



The Last Family in England

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By the author of *Reasons to Stay Alive*

Meet the Hunter family: Adam, Kate, and their children Hal and Charlotte. And Prince, their black Labrador.

Prince is an earnest young dog, striving hard to live up to the tenets of the Labrador Pact (Remain Loyal to Your Human Masters, Serve and Protect Your Family at Any Cost). Other dogs, led by the Springer Spaniels, have revolted. Their slogans are 'Dogs for Dogs, not for Humans' and 'Pleasure not Duty'. Mentored by an elderly Labrador called Henry, Prince takes his responsibilities seriously, and as things in the Hunter family begin to go badly awry - marital breakdown, rowdy teenage parties, attempted suicide - his responsibilities threaten to overwhelm him. And down in the park it's even worse: Henry has disappeared; Falstaff the Springer Spaniel wants to lead Prince astray; Joyce the Irish wolfhound has been murdered. In the end Prince is forced to break the Labrador Pact and take desperate action to save his Family.

The Last Family in England Details

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From Reader Review The Last Family in England for online ebook

Cher says

3.5 stars - It was really good.

The book opens with the narrator, a Labrador named Prince, preparing to be euthanized. I was incredibly close to DNF'ing the book right then and there, but I'm thankful I stuck with it. Prince tells the story of how he came to be on death row, which was a result of following the "Labrador Pact", which is what he abides by to protect and keep his human family together.

Fans of Shakespeare will appreciate the nod to *Henry IV* which is mirrored in the relationship between Prince and his pleasure seeking friend, Falstaff.

I enjoyed hearing the story through a dog's eyes (and nose of course). The author used this interesting perspective to examine relationships, loyalty, duty, honor and the binds that tie families together in a wry and endearing manner.

Favorite Quote: Whereas dogs can learn to suppress their instincts, for humans there is no hope.

First Sentence: Dogs like to talk.

Bob says

Wow! I should have hated this. A novel narrated by a family's pet labrador. It's everything I detest. But Matt Haig pulls this off remarkably well and, and... I didn't see the twist at the end. That's probably because it's not really a twist, just a logical conclusion. This can give the impression that it's a young adult novel or at least a novel that your kids might like. Just be warned: there's a moment or two in here that are definitely adult rated. Give this a go. It's an easy read and can be done in one or two sittings.

Ronja says

Máte labradora jménem Lord a v knihkupectví narazíte na knihu, kterou vypráví labrador Princ. To je jasné znamení, no ne?

Vzhledem k uvedenému d?vodu nákupu jsem od knížky naprosto nic ne?ekala, a proto bylo p?íjemným p?ekvapením, že byla fakt dobrá. Jasn?, samotná zápletka není nic vrcholn? originálního, ale práv? psí o?i a nos tomu dodávaly š?ávu a d?laly p?íb?h ješt? depresivn?jší. Jo jo, žádný milý p?íb?h o zví?atech, ale život jedné rodiny, která v tom všem, co se jí d?je, má št?stí, že má doma labradora. Protože on rodinu ?ídí a udržuje v ní pohodu podle Labrado?í úmluvy, která psy tohoto plemene jako poslední mezi svými zavazuje k ochran? rodiny. A p?iznejme si, že a? se snaží sebevíc, moc mu to nejde.

Zvláštní, že nám ?asto p?ipadají smutn?jší p?íb?hy, kde se zví?ata potýkají s n??ím špatným, než kdyby se to

d?lo lidským hrdin?m. Možná je to tím, co všechno lidi zp?sobují, protože, jak říká Princ „se neumí vymanit svým pud?m i když se o to snaží sebevíc“. A zví?ata jsou ?asto jediní tvorové, kte?í si jdou za št?stím tak, že jej p?inášejí i druhým.

Shirley Revill says

What a totally brilliant audiobook that I loved even though it was quite a sad story.
Prince the family's Labrador has one purpose in his life and that is to keep his family safe and happy.
The story is told through the eyes of a dog trying to keep his family together.
I needed tissues for this one. Highly recommended.

