

Cassandra's Eye

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An evocative novel set in 1969's counterculture, *Cassandra's Eye* focuses on the almost-grown daughter of intransigent bohemian parents.

In Portland, Maine, Shanti is caught between her parents' heedless lifestyle, her desire to break free, and her need to take responsibility for her two younger sisters and physically impaired brother. The story of her eighteenth year is also a striking portrait of the times.

Observant Shanti is a compelling lead who describes herself as "eighteen going on forty." She cooks meals and looks after her siblings while her father, an unsuccessful abstract painter, opens an art gallery with the money meant for his son's corrective surgery. Meanwhile, her mother wants to study the classics and works in a market to bring in what little cash the family has.

The story features women who wear Indian print dresses to parties, Chianti bottles holding dripping candles, and the tangled emotions of casual sex—a constant threat to group tranquility. Nuanced and succinct language is used to develop complex characters: Shanti sees her father as a man who yearns for a revelation, who views his paintings as steps along a "sacred journey." Portland's combination of misty beauty and shabby melancholy mirrors the novel's underlying themes of ambition-tainted lassitude and underscores the feelings within Shanti's first serious relationship.

The text is sparing and skillful, driven by Shanti's compelling voice. The eventual fallout from her parents' heedless behavior triggers dramatic events that lead to painful realities, though they give Shanti the breathing space she needs.

Recreating a unique time and place, *Cassandra's Eye* is a strong coming-of-age novel whose lead is hard to part ways with.

SUSAN WAGGONER (January / February 2020)

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