



Isaac And His Devils

Fernanda Eberstadt

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“Enchanting . . . Bursting with talent and love of life,” said the *Washington Post Book World* of Fernanda Eberstadt’s extraordinary first novel, *Low Tide*. Now her exuberant gifts are even more abundantly evident on a larger scale.

Isaac and His Devils tells the story of a boy who throws off sparks of what might be genius—and of his father, a man who has walked away from the possibilities of his own brilliance.

Isaac Hooker, from birth to his twenty-second year, compensates for his ill health with a radiant tireless curiosity. He is certain of his destiny: he will “transfigure America in some vague, huge way.” He is the smartest. He will be the best, the first. At his side—watching him, loving him, driving him (to his mother’s ceaseless irritation)—is Isaac’s father, Sam, who sees in his son’s promise the triumphs he himself might have had . . . and Isaac’s teacher, Agnes Urquhart, who recognizes in the boy’s wild and clumsy energy the genesis of great achievement, and who begins to turn him towards it . . . Until Isaac, realizing he must confront and escape the devils that defeated his father, finds his life suddenly, frighteningly, out of control.

Around their story, the larger story of the family unfolds. Moving backwards and forwards in time, the narrative weaves an intricate portrait of Isaac’s parents’ early lives in their insular New Hampshire town; of their too-young, mismatched marriage; of Sam’s sacrifice of ambition and bookish dreams to satisfy the immediate needs of his sensual, down-to-earth, and pregnant wife; of the difficult yet tender attachment between Isaac and his younger, less promising brother; and especially of the powerful love and hate between Isaac and his father—as the son, who secretly sees his own progress into realms where his father cannot follow as betrayal, pushes himself out of childhood and towards the first moments of becoming an adult.

A novel of rich feeling and intelligence. A major leap forwards for a brilliantly gifted novelist.

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