Amy Hawthorne says

This book was so emotional! I loved it. It's about the unswerving loyalty of the main protagonist, Prince, a Labrador. It was great how comedy was mixed into the sadness, following the labrador pact and the different dog stereotypes. All a bit crazy but heart warming and enjoyable. This book does contain some upsetting topics though and it doesn't end hopefully, but Matt Haig's writing is entertaining and great and I loved it.

Margo says

Sweet and sad. A must for dog owners.

Stephen Gallup says

I really liked Matt Haig's *The Dead Fathers Club* , which I found refreshingly new and original. It's great to see that he has other titles, and this one is equally charming if not more so. No, scratch that; it's the best to come my way in a good long while. It's the kind of book I wish I'd written.

Prince is a fairly young labrador retriever who has the responsibility of preserving unity in the Hunter family. It turns out labs are the only breed still serious about caring for their masters, who, being "only human," would never manage on their own. "The halcyon days when all dogs remained loyal" are in the past. Most have now given up, or as Henry, Prince's aged mentor, puts it, "This is an age in which canine duty and sacrifice have been replaced by the relentless pursuit of pleasure." For labs, "Duty over all" is the mantra, and they've got their work cut out for them. Not only are other breeds derelict in their duties (springer spaniels being notoriously worthless), but increasing numbers of people now prefer cats—or even have no pets at all. "Our influence is waning," Henry intones mournfully. Still, every lab who protects his family from danger and dissolution is doing a service to all. Prince has been learning how to intervene via various subtle strategies, e.g., judicious wagging, to encourage his owners not to be overly distracted by anxiety and self-destructive impulses and to return their focus to things that matter.

The Hunter family has its fault lines, as do all families (e.g., the 13-year-old daughter yearns for more

independence). Normally, Prince would simply redirect their focus. But each principal member of this family is being targeted by a bad outside influence that's exploiting those weak points. Kate has no defense against a manipulative old boyfriend named Simon who has recently moved back into the neighborhood. Likewise, Adam is under the influence of Simon's wife Emily. Daughter Charlotte is being wooed by a young hooligan, and son Hal cannot resist his delinquent mate Jamie. Prince is the only one who sees what's happening, and the challenge is beyond his powers.

Simon and Emily have a dog too, a fat and seemingly irresponsible springer spaniel mix named Falstaff. His advent makes for an obvious allusion to the dishonorable Falstaff, in Shakespeare's *Henry IV* plays, who leads young Prince Hal astray. (Wait a minute: The son here is also named Hal, and he too is being led astray.)

This story made me yearn for a dog. (I haven't had one in many years.) On the other hand (or as Prince would say, on the other paw), this doesn't necessarily have to be about dogs at all. I'm thinking back to *The Dead Fathers Club* and pondering the similarities (aside from their Shakespearean connections). In both books, the main character is torn between his understanding of what he must do and compelling arguments that he should do something different.

This becomes abundantly clear when Falstaff finally steps out of character, gives up the scoffing and teasing, and engages Prince's worries head-on. They both know humans are an utter mess. That's a given. Humans are a species so irrevocably detached from nature they have to impose their own set of challenges on life. Nevertheless, Prince loves his people. "When they're happy, I'm happy. When they feel pain, I feel that too." He believes he can save them because, as he asserts, "We *are* in control!"

"You don't seem that 'in control' to me," Falstaff replies. He goes on to insist, "There is nothing you can do. The family you have tried so hard to protect is about to fall apart, and it is not your fault." The problem, he says, is that humans want too much. But *they* are the ones making mistakes. "This has nothing to do with you. So you might as well try to enjoy yourself."

Prince is indignant. Did Falstaff really believe humans were masters of their own destinies? No, in spite of everything, *his* family could still be saved!

Why does this ring so true to me? Because it sounds astonishingly close to my life story, which (in a much less poetic manner) I attempted to tell in my own book. I had a child with profound developmental disabilities, and I believed it was my role to make things right for him. Then on top of that I had a father who was failing, and again I thought I could intervene. When people said I was being unreasonable, that there was very little I could do, I just doubled down. I believed, and still believe, a stance like that is key to achieving great things. But of course it can also lead to disaster.

