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The Red House



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Par Mark Haddon : The Red House before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Red House:

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Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurFrom the bestselling author of The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time and A Spot of Bother comes a superb book about family and secretsTwo families. Seven days. One house. Angela and her brother Richard have spent twenty years avoiding each other. Now, after the death of their mother, they bring their families together for a holiday in a rented house on the Welsh border. Four adults and four children. Seven days of shared meals, log fires, card games and wet walks. But in the quiet and stillness of the valley, ghosts begin to rise up. The parents Richard thought he had. The parents Angela thought she had. Past and present lovers. Friends, enemies, victims, saviours. Once again Mark Haddon, author of The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time and A Spot of Bother, has written a novel that

is funny, poignant and deeply insightful about human lives. Extrait Haddon / THE RED HOUSE Friday Cooling towers and sewage farms. Finstock, Charlbury, Ascott-under-Wychwood. Seventy miles per hour, the train unzips the fields. Two gun-gray lines beside the rivers meander. Flashes of sun on the hammered metal. Something of steam about it, even now. Hogwarts and Adlestrop. The night mail crossing the border. Cheyenne sweeping down from the ridge. Delta blues from the boxcar. Somewhere, those secret points that might just switch and send you curving into a world of uniformed porters and great-aunts and summers at the lake. Angela leant against the cold window, hypnotized by the power lines as they sagged and were scooped up by the next gantry, over and over and over. Polytunnels like silver mattresses, indecipherable swirls of graffiti on a brick siding. Shed buried her mother six weeks ago. A bearded man in a suit with shiny elbows playing Danny Boy on Northumbrian pipes. Everything off-kilter, the bandage on the vicar's hand, that woman chasing her windblown hat between the headstones, the dog that belonged to no one. She thought her mother had left the world a long way back, the weekly visits mostly for Angela's own benefit. Boiled mutton, Classic FM and a commode in flesh-colored plastic. Her death should have been a relief. Then the first spade of earth hit the coffin, a bubble rose in her chest and she realized her mother had been what . . . ? A cornerstone? A breakwater? The week after the funeral Dominic had been standing at the sink bottle-brushing the green vase. The last of the freak snow was still packed down the side of the shed and the rotary washing line was turning in the wind. Angela came in holding the phone as if it was a mystery object shed found on the hall table. That was Richard. Dominic upended the vase on the wire rack. And what did he want? He offered to take us on holiday. He dried his hands on the tea towel. Are we talking about your brother, or some entirely different Richard? We are indeed talking about my brother. He really had no idea what to say. Angela and Richard had spent no more than an afternoon in each other's company over the last fifteen years and their meeting at the funeral had seemed perfunctory at best. Where's the exotic location? He's rented a house on the Welsh border. Near Hay-on-Wye. The fine sandy beaches of Herefordshire. He halved the tea towel and hung it over the radiator. I said yes. Well, thanks for the consultation. Angela paused and held his eye. Richard knows we can't afford a holiday of our own. I'm not looking forward to it any more than you, but I didn't have a great deal of choice. He held up his hands. Point taken. They'd had this argument way too many times. Herefordshire it is then. Ordnance Survey 161. The Black Mountains / Y Mynyddoedd Duon. Dominic flipped up the pink cover and unfolded the big paper concertina. He had loved maps since he was a boy. Here be monsters. X marks the spot. The edges of the paper browned and scalloped with a burning match, messages flashed from peak to peak using triangles of broken mirror. He looked sideways at Angela. So hard to remember that girl on the far side of the union bar, her shoulders in that blue summer dress. She disgusted him now, the size and sag of her, the veins on her calves, almost a grandmother. He dreamt of her dying unexpectedly, rediscovering all those freedoms he'd lost twenty years ago. Then he had the same dream five minutes later and he remembered what poor use he'd made of those freedoms first time round and he heard the squeak of trolley wheels and saw the bags of fluid. All those other lives. You never did get to lead them. He gazed out of the window and saw a narrow boat on the adjacent canal, some bearded pillock at the tiller, pipe, mug of tea. Ahoy there, matey. Stupid way to spend a holiday, banging your head every time you stood up. A week in a boat with Richard. Think of that. They were in the middle of nowhere, thank goodness. If it all got too much he could walk up into the hills and yell at the sky. To be honest, it was Angela he was worried about. All that hardwired sibling friction. Do not return once lit and so forth. Richard's