Clarion Review

General

Surviving Curtis Hall: The Lure of Blood
L.A. Matthies
iUniverse
978-1-4759-5266-7
Three Stars (out of Five)

In *Surviving Curtis Hall: The Lure of Blood*, debut author L. A. Matthies artfully navigates the teen angst generated by changing schools, new love, and significant secrets.

To escape the drugs and violence of their old school, poet and lacrosse star Tristen McCoy and his friends Billy and Sasha transfer to Curtis Hall. The protagonist and his buddies soon find themselves embroiled with new classmates Marcella, Skye, and Pierce. As some of them try to discover who they truly love and others hide the truth of their identities, one thing is clear: The students' lives will never be the same.

Tristen, Billy, and Sasha are rounded characters who represent a refreshing rarity in young-adult novels—a trio who have been friends since childhood and who remain close throughout the turmoil of the novel. Marcella, Skye, and Pierce are also well developed. The symbiosis between Marcella, a vampire, and Skye, a gypsy, adds new depth to the bloodsucker mythology, suggesting that Romany gain special powers from the vampires.

In a pleasant reversal of the *Twilight* saga, Tristen, a human boy, falls for Marcella, a vampire girl, and their relationship is the novel's focal point, according to the blurb on the back. Their relationship doesn't consume the book, however, because there's much additional drama going on in both the human and vampire worlds. Marcella, for example, attempts to curb her attraction to Tristen, research a potion to make vampires survive sunlight, and fend off her sadistic brother. Sasha struggles with her feelings for boyfriend Billy, yet does not want to hurt her childhood friends by potentially destroying the trio if she breaks things off with him. In fact, there is so much action in this book that readers quickly realize that the supposed main characters of Tristen and Marcella fail to emerge as the linchpins one expects them to be.

While the intense drama keeps readers turning the pages, each chapter is told from a different viewpoint; so in some cases the audience has to wait too long to find out how each

player is integral to the story. With so many characters, the so-called protagonist is relegated to a secondary role. This is unfortunate because Tristen is intriguing: a poetic, smart jock, free of arrogance, who strives to keep the peace between his pals.

While Marcella becomes infatuated with Tristen, she is no passive Bella Swan, but an ancient bloodsucker on a mission. Only at the end do Tristen and Marcella stop pining for one another and actually connect. Although the plot is enjoyable, those hoping for a full-blown romance will be disappointed. The author leaves her debut open-ended, and one hopes that a sequel will see Tristen and Marcella take center stage.

Jill Allen