



Isles of the Blind

Robert Rosenberg

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Every moment of this novel becomes appealing for its thoughtful approaches to the complicated nature of fraternal love.

A pitied son rejects low expectations, leading to a deep family rift in Robert Rosenberg's *Isles of the Blind*, a rich and lengthy meditation on bloodlines and loyalty, personal and national accountability, and absolution.

Avram's chronically ill younger brother isn't expected to live into adulthood. Family sacrifices afford him a blessed childhood on a Turkish island, though Yusuf grows to resent his family's stunted expectations and is impatient for more. When his mother dies early, in a state of poverty that he is determined to personally subvert, the discord between father, brother, and son seems insurmountable.

While Avram builds a quiet, respectable life, Yusuf becomes notorious: as a rare Jewish Turkish billionaire; as a playboy and a questionable benefactor to his servant's beautiful young daughter; and, most dangerously, as a public figure relentless in questioning the Turkish government's standard line on the Armenian genocide. National leaders are not saddened when a tragedy claims his life, but when Avram returns to the island of their childhood to renovate his brother's mansion, he is faced with his own considerable regrets.

The novel builds its setting and characters with quietude and grace, affording Avram the narrator's place. He relates Yusuf's story with love, but also with confusion and frustration. Yet as Avram repairs Yusuf's home and delves into the historical questions that likely got him killed, he comes to understand his brother better: as a lonely man for whom no personal achievement was never quite enough.

In the movement of the novel, grand historical tragedies become the moral absolutes that help characters work around their more personal disappointments. Turkish life, with its sensuous movements and political quagmires, is imparted in a relatable and appealing way. But the tension between the brothers sits at the novel's core. Avram's moves toward recompense are emotionally compelling, and every moment of this novel becomes appealing for its thoughtful approaches to the complicated nature of fraternal love.

MICHELLE ANNE SCHINGLER (Summer 2016)

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