hair, yes. Now that he thought about it that was where the evil was located, this luxuriant black crest, like the tusks of a bull walrus, a warning to beta males. Or like a separate creature entirely, some alien life-form that had pushed suckers into his skull and was using him as a vehicle. The children sat opposite. Alex, seventeen, was reading *Main Force* by Andy McNab. Daisy, sixteen, was reading a book called *The Art of Daily Prayer*. Benjy, eight, had swiveled so that his feet were on the headrest and his head was hanging over the edge of the seat, eyes closed. Angela poked his shoulder with the toe of her shoe. What on earth are you doing? I'm on horseback beheading Nazi zombies. They looked like children from three separate families, Alex the athlete, all shoulders and biceps, off into the wild blue yonder every other weekend, canoeing, mountain biking, Benjy a kind of boy-liquid which had been poured into whatever space he happened to be occupying, and Daisy . . . Angela wondered if something dreadful had happened to her daughter over the past year, something that might explain the arrogant humility, the way she'd made herself so ostentatiously plain. They plunged into a tunnel and the windows thumped and clattered. She saw an overweight, middle-aged woman floating out there in the dark for several seconds before she vanished in a blast of sunlight and poplars, and she was back in her body again, dress pinching at

the waist, beads of sweat in the small of her back, that train smell, burning dust, hot brakes, the dull reek of the toilets. Carter placed his boot on the mans shoulder and rolled him over. This couldnt be happening. Hed killed Bunny ONeil. Theyd trained together in the Cairngorms ten years ago. What was an exSAS captain doing in the middle of Afghanistan, armed with a black-market Soviet rifle, trying to assassinate a billionaire head of an international construction company? Farther down the carriage the ticket collector was squatting beside a bird-frail woman with long gray hair and spectacles on a red string. So youve come on the train with no ticket and no means of payment? Shaved head, cloudy blue tattoo on his meaty forearm. Angela wanted to pay for her ticket and save her from this bullying man. She was trying to pick something invisible from the air with her tiny liver-spotted hands. I cant . . . Is someone meeting you at Hereford? A tenderness in his voice which she hadnt heard the first time. He touched the womans arm gently to get her attention. A son, maybe, or a daughter? The woman clawed at the air. I cant quite . . . Angela felt a prickle at the corner of her eye and turned away. Richard had remarried six months ago, acquiring a stepdaughter into the bargain. Angela hadnt gone to the wedding. Edinburgh was a long way, it was term time and theyd never felt like brother and sister, just two people who spoke briefly on the phone every few weeks or so to manage the stages of their mothers decline. Shed met Louisa and Melissa for the first time at the funeral. They looked as if they had been purchased from an exclusive catalog at some exorbitant price, flawless skin and matching black leather boots. The girl stared at her and didnt look away when Angela caught her eye. Bobbed chestnut hair, black denim skirt almost but not quite too short for a funeral. So much sheen and sneer at sixteen. Melissas directing a play at school. Midsummer Nights Dream. Something slightly footballers wife about Louisa. Angela couldnt picture her going to the theater or reading a serious book, couldnt imagine the conversations she and Richard might have when they were alone. But his judgment of other people had always been a little wobbly. Ten years married to the Ginger Witch. The presents he bought for the kids when he last visited, so much effort aimed in the wrong direction. Benjys football annual, Daisys bracelet. She wondered if he was making a new version of the same mistake, whether she was simply not-Jennifer, and he was another rung on the social ladder. Im going to the loo. Benjy stood up. My bladder is so awesomely full. Dont get lost. She touched his sleeve. You cant get lost on a train. A sick pervert could strangle you, said Alex, and throw your body out of a window. Ill punch him in the crutch. Crotch, said Alex. Critch, crotch, cratch . . . sang Benjy as he made his way up the carriage. Eventually we find that we no longer need silence. We no longer need solitude. We no longer even need words. We can make all our actions holy. We can cook a meal for our family and it becomes prayer. We can go for a walk in the park and it becomes prayer. Alex photographed a herd of cows. What was the point of being black and white, evolutionarily? He hated real violence. He could still hear the snap of Callums leg that night in Crouch End. He felt sick when he saw footage from Iraq or Afghanistan. He didnt tell anyone about this. But Andy McNab tamed it by turning it into a cartoon. And now he was thinking about Melissa unzipping that black denim skirt. The word unzipping gave him an erection which he covered with the novel. But was it OK fancying your uncles stepdaughter? Some people married their cousins and that was acceptable, unless you both had recessive genes for something bad and your babies came out really fucked up. But girls who went to private school were secretly gagging for it, with their tans