



## Black Iris

By Leah Raeder

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The next dark and sexy romantic suspense novel from the *USA TODAY* bestselling author of *Unteachable*, which was praised for its “lush, haunting prose, deft storytelling, and scorching sensuality” (M. Pierce, bestselling author of the Night Owl trilogy), and called “one of the best forbidden romances” (Lauren Blakely, *New York Times* bestselling author).

*“Love is not a thing that we create. It’s an undoing.”*

It only took one moment of weakness for Laney Keating’s world to fall apart. One stupid gesture for a hopeless crush. Then the rumors began. Slut, they called her. Queer. Psycho. Mentally ill, messed up, so messed up even her own mother decided she wasn’t worth sticking around for.

If Laney could erase that whole year, she would. College is her chance to start with a clean slate.

She’s not looking for new friends, but they find her: charming, handsome Armin, the only guy patient enough to work through her thorny defenses—and fiery, filterless Blythe, the bad girl and partner in crime who has thorns of her own.

But Laney knows nothing good ever lasts. When a ghost from her past resurfaces—the bully who broke her down completely—she decides it’s time to live up to her own legend. And Armin and Blythe are going to help.

Which was the plan all along.

Because the rumors are true. Every single one. And Laney is going to show them just how true.

She’s going to show them all.

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### Editorial Review

Review

#### Praise for *Black Iris*:

"Like an afternoon special on bullying gone impossibly dark, Raeder's dizzyingly intense, drug-addicted queer teenage revenge fantasy takes its reader on a sexy, bloody journey of pure emotion...A twisting timeline dancing over a year's events makes every moment seem both immediate and angrily steeped in memory. Major themes include depression, mania, and the ways that the use and abuse of drugs affect access to the reality of self and the world's essential nature; but the soul-searching always comes in the context of action, everyone around hit by the shrapnel of exploding feelings. This is an exhilarating ride for our inner underdog, craving a taste of what it would feel like to just get back at everyone if we were reckless enough not to care about the consequences." (*Publishers Weekly, starred review*)

"Not for the faint of heart...gritty, intense, and lyrical...Raeder's compelling and unnerving dysfunctional love story is about revenge and survival."

(*Booklist*)

"Raeder is a true, original talent." (Jennifer L. Armentrout #1 *New York Times* bestselling author)

"Risky, brave, bold. Heart-breaking, captivating, and sensual. There aren't enough words to describe this suspenseful powerhouse of a novel. Raeder's gorgeous prose and raw characters will keep you flipping to the very end. *Black Iris* is one of the best books I've read this year." (Karina Halle *New York Times* bestselling author)

"Intense and visceral, *Black Iris* is as sharp as a knife and beats with a heart that is double-edged and dangerous." (Lauren Blakely *New York Times* bestselling author)

"Provocative, seductive, and skillfully written, *Black Iris* is a story that stands out from the crowd." (K.A. Tucker *USA Today* Bestselling Author)

"Raeder masterfully weaves a dark, twisted, dangerously sexy quest for revenge with a raw, honest search for kinship and self-acceptance. *Black Iris* demands your attention, your heart, and an immediate reread." (Dahlia Adler author of *Last Will and Testament*)

"Lyrical, vivid, and poignant, *Unteachable* is one of best forbidden romances I've ever read." (Lauren Blakely *New York Times* bestselling author)

"*Unteachable* infuses the complicated dynamics of forbidden sexual tension and untamed passion, all while managing to break your heart. Easily one of my favorite reads." (Gail McHugh *New York Times* bestselling author)

"With lush, haunting prose, deft storytelling and scorching sensuality, Leah Raeder weaves a love story that obliterates convention. The best book I've read this year." (M. Pierce bestselling author of the *Night Owl Trilogy*)

"Leah Raeder's writing is skillful and stunning. *Unteachable* is one of the most beautifully powerful stories of forbidden love that I have ever read." (Mia Sheridan *bestselling author of Archer's Voice*)

"Equally wicked as it is beautiful. This story is one of the best reads I've read to date. My book hangover afterward was *real*. It honestly opened my eyes to all things LGBTQIA+ and the importance of treating mental illness. Overall a very note-worthy read that everyone should digest at least once." (*Book Baristas*)

### **Praise for *Cam Girl*:**

"Raeder's beautifully broken characters are so full of life that they leap off the page and demand that the reader pay attention to them...it's a must read for anyone wanting a sexy deep dive into a tangled psyche and a difficult life." (*Publishers Weekly (starred review)*)