I agree with Prince that we humans create trouble and unhappiness for ourselves (and others) in direct proportion to our progress in escaping natural challenges. A loyal dog is no doubt a great counterbalancing force. At this point, I want to read everything Matt Haig has written.

Fence says

I really had no idea what to expect from this book, it was simply sitting with the returns at the library and looked vaguely interesting. Plus I follow Haig on twitter despite having read only one of his books, The

Radleys. So I picked this up.

It is such a good book. But there is something in it that may put off some readers, I've even seen a review on Goodreads where someone rated it 1 stars because of this event, yet they didn't read the whole book. But it is a spoiler, so I don't want to give it away..

I loved it, even though it is terribly sad. You can get a good feel for it by reading the first few pages.

It is a story about one dog and his family, and the things he will do to keep them safe. For that is a Labrador's purpose you see, to protect the family and as long as he lives up to his obligations, everything is in a Labrador's control. He simply needs to find the correct way to help them. He has that power. But it is also a heavy responsibility, and one that Prince, our narrator, feels lies heavy on him. Especially since the new neighbours moved in and Adam, his owner, is soon spending more and more time with Emily.

It is such an unusual book. All about modern life and relationships, as well as families and how they manage to survive, sometimes how they break apart. But it also has a whodunnit mystery in the middle of it, as well as asking questions about what we expect of our dogs.

I also recognised the name Falstaff as being a Shakespeare reference, and one of the children is called Hal, but I never read or studied those plays so I'm afraid I have no frame of reference ((I'm "like a child who wanders into the middle of a movie")) for whatever allusions Haig was making there.

As I may have said earlier, I really enjoyed this one, and I'd urge you to give it a go. I'm certainly going to read more by Haig, and soon.

Maybaby says

Well...as a jaded reader whose finding it hard to find worthy reads. This one was a worthy read.

It's a quick read.

I won't spoil it for anyone.

It's not a great literary work. It's a fine piece of light modern fiction.

Lori Whitwam says

Warning, dog lovers, do not read this one!

This book begins with Prince, a black labrador, being taken to the vet to be put down for vicious behavior.

Labradors are, in the book, the only breed that still keep the Pact, which says that the family always comes first. Apparently, Prince's totally screwed up family put him in a situation where, in order to help them, he did something that appeared vicious, and now dogs know he's broken the Pact.

While he's at the vet's waiting to be euthanized, he tells us the story... and I'm thinking that, of course, there will be a big revelation at the end, and Prince will be saved and proven right.

Then I got worried. Am I going to spend the next couple of days reading this book, then get furious at the end when Prince dies?

So I took a peek at the last page. Prince is still euthanized. Which totally sucks, and I tossed the book straight back in the book bag. NOT READING! Just glad I risked it, because otherwise I'd have owed the library for a new book.

Tim says

This interesting book is the second adult novel from Mr. Haig, the author of the excellent and heartbreaking *Dead Father's Club*. The *Labrador Pact* is told exclusively from the point of view of a labrador named Prince, and the book details Prince's efforts to save his human family from being broken up by the forces of the outside world.

The entire book is a kind of extended (but loose) retelling of some of the main issues presented in Shakespeare's history plays. As with *Dead Father's Club*'s reworking of the issues presented in "Hamlet," the *Labrador Pact* is not a strict interpretation of Shakespeare's histories. Rather, Mr. Haig somewhat ingeniously distills the essence of what is at stake in those plays into a modern storyline. At the same time, Mr. Haig does not fail to give copious hints of what he's about throughout the text, from the sprinkling of Shakespeare quotes to the naming of major characters after those in the plays.

In an offhand, almost sly way the book deals with such themes as the sanctity of the family unit, the meaning of love, the meaning of commitment, the question of duty and, most importantly, whether any of us really have the power to fully protect those that we love.

