



The Life Before Her Eyes

By Laura Kasischke

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Diana stands before the mirror preening with her best friend, Maureen. Suddenly, a classmate enters holding a gun, and Diana sees her life dance before her eyes. In a moment the future she was just imagining--a doting wife and mother at the age of forty--is sealed by a horrific decision she is forced to make. In prose infused with the dramatically feminine sensuality of spring, we experience seventeen-year-old Diana's uncertain steps into womanhood--her awkward, heated forays into sex; her fresh, fragile construction of an identity. Together with the sights and sounds of renewal, we experience the tasks of Diana's adulthood: protecting her beloved daughter and holding onto her successful husband.

An acclaimed writer and poet, Laura Kasischke has crafted a consciousness that encompasses the truth of a teenager's world and the profound transformation of that world at midlife. Resonant and deeply stirring, *The Life Before Her Eyes* finds piercing beauty in the midst of a nightmare from long ago that echoes like a dirge beneath each new spring.

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Editorial Review

From Library Journal

This third novel by Michigan author Kasischke (*Suspicious River*) opens with a shocking scene from a Columbine-like school massacre. Diana and her best friend are confronted by a schoolmate killer, but only Diana is spared. Fast-forward 20 years: Diana, now middle-aged and still beautiful, is a housewife and artist living in the same idyllic university town with a handsome professor-husband and a young daughter. She has seemingly repressed her memory of the event as well as her survivor's guilt, but her perfect world and her grip on reality are both starting to crack. These scenes are imbued with that sense of eerie apprehension found in a good horror flick. Woven through the book is a flashback narrative of Diana's sunny but empty-headed adolescent days. The novel plays teenage Diana's youthful illusions of immortality and beauty against the shifting, uneasy reality of middle age. Kasischke, also a published poet, writes prose that is dreamy and lyrical. This is one book you won't want to put down. Highly recommended for all popular fiction collections.

- *Reba Leiding, James Madison Univ., Harrisonburg, VA*

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From *Booklist*

Disturbing fiction (*Suspicious River* 1996, and *White Bird in a Blizzard*, 1999) is fast becoming prizewinning poet Kasischke's hallmark. Her third novel opens with a haunting scene set in the girls' washroom of a high school. Diana is goofing in front of the mirror with her best friend, Maureen, "when they hear the first *dot-dot-dot* of automatic gunfire. It sounds phony and far away." They are eventually confronted by the gunman, a fellow classmate whom "they'd never even really noticed." He asks them a terrible question, "Which one of you girls should I kill?" Kasischke then juxtaposes scenes from 17-year-old Diana's life with scenes from her apparent future as a 40-year-old wife and mother. In the final chapter, however, the author ambushes the reader with a shocking revelation about Diana's fate. Whether the novel is viewed as a cheap narrative trick (there will be plenty of readers crying foul) or an imaginative exploration, there's no denying that Kasischke is a fearless writer. *Joanne Wilkinson*

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Review

PRAISE FOR *THE LIFE BEFORE HER EYES*

"Hauntingly original . . . A tour de force."--*O Magazine*

"Potent and poetic storytelling. Such is the agility of [Kasischke's] writing that it can encompass both a heinously nihilistic act and a most magical . . . outcome."--*Elle*

"Poetic . . . A novel that takes on deep matters of life and death; conscience and consciousness; family, love, and friendship."--*Los Angeles Times*

Users Review

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Sandra Gregory:

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