"*Cam Girl* is a beautiful exploration of gender and sexuality that begs readers to question how well we know those closest to us, including ourselves. Raeder's trademark sensual lyricism is in full effect here, but it's the fraught yet tender relationship between Vada and Ellis that will have you glued to the pages until the oh-so-perfect ending." (Dahlia Adler, author of *UNDER THE LIGHTS*)

"Raeder keeps the action moving as readers try to figure out the dual mysteries—what happened on the road that night, and who is Blue?" (*Booklist*)

"Gripping, emotional, relatable, and yes, romantic (in all the best ways) read. Whatever Raeder writes, I will always want to read and recommend." (*RT Magazine*)

"Raeder's best book yet. It has the grit, language, and heat you'd expect, but there's more. Raeder has clearly dug down and bled and studied the mirror to reveal the ugliest and most beautiful parts of herself, and human nature. *CAM GIRL* is a rich and unflinching narrative." (Emery Lord, author of *Open Road Summer*)

### About the Author

Leah Raeder is the author of *Unteachable*, *Black Iris*, and the forthcoming *Cam Girl*. Aside from reading her brains out, she enjoys graphic design, video games, fine whiskey, and the art of self-deprecation. She lives with her very own manic pixie dream boy in Chicago. Visit her at [LeahRaeder.com](http://LeahRaeder.com).

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Black Iris

### APRIL, LAST YEAR

April is the cruelest month, T. S. Eliot said, and that's because it kills. It's the month with the highest suicide rate. You'd think December, or even January—the holidays and all that forced cheer and agonized smiling pushing fragile people to the edge—but actually it's spring, when the world wakes from frost-bound sleep and something cruel and final stirs inside those of us who are broken. Like Eliot said: mixing memory and desire, stirring dull roots with spring rain. In the deepest throes of depression, when sunlight is anguish and the sky throbs like one big raw migraine and you just want to sleep until you or everything else dies, you're less likely to commit suicide than someone coming out of a depressive episode. Drug companies know this. That's why antidepressants have to be marked with the warning **MAY CAUSE SUICIDAL THOUGHTS**.

Because what brings you back to life also gives you the means to destroy yourself.

Flick, flick, flick. The lighter in my hand, the sound of my life grinding into sparks that would never catch, under a salmon-pink dawn in Nowhereville, Illinois. Gravel crunched beneath my shoes, polished like oyster shell from the rain. I stopped at the puddle outside our garage and peered into the oily mirrored water, watching the slow swirl of a gasoline rainbow, the tiny orange tongue of fire licking shadows from my face until they washed back over and over. An unlit cigarette hung from my lip and my mouth had a weird bleach taste I tried not to think about. I tried not to think about anything that had happened last night. I was eighteen and, according to Mom, “completely out of control,” which to anyone else would have meant “a normal teenager.” Mom’s favorite hobby: projecting her own psych issues onto me.

Very soon I’d be free of her.

From the alley I could see the backyard, the grass jeweled with dew. Mom’s garden lined the walk to the porch, hyacinths with their cones of curled blue stars, rosebuds crumpled like flakes of dried blood, everything glazed in clear lacquer and the air musky with the cologne of rain. At six fifteen she’d wake and find my bed empty. But that wasn’t the real problem. The real problem was that in about three minutes, something terrible was going to happen. The thing you’ll hate me for. The thing that will make me an Unsympathetic Protagonist.

Since the fourth wall is down, let’s get one thing straight:

I am not the heroine of this story.

And I’m not trying to be cute. It’s the truth. I’m diagnosed borderline and seriously fucked-up. I hold grudges. I bottle my hate until it ferments into poison, and then I get high off the fumes. I’m completely dysfunctional and that’s the way I like it, so don’t expect a character arc where I finally find Redemption, Growth, and Change, or learn How to Forgive Myself and Others.

Fuck forgiveness.

Oh, and I’m a writer. Which is worse than all the rest put together.

Open sesame, I texted my brother.

I don’t know how I didn’t hear it. It was quiet, the crickets creaking like a rusty seesaw, but that other sound must have been there, scratching softly at my brain. I crept into the backyard through the maze of Mom’s thorns.