Like all good authors who deal with serious issues, Mr. Haig does not, of course, fully answer any of these questions. But the entertaining, sometimes funny, sometimes heartbreaking exploration of these issues was a joy to read.

Shonna Froebel says

If you're an animal person, this book may not be for you. I felt sick when I finished, like I'd been kicked in the stomach, and it left me feeling hopeless.

The story is told from the dog's point of view. Prince is adopted as a puppy into the home of Adam and Kate and their two children, Hal and Charlotte. Prince abides by the Labrador pact, with a sense of duty toward his family. He must protect them, keep them safe and always be on the lookout for threats to their wellbeing, not just as individuals, but as a family unit. He is coached by an older lab, Henry, whom he meets on his morning outing to the park. He asks Henry for advice when he senses problems, and does his best to keep his family happy and safe. When he finds that the family's own behaviour is what provides the threat, he is unsure what to do, but tries his best to abide by the pact and do his duty.

With my reaction to the book being so visceral, I really can't recommend it. It is however original in viewpoint, and the story flows and holds together very well.

Sid Nuncius says

I thought How To Stop Time was outstandingly good and I also enjoyed The Dead Fathers Club very much, but I'm afraid The Last Family In England didn't really do much for me.

The book is narrated by Prince, a Labrador who lives by the Labrador Code of Duty Before Pleasure and protecting his (human) family at all costs. These tenets are challenged as other breeds undermine them and his family suffers emotional problems and comes under threat. It's a good idea, which is loosely based on Shakespeare's Henry IV plays, and Matt Haig's humanity, compassion and insight are all there as he explores ideas of duty, responsibility, sacrifice and how far we can rely on faith and received wisdom.

Given all this, I'm not exactly sure why the book didn't quite work for me. Partly it's having a dog as narrator; I didn't really find Prince's voice convincing - and I certainly wasn't convinced by the family cat, either. If even Kipling couldn't pull off a book in a dog's voice (even this admirer of Kipling's writing would strongly advise avoiding Thy Servant A Dog) it must be very difficult indeed. Also, I somehow didn't find the outsider's perspective on the family persuasive, although it's something that Haig does brilliantly in other books. Whatever it was, I found myself surprisingly unengaged.

There is a lot that is good about the book so it may well be worth a try if you like Matt Haig's work, but I can only give this a very qualified recommendation.

(My thanks to Canongate Books for an ARC via NetGalley.)

Megan (ReadingRover) says

Enjoyable but a bit too drawn out and philosophical for me at times. I'm wavering between 3 & 4 stars. It's really a solid 3.5 since it's narrated by a dog I'll go with 4.

April (Aprilius Maximus) says

Okay, buy why u gotta rip out my heart like that, Matt Haig????

Kirsty 📚📖♥? says

I wasn't sure when I started this and realised it was written from the dog's point of view if I'd like the book but it turned out to be quite a sweet tale full of twists and turns.

Even though the book is humorous it does cover a lot of more serious events such as the breakdown of a marriage, death and suicide. I really enjoyed the way these were written and covered.

It's a quick read, short chapters that turn really easily. It's not the most highbrow of books (thank heavens) but it does pass an enjoyable few hours.

Free arc from netgalley

Lucy Banks says

I received a copy of this book from Netgalley, in exchange for an honest review.

Astute observation of a family with secrets - bloody bleak ending though.

I enjoyed this book, as I enjoy most of Matt Haig's stuff - though I had a few reservations about it. However, overall, it was a clever concept, excellently executed (as always).

Prince is a labrador who is dedicated to the labrador pact - protecting the family above all else. He lives with Adam, Kate, Hal and Charlotte - a seemingly idyllic family who have quite a few secrets. As betrayal, depression and self-loathing start to take over, Prince finds it increasingly difficult to hold them all together.

The situation worsens when Simon, Adam's old friend and best-man, turns up - along with his pretty young wife. Temptation proves too strong for some family members, and Prince's final desperate act to protect the family ends in a fairly hideous manner...

