



We Were the Mulvaney

By Joyce Carol Oates

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An Oprah Book Club® selection

A New York Times Notable Book

"It's the novel closest to my heart.... I'm deeply moved that **Oprah Winfrey** has selected this novel for Oprah's Book Club, a family novel presented to Oprah's vast American family."—**Joyce Carol Oates**

Moving away from the dark tone of her more recent masterpieces, Joyce Carol Oates turns the tale of a family struggling to cope with its fall from grace into a deeply moving and unforgettable account of the vigor of hope and the power of love to prevail over suffering. The Mulvaney of High Point Farm in Mt. Ephraim, New York, are a large and fortunate clan, blessed with good looks, abundant charisma, and boundless promise. But over the twenty-five year span of this ambitious novel, the Mulvaney will slide, almost imperceptibly at first, from the pinnacle of happiness, transformed by the vagaries of fate into a scattered collection of lost and lonely souls. It is the youngest son, Judd, now an adult, who attempts to piece together the fragments of the Mulvaney's former glory, seeking to uncover and understand the secret violation that occasioned the family's tragic downfall. Each of the Mulvaney endures some form of exile- physical or spiritual - but in the end they find a way to bridge the chasms that have opened up among them, reuniting in the spirit of love and healing. Profoundly cathartic, Oates' acclaimed novel unfolds as if, in the darkness of the human spirit, she has come upon a source of light at its core. Rarely has a writer made such a startling and inspiring statement about the value of hope and compassion.

From the Trade Paperback edition.

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

Oprah Book Club® Selection, January 2001: A happy family, the Mulvaney. After decades of marriage, Mom and Dad are still in love--and the proud parents of a brood of youngsters that includes a star athlete, a class valedictorian, and a popular cheerleader. Home is an idyllic place called High Point Farm. And the bonds of attachment within this all-American clan do seem both deep and unconditional: "Mom paused again, drawing in her breath sharply, her eyes suffused with a special lustre, gazing upon her family one by one, with what crazy unbounded love she gazed upon us, and at such a moment my heart would contract as if this woman who was my mother had slipped her fingers inside my rib cage to contain it, as you might hold a wild, thrashing bird to comfort it."

But as we all know, Eden can't last forever. And in the hands of Joyce Carol Oates, who's chronicled just about every variety of familial dysfunction, you know the fall from grace is going to be a doozy. By the time all is said and done, a rape occurs, a daughter is exiled, much alcohol is consumed, and the farm is lost. Even to recount these events in retrospect is a trial for the Mulvaney offspring, one of whom declares: "When I say this is a hard reckoning I mean it's been like squeezing thick drops of blood from my veins." In the hands of a lesser writer, this could be the stuff of a bad television movie. But this is Oates's 26th novel, and by now she knows her material and her craft to perfection. *We Were the Mulvaney* is populated with such richly observed and complex characters that we can't help but care about them, even as we wait for disaster to strike them down. --*Anita Urquhart*

From Publishers Weekly

Elegiac and urgent in tone, Oates's wrenching 26th novel (after *Zombie*) is a profound and darkly realistic chronicle of one family's hubristic heyday and its fall from grace. The wealthy, socially elite Mulvaney live on historic High Point Farm, near the small upstate town of Mt. Ephraim, N.Y. Before the act of violence that forever destroys it, an idyllic incandescence bathes life on the farm. Hard-working and proud, Michael Mulvaney owns a successful roofing company. His wife, Corinne, who makes a halfhearted attempt at running an antique business, adores her husband and four children, feeling "privileged by God." Narrator Judd looks up to his older brothers, athletic Mike Jr. ("Mule") and intellectual Patrick ("Pinch"), and his sister, radiant Marianne, a popular cheerleader who is 17 in 1976 when she is raped by a classmate after a prom. Though the incident is hushed up, everyone in the family becomes a casualty. Guilty and shamed by his reaction to his daughter's defilement, Mike Sr. can't bear to look at Marianne, and she is banished from her home, sent to live with a distant relative. The family begins to disintegrate. Mike loses his business and, later, the homestead. The boys and Corinne register their frustration and sadness in different, destructive ways. Valiant, tainted Marianne runs from love and commitment. More than a decade later, there is a surprising denouement, in which Oates accommodates a guardedly optimistic vision of the future. Each family member is complexly rendered and seen against the background of social and cultural conditioning. As with much of Oates's work, the prose is sometimes prolix, but the very rush of narrative, in which flashbacks capture the same urgency of tone as the present, gives this moving tale its emotional power. 75,000 first printing; author tour.

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From Library Journal

Everyone knows the Mulvaney: Dad the successful businessman, Mike the football star, Marianne the cheerleader, Patrick the brain, Judd the runt, and Mom dedicated to running the family. But after what sometime narrator Judd calls the events of Valentine's Day 1976, this ideal family falls apart and is not

reunited until 1993. Oates's (Will You Always Love Me, LJ 2/1/96) 26th novel explores this disintegration with an eye to the nature of changing relationships and recovering from the fractures that occur. Through vivid imagery of a calm upstate New York landscape that any moment can be transformed by a blinding blizzard into a near-death experience, Oates demonstrates how faith and hope can help us endure. At another level, the process of becoming the Mulvaney's again investigates the philosophical and spiritual aspects of a family's survival and restoration. Highly recommended. ?Joshua Cohen, Mid-Hudson Lib. System, Poughkeepsie, NY
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Users Review

From reader reviews:

Alan Williams:

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