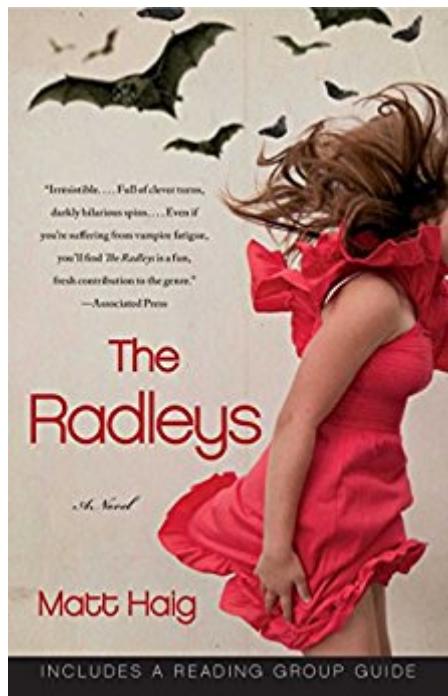


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The Radleys: A Novel



Synopsis

Just about everyone knows a family like the Radleys. Many of us grew up next door to one. They are a modern family, averagely content, averagely dysfunctional, living in a staid and quiet suburban English town. Peter is an overworked doctor whose wife, Helen, has become increasingly remote and uncommunicative. Rowan, their teenage son, is being bullied at school, and their anemic daughter, Clara, has recently become a vegan. They are typical, that is, save for one devastating exception: Peter and Helen are vampires and have "for seventeen years" been abstaining by choice from a life of chasing blood in the hope that their children could live normal lives. One night, Clara finds herself driven to commit a shocking and disturbingly satisfying "act of violence, and her parents are forced to explain their history of shadows and lies. A police investigation is launched that uncovers a richness of vampire history heretofore unknown to the general public. And when the malevolent and alluring Uncle Will, a practicing vampire, arrives to throw the police off Clara's trail, he winds up throwing the whole house into temptation and turmoil and unleashing a host of dark secrets that threaten the Radleys' marriage. The Radleys is a moving, thrilling, and radiant domestic novel that explores with daring the lengths a parent will go to protect a child, what it costs you to deny your identity, the undeniable appeal of sin, and the everlasting, iridescent bonds of family love. Read it and ask what we grow into when we grow up, and what we gain and lose when we deny our appetites.

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Customer Reviews

Matt Haig tells us right up front that "vampire" is "a provocative word, wrapped in too many clichÃ©s and girly novels." But for the very middle-class British Radleys, with their two children, the clichÃ© is their life in hiding, a colorless droning buzz of hunger repressed and desires denied. Rowan Radley is an anemic teen with skin rashes, yearning for the courage to talk to his sister's friend Eva. Clara Radley's walls are covered with "Save the Whales" posters; she is a vegetarian whose only friend is the new girl at school, a beauty who she senses will probably not speak to her any more once she is fully accepted by the other students. Helen and Dr. Peter Radley are helpless to assist their children to fit in, any more than they can assimilate themselves. They are too busy hiding their nature, not only from the neighbors, but also from their children. They are Abstainers: vampires who refuse to drink blood. Despite years of residence in their quiet community, all four Radleys are simply existing day-to-day. Suffering, in a blunted, relentless way: "Everyone represses everything. Do you think any of these "normal" human beings really do exactly what they want to do all the time? 'Course not. It's just the same. We're middle-class and we're British. Repression is in our veins." In a single brutal event at an overnight party, Clara will open the gates for all of the Radleys to revert to their true nature. And the advent of Uncle Will, a long-practising blood-drinker with the power to cloud men's minds, will at first seem a blessing. He can help them divert the attention of the police: "It is another unsolved mystery in a world full of unsolved mysteries. Now stand up and walk out the way you came, and the moment that fresh air caresses your face, you will realize that that is what makes the world so beautiful. All those unsolved mysteries. And you won't ever want to interfere with that beauty again." As always, though, when long-held feelings are repressed, they eventually burst forth with explosive power. The secrets the Radleys have been hiding go far beyond blood-drinking. And when they are no longer suppressed, the results will change the Radleys and everyone involved with them irrevocably. It's an intense novel, about much more than the girly clichÃ© of vampire romance. This story is about living the life you were born to live, rather than the one defined for you by society. It's worth the read. "That is what the taste of blood does. It takes away the gap between thought and action. To think is to do. There is no unlived life inside you as the air speeds past your body, as you look down at the dreary villages and market towns..."

Middle class British domesticity isn't what I would have thought the vampire genre needed, but it turns out to be just what's required. Haig paints a very believable portrait of middle class family life, complete with troubled teens of a very plausible sort, marital secrets and the malaise of a too-comfortable life. The book is relatively short but doesn't feel slight: The characters are so well-delineated and the writing is so lean that what would have taken Anne Rice twice as long to say, Haig does in little over 300 pages. Although there's some world-building here, he resists the temptation to create an almost unrecognizable mythological world inside his England. It's all very grounded, mostly sketched out through excerpts from a self-help book for vampire "abstainers" who no longer drink blood. For the first time in a long time, I find myself actually looking forward to the prospect of a sequel to a work of vampire fiction. Ironically, there don't seem to be any in the immediate offing, which probably speaks to the intent of the author to tell a good story, rather than to create a cash-generating franchise. Strongly recommended for adult fans of vampire fiction, particularly those tired of some of the more baroque or overstuffed competition.

An interesting read but for those with a vivid imagination. I found some of the descriptions of vampire activity a bit too much to stomach. Saying that though I enjoyed the story line and had a few good laughs when I told my book club buddies that I was a vampire also and that's why I like to drink red wine. I thought that the books ending was very abrupt but then maybe there is more to follow? The feed back from the book club members was mixed, some really enjoyed it some didn't like it's graphic depictions of vampire activity. A pretty good read though and well written.

So we've had "good" vampires (*Twilight*) and "bad" vampires (just about everyone else), and now we get vamps that are somewhere in between. The Radleys are a suburban British couple with a teenaged son and daughter. Peter is a physician and Helen is a housewife, with son Rowan and daughter Clara. The family is considered a bit odd, especially the two teens, who come in for some bullying by their classmates. All four have pale skin and tend to break out in a rash if exposed very long to the sun. Of course, the Radleys are vampires -- but only the adults know it. They've never told their kids why they have trouble sleeping and often just don't feel very well. A bloody incident changes all that. The kids learn the shocking truth, and Peter's bad-vamp brother, Will, arrives on the scene to clean up the mess. There's tension between him and Helen over an old secret they share and Peter isn't happy about having him there, either, but they need his help. And while most people don't know vampires exist, a special arm of the police force knows it very well, and tries to keep the bloodsuckers under control. Once the cops start nosing around, things go downhill fast. All

of this makes for an interesting stew -- or perhaps blood pudding would be a more apt term. It takes normal village life and turns it on its head. Interspersed between chapters are tips from "The Abstainer's Handbook," a guide for vampires who choose not to drink blood. I found this novel enjoyable if not compelling. The pace seemed to drag at times. Still, it's a different way of looking at the vampire legend, which is saying something in this overcrowded field.

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