Initially, when I realised the entire book was from the perspective of a dog, I thought it was a bit gimmicky. However, Haig's straightforward, non-pretentious style of writing meant that it didn't veer into over-cleverness - so for the most part, it worked well.

There were many lovely 'doggy' details that added authenticity too - such as getting high off of inhaling the 'smell pile' in the park, and each dog breed having its own personality.

As ever though, the strongest aspect was the characterisation. The family are richly depicted, their emotions explored thoroughly, and their little foibles illustrated to perfection. From teenage Hal's pain when he gets busted for having a party in his parent's absence, to Adam's embarrassing middle-aged fantasy about a younger woman - it's all beautifully relateable, which makes the book much more convincing to read.

However, I did have a few reservations. The ending was a tad over-dramatic, but to be fair, I didn't see it coming. As for the very end itself, god it was depressing! I kind of appreciate why Haig ended it like that - but jeez, it could have been handled a little less bleakly. The take-home message seemed to be 'humanity is screwed whatever you do, so don't bother trying to ever do anything nice for anybody.' As you can probably tell, I wasn't in love with it - and felt it jarred with the relatively upbeat tone of the rest of the book.

But all in all, this was a good read. He's a great writer!

Theresa says

This book is the story of the Hunter family as told by their dog, Prince, a black labrador. This is not a happy

book--do not read this book if you want to feel good at the beginning or at the end.

Prince goes for daily walks to the park with his master Adam and meets up with an older, wiser golden labrador, named Henry who tutors him in "the labrador pact". The labrador pact teaches that labradors must protect their families ("duty above all") and that if they do so then they will get their "eternal reward"--to be with their families after this life. However, when Harry goes missing, Prince is left to fend and interpret the pact for himself. And as the labradors are the only dogs left who still take the pact seriously (thanks to the Springer Uprising) it is all the more important to Prince that he get it right.

This novel addresses issues such as infidelity, suicide, drugs, and finally the aftermath of all of these things on one family whose dog is trying desperately to hold them together. And it addresses these issues through the family dog who is the main character of the story--a really unique perspective.

Listening to this book was an added bonus as the narrator had different personalities for different breeds and the author brought out what the labradors' thought of these different breeds which was both humorous and interesting.

However, not a feel good book. It was one that was a little disturbing but that definitely provoked thought well after the book ended.

Ian Mapp says

Loved this book.

Simple tale told from the family labrador (Prince).

You know that he is in trouble from the start when he reveals on the first page that he is about to be put down. The question is how did he get there.

The labradors have a pact to protect the family and prince's family are in trouble. The parents are fighting and the father is about to embark on an affair with the hippy new neighbor. There is some history here, as it transpires that the hippy is married to the fathers former best friend, who has previously been knocking off his wife.

The above reads a lot more complicated than it is.

Then there is the children, the daughter is on the cusp of adulthood and attempts to committ suicide and the son has a teenage party that gets out of control.

The dogs themselves have a pecking order and the different breeds come across as rather funny stereotypes.

A gentle humorous book that has some laugh out loud moments. How could you forget the matter of fact way that he atttempts to stop the love in between the daughter and her boyfriend by taking a shit on the floor.

Then there is the analogy to Henry V by shakespeare that would work a lot better if I fully knew it.

Gentle and funny. An easy read.

Hollowspine says

Although I gave this book four stars it is not because I "really liked it." The book was written from a dog's perspective. And it was very well done. That alone deserves a lot of credit, to write an entire novel from dog POV and have it work beautifully and not come out like a joke is very difficult. The plot and story flowed gracefully towards the conclusion, not heavy handed at all. Overall a very well-written tight novel.

But having finished the story I feel depressed. Everything was so dark, the message that the world is beyond hope and there is nothing you can do to stop things falling apart was hammered into me like nails in a coffin. Also, it made me miss my Leto puppy.

A beautiful but immensely sad story. For anyone who has ever had a dog companion, I think would if not enjoy would find this story thought provoking, though I cannot say that it will not depress, for I believe it should depress anyone who picks it up.