and their white knickers that smelt of fabric conditioner. Except she probably wouldnt speak to him, would she, because girls only spoke to twats with floppy hair and skinny jeans. On the other hand, normal service was kind of suspended on holiday and maybe theyd be sharing a bathroom and hed go in and open the shower cubicle door and squeeze her soapy tits so she moaned. A man is trapped in a hot flat above the shipyard, caring for a wife who will live out her days in this bed, watching this television. Twin sisters are separated at seven weeks and know nothing of one another, only an absence that walks beside them always on the road. A girl is raped by her mothers boyfriend. A child dies and doesnt die. Family, that slippery word, a star to every wandering bark, and everyone sailing under a different sky. And then there was her fourth child, the child no one else could see. Karen, her loved and secret ghost, stillborn all those years ago. Holoprosencephaly. Hox genes failing along the midline of the head. Her little monster, features melted into the center of her face. Theyd told her not to look but shed looked and screamed at them to take the thing away. Then in the small hours, while Dominic slept and the ward was still, she wanted that tiny damaged body in her arms again, because she could learn to love her, she really could, but the points had switched and Karen had swerved away into the parallel world she glimpsed sometimes from cars and trains, the spiderweb sheds and the Gypsy camps, the sidings and the breakers yards, the world she visited in dreams, stumbling through dog shit and nettles, the air treacly with heat, lured by a girls voice and the flash of a summer dress. And this coming Thursday would be Karens

eighteenth birthday. Which was what she hated about the countryside, no distraction from the dirty messed-up workings of the heart. You'll love it, Dominic had said. Inbred locals surrounding the house at night with pitchforks and flaming brands. Not understanding, in the way that he failed to understand so many things these days. Dominic wiped the sandwich crumbs from his lip and looked over at Daisy, who smiled briefly before returning to her book. She was so much calmer these days, none of the unpredictable tears which spilled out of her last year making him feel clumsy and useless. It was bollocks, of course, the Jesus stuff, and some of the church people made his flesh crawl. Bad clothes and false cheer. But he was oddly proud, the strength of her conviction, the way she swam so doggedly against the current. If only her real friends hadn't drifted away. But Alex wouldn't look up however long you stared. If he was reading he was reading, if he was running he was running. He'd expected more from having a son. That Oedipal rage between two and four. Stop hugging Mummy. Then, from seven to ten, a golden time, filling a buried cashbox with baby teeth and Pokmon cards, camping in the New Forest, that night the pony opened the zip of their tent and stole their biscuits. He taught Alex how to play the piano, theme tunes arranged in C major with a single finger in the left hand. Star Wars, Raiders of the Lost Ark. But he grew bored of the piano and gave Benjy the key to the cashbox and went camping with his friends. Devon, the Peak District. He wondered sometimes if he loved Daisy not because of the strength of her belief but because of her loneliness, the mess she was making of her life, the way it rhymed with his own. Behind everything there is a house. Behind everything there is always a house, compared to which every other house is larger or colder or more luxurious. Cladding over thirties brick, a broken greenhouse, rhubarb and rusted cans of Castrol for the mower. At the far end you can peel back the corner of the chicken-wire fence and slip down into the cutting where the trains run to Sheffield every half hour. The tarry sleepers, the locked junction box where they keep the electricity. If you leave pennies on the rail the trains hammer them into long bronze tongues, the queen's face flattened to nothing. Pan back and you're kneeling at the pond's edge because your brother says there are tadpoles. You reach into the soup of stems and slime, he shoves you and you're still screaming when you hit the surface. Your mouth fills with water. Fear and loneliness will always taste like this. You run up the garden, sodden, trailing weed, shouting, Dad . . . Dad . . . Dad . . . And you can see him standing at the kitchen door, but he starts to evaporate as you reach the cracked patio, thinning in waves like Captain Kirk in the transporter room, that same high buzzing sound, and the door is empty, and the kitchen is empty, and the house is empty and you realize he's never coming back. Have you not got anything else to read? asked Angela. Yep, said Daisy, but right now this is the book I would like to read if that's all right by you. There's no need to be sarcastic. Ladies . . . said Alex, which would have escalated the row to flashpoint if they hadn't been interrupted by Benjy running down the carriage and pinballing off the seat backs. He'd been standing in the toilet when he remembered the werewolf from the Queen Victoria episode of Doctor Who. Eyes like black billiard balls, the heat of its breath on his neck. He squirreled himself under Dad's arm and rubbed the silky cuff of Dad's special shirt against