ForeWord Reviews

GENERAL

All His Sons
Frederic Raphael
Catbird Press
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The secret of the Brit's love affair with language is that speaking is inherently a sensuous act. Thousands of tiny muscles and nerve endings fire exquisitely to release a single word with its shape and eminence.

Classically educated in the midst of a culture restrained by convention and posture, British habitué, screenwriter, and novelist Raphael uses this quality of language to be "provocative rather than conclusive" in his new collection of nine stories and a novella. Raphael is the author of thirty-seven books: novels, essays, short stories, translations of poetry and drama from Latin and Greek, and biographies (including the instantly criticized and controversial Eyes Wide Open: A Memoir of Stanley Kubrick, 1999). His screen credits include the Academy Award-winning screenplay Darling (1965), the Oscar-nominated screenplay Two for the Road (1967), the sadly underrated adaptation of the Thomas Hardy novel, Far from the Madding Crowd (1967), and Eyes Wide Shut (2000), co-authored with Stanley Kubrick.

The painting on this book's front cover was done by illustrator Sarah Raphael, a former London artist and the late daughter of Frederic Raphael.

In his title novella, set in New York City, readers are invited into the complex dynamics within the Jewish-American family of Julius Oppenheim and his two grown sons, Stanley and Sidney. It is a story of lives intertwined by helixes of DNA: fathers and sons, brothers and fathers, grandfathers and fathers, sons and their sons.

Throughout the volume Raphael frames an interior landscape, holding open the questions of the human heart: its insecurities, desires, hopes, fears, dreams, losses, and loves. "Julius wanted to study in the liberal arts… but no: he studied business and economics. Instead of being despised as he hoped, he learned to despise, as he feared."

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The author heightens the novella's momentum by writing some sections in the style of a film script. For example, the scene after Stanley's wife and son have left him for good… "INT. THE APARTMENT. DAY Stanley comes in and there is wet on his cheeks. His nose is cold.

NARRATOR

He has looked forward to and dreaded this moment. He is free. And now he longs for the chains he no longer has to wear.

Stanley sits at his desk. We watch him closely.

NARRATOR

He realizes that he need never be interrupted again. No one will call for… lunch, or toilet paper. He puts his head in his hands and tries to cry, and then to smile."

In this taut, fast-moving narrative, filled with "provocative" language, the author states that "Love is a word that proves to us how little we can say about what we insist matters most."

Beef Torrey