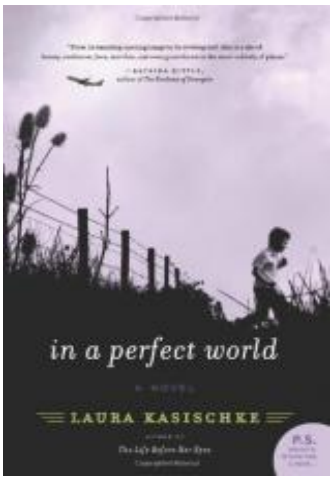
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In a Perfect World

by Laura Kasischke



About the Book

In a Perfect World is critically acclaimed writer Laura Kasischke?s new novel of marriage, motherhood, and the choices we make when we have no choices left.

It was a fairy tale come true when Mark Dorn --- handsome pilot, widower, tragic father of three --- chose Jiselle to be his wife. The other flight attendants were jealous: She could quit now, leaving behind the million daily irritations of the job. (Since the outbreak of the Phoenix flu, passengers had become even more difficult and nervous, and a life of constant travel had grown harder.) She could move into Mark Dorn's precious log cabin and help him raise his three beautiful children.

But fairy tales aren't like marriage. Or motherhood. With Mark almost always gone, Jiselle finds herself alone, and lonely. She suspects that Mark's daughters hate her. And the Phoenix flu, which Jiselle had thought of as a passing hysteria (when she thought of it at all), well... it turns out that the Phoenix flu will change everything for Jiselle, for her new family, and for the life she thought she had chosen.

Discussion Guide

1. Numerous fairytales are interwoven with the plot of **In a Perfect World**. What are some of these tales, and how do they function within the story? How might this novel be read, itself, as a kind of fairytale?

2. The unfolding of the love story between Jiselle and Mark is cut short with his quarantine and is soon overshadowed by her life with his children. How does this become its own romance, and in what ways does this shift comment on expectations regarding love and marriage?

3. How do you feel about the changes in Jiselle's character as the novel unfolds? How do you feel about the way she

handles and reacts to the events of the novel, particularly the demands of step-motherhood?

4. Joy is a character who is never encountered in the novel, but who seems important nonetheless. How do you interpret her shadow-character, and how does Jiselle's ?relationship' to her change during the course of the novel?

5. The author researched the Black Death in writing this book. Which events seem historically familiar? Which details seem to parallel contemporary concerns and events? Does the plot seem more fabulist than realistic? Can you imagine the kind of future the author has imagined?

6. Did you see Mark as a sympathetic character? Was Jiselle foolish to marry him?

7. At which moments in the novel do we see Jiselle's relationship to the children changing? Do you feel that, at some points, they become ?her' children? If so, where in the novel does this seem to occur?

8. Jiselle and the children are very isolated in this novel. Does this seem realistic to you? How do you feel about the few additional characters who figure in it: Jiselle's mother, Paul Temple, Tara Temple, the Schmidts?

9. What does the title, **In a Perfect World**, say to you about the themes and structure of the novel?

10. Is this an apocalyptic novel? What is your interpretation of the ending?

Author Bio

Laura Kasischke teaches in the MFA program at the University of Michigan. A winner of the National Book Critics Circle Award for poetry, she has published seven collections of poetry and nine novels, two of which have been made into films, including THE LIFE BEFORE HER EYES. She lives in Chelsea, Michigan, with her husband and son.

Critical Praise

"Kasischke finds beauty amid the apocalypse in her timely seventh novel... Kasischke?s penchant for disconcerting but absorbing fiction is on display, as is her facility with language. Startling, sometimes violent images combine with strikingly dispassionate narration to create a fictional world where terror, beauty and chaos walk hand in hand."

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