his upper lip. Dad said, You all right, Captain?, and he said, Yeah, because he was now, so he took out his Natural History Museum notebook and the pen that wrote in eight colors and drew the zombies. When he reentered the world they were changing trains at high speed, sprinting to another platform to catch a connecting train which left in two minutes. Halfway across the footbridge he remembered that he'd forgotten to pick up the metal thing. What metal thing? said Mum. The metal thing, he said, because he hadn't given it a name. It was a hinge from a briefcase and later on Mum would call it a piece of rubbish but he loved the strength of the spring and the smell it left on his fingers. Dad said, I'll get it because when he was a child he kept a horse's tooth in a Golden Virginia tobacco tin, and Mum said, For Christ's sake. But Dad came back carrying the metal thing with seconds to spare and gave it to Benjy and said, Guard it with your life. And as they were pulling out of the station Benjy saw an old lady with long gray hair being arrested by two policemen in fluorescent-yellow jackets. One of the policemen had a gun. Then there was another train traveling beside them at almost exactly the same speed and Benjy remembered the story about Albert Einstein doing a thought experiment, sitting on a tram in Vienna going at the speed of light and shining a torch straight ahead so the light just sat there like candyfloss. You hate Richard because he swans around his spacious Georgian apartment on Moray Place four hundred miles away while you perch on that scuffed olive chair listening to Mum roar in the cage of her broken mind. The nurses burn my hands. There was an air raid last night. You hate him because he pays for all of it, the long lawn, the low-rent cabaret on Friday nights, Magic Memories: The Stars of Yesteryear. You hate him for marrying that woman who expected your children to eat lamb curry and forced you to stay in a hotel. You hate him for replacing her so efficiently, as if an event which destroyed other people's lives were merely one more medical

procedure, the tumor sliced out, wound stitched and swabbed. You hate him because he is the prodigal son. When will Richard come to see me? Do you know Richard? Hes such a lovely boy. In spite of which, deep down, you like being the good child, the one who cares. Deep down you are still waiting for a definitive judgment in which you are finally raised above your relentlessly achieving brother, though the only person who could make that kind of judgment was drifting in and out of their final sleep, the mask misting and clearing, the low hiss of the cylinder under the bed. And then they were gone. M6 southbound, the sprawl of Birmingham finally behind them. Richard dropped a gear and eased the Mercedes round a Belgian chemical tanker. Frankley Services 2 miles. He imagined pulling over in the corner of the car park to watch Louisa sleeping, that spill of butter-colored hair, the pink of her ear, the mystery of it, why a man was aroused by the sight of one woman and not another, something deep in the brain stem like a sweet tooth or a fear of snakes. He looked in the rearview mirror. Melissa was listening to her iPod. She gave him a deadpan comedy wave. He slid the Eliot Gardiner Dido and Aeneas into the CD player and turned up the volume. Melissa stared out of the window and pictured herself in a film. She was walking across a cobbled square. Pigeons, cathedral. She was wearing the red leather jacket Dad had bought her in Madrid. Fifteen years old. She walked into that room, heads turned and suddenly she understood. But theyd want her to be friends with the girl, wouldnt they, just because they were the same age. Like Mum wanted to be friends with some woman on the till in Tescos because they were both forty-four. The girl could have made herself look all right but she hadnt got a clue. Maybe she was a lesbian. Seven days in the countryside with someone elses relatives. Revue de presse "A beautiful object that will grace any holiday home's unfixably wobbly bedside table. The cover feels like a cracked china plate, decorated with a clever re-working of the willow-pattern; like the contents, it is subtle and clever. Haddon writes superb books for children, teenagers and grown-ups, and gets every voice in this one dead right. He is also a master craftsman, so this complicated narrative moves with the speed and certainty of released, unhappy holidaymakers hitting the homeward road. So shove this in your holidaying bag. You may have made a mistake with the booking, but you won't with the book" (Susan Jeffreys Independent) "Mark Haddon is terrifyingly talented... The Red House is thoroughly engrossing and enjoyable entertainment" (Angus Clarke The Times) "A hugely enjoyable, sympathetic novel...a tremendous pleasure...we have been absorbed, entertained and moved" (Kate Kellaway Observer) "Rather like with Alan Ayckbourn's plays, what makes The Red House engaging is the quality of the writing. From the first page in which the train carrying Dominic and Angela's family "unzips the fields", there is a vigor to Haddon's prose which carries you along. I read it twice, both times with enjoyment" (Amanda Craig Independent on Sunday) "With writing as elegant and truthful as this, readers will wish to keep their copies close at hand to savour again" (Michael Arditti Daily Mail)