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Book Review: 'The Black Hour' by Lori Rader-Day

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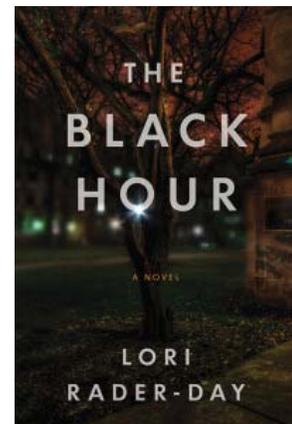
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What happens when those you trust and depend on for support disappoint or worse, use your weaknesses against you? Where do you turn in the bleakest of moments and how do you persevere when things seem hopeless? Debut author [Lori Rader-Day](#) explores these questions and others in her intriguing new "whydunnit."

Set at a fictional, prestigious university on the Chicago shores of Lake Michigan, [The Black Hour](#) deals with the aftermath of a horrific shooting of a sociology professor by a troubled student. The catch is Dr. [Amelia Emmet](#) has no idea why [Leo Lehane](#) shot her before killing himself. She swears they'd never met and records show he wasn't in any of her classes.

Acerbic yet fragile, Amelia returns to her teaching position following her difficult 10-month recovery. She must battle the physical ramifications of the ordeal along with the psychological trauma she is forced to admit exists. The insular community she returns to isn't as welcoming as she'd hoped and surprisingly, she realizes that not everyone sees her as the victim.

To make matters worse, her former best friend seems to be pulling away and Amelia's attracted the unwanted attention of a tenacious reporter. Add in the constant pain she must endure, the stares and whispers of students and staff, and Amelia's equilibrium is threatened at work and home. She must find a way to process the violent incident before everything she's worked to achieve disappears.

Transfer student and PhD candidate [Nathaniel Barber](#) arrives on campus on Amelia's first day back. Reeling from recent events in his own life, a new start may be just what he needs. Amelia offers him a job as her teaching assistant not knowing he has sought her out for mysterious reasons of his own. Obsessed with violent crimes in and around Chicago, Nathaniel hovers at the margins of university society nursing scars he hasn't yet fully examined. The more Amelia comes to rely on him, the more determined he is to dig into the mystery of the shooting - even if doing so puts them both in danger.

The author draws Amelia's character with an Exact-o knife, leaving her sharp edges intact. Nathaniel's character manages to elicit sympathy and suspicion at the same time. Rader-Day alternates points of view between these two main characters and keeps the tension building throughout the spare yet powerful narrative.

As professor and student pursue the truth, each in their own way, they set themselves against each other and unknown forces. They soon have more to worry about than each other's secrets and will need both courage and each other to prevent another tragedy on campus. [Rader-Day's](#) precise prose has a clarity to it that reveals the damages and strengths of her main characters and hints at a larger darkness growing within their closed community. With shadows lurking at the edges, she creates an evocative atmosphere that is both familiar and sinister.

Fans of psychological suspense and mystery will find it easy to keep the pages turning. I was drawn in and stayed up late, finishing the last pages at 1:00 a.m. Not quite [The Black Hour](#), but close.

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