The house was dark, Donnie’s curtains closed. Wake up fuckface, I texted, punctuating with a smiley. Six twelve a.m. Three minutes until Medusa’s alarm went off. Donnie always slept with his phone under his pillow, which was probably slowly giving him cancer. He should’ve been up by now. Mom’s gonna kill me, I wrote. Do you want to be an only child?

Six thirteen.

Dammit. I had to beat that alarm.

I bolted across the lawn, kicking pearls of dew loose from the grass. A thorn snagged my ankle but I wouldn’t notice the blood till much later, in the hospital. My socks instantly went damp. It wasn’t until I’d reached the porch that I saw the other tracks, paralleling mine.

A chill swept up my back. I touched the kitchen doorknob.

Unlocked.

I didn't open it. That coldness wove around my spine, thickening, binding. Someone was awake. Someone had come downstairs, crossed the yard before me.

I turned.

She was in the garage, at the window. I knew my mother's silhouette from long years of it slipping into doorways, catching us horsing around when we should've been asleep, catching me when I snuck in alone after midnight, my body weary and ancient with all that had been done to it. I knew the high set of those shoulders, that neck rigid with contempt. The closed mouth carved tight into her elegant Gorgon skull. She'd stand there without saying a word. Her silence was the kind that compelled you to fill it with all your wrongs. I could never see her eyes but I knew they burned ice-wraith blue, and now I felt them through the dusty window pane, felt the stare that could turn me to stone.

I removed the lighter slowly from my pocket. Flicked it once with exaggerated languor. Lit up. Took a long, luxuriously filthy drag, meeting her stare. The inside of my body felt carbon-coated, black and grimy. Not the soft pink vulnerable thing I really was.

Okay, bitch. Your move.

She just stood there.

Those moments counted. Those moments when I faced her, eating fire and breathing smoke, telling myself I was hard, that I could crush her and this whole world in my hands. Telling myself she couldn't hurt me. No one could hurt me anymore.

Those moments could have saved us.

By the time I reached the end of the cigarette the sun had torn a red gash at the horizon, and I saw that Mom was unsteady on her feet, swaying. And finally I realized what that rhythmic sound was beneath the crickets. I knew it from climbing up into the garage rafters with my brother to smoke a J, the beams creaking with our weight. Wood, under strain.

I dropped my cigarette in the grass.

In some deep part of me, I already knew. I crossed the lawn, noticing the white square taped to the side door only when I touched the knob. A name scrawled across the paper in her bold, slashing handwriting.

Delaney.

How had she known it would be me?

I ignored the note. I was trying to turn the doorknob and failing. Locked.

"Mom," I said, and rattled the door, then again, louder, "Mom."

She swayed dreamily.

A light flipped on inside the house, a yellow frame falling over me. I braced both hands on the knob and kicked. Everything stretched away like the reflection in a car mirror. My mind floated above my head, looking down at my body: Laney Keating, her hair matted, a black wash of mascara running down her cheeks, her mouth still bitter from the blowjob, throttling the garage door and screaming her mother's name. I watched her from a faraway place. She gave up kicking and punched straight through the window in a brilliant starburst of glass. I felt the heat shoot up my arm like a drug, saw the redness streaking over my skin, but didn't quite connect it to me, to the girl crawling in over those jagged glass teeth, tumbling to the floor, scrambling up and screaming as she grabbed her mother's legs and uselessly lifted the limp, hanging body. My mind was still outside, staring at my name on the suicide note. All I could think was, How did she know I'd find her? How did she know it would be me?

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I don't remember much else because I blacked out thirty seconds later. Dad had seen me from the house and dragged me onto the lawn, then Mom, laying us side by side. I was unconscious but somehow I can picture it. Grass curling over bone-white skin, tracing horsetails of dew, tiny clear beads that reflect an entire world full of stars and flowers and our pale bodies, everything she'd left behind. My blood mixed with the dew and turned pink. The glass would leave scars on my right hand like the ghost of a cobweb, which is what scars are: a haunting of the skin.

At the funeral Dad said he thought she'd killed us both. He'd been a heartbeat from getting his semiautomatic and joining us when he realized I had a pulse.

This might sound fucked-up, but the part that really upset me wasn't the suicide. That had been a long time coming. What disturbed me was that she knew I'd find her first.

I am my mother's daughter.

I know what it feels like to plan something that will destroy you, to be so fucking sure you want it that you arrange everything perfectly, prune the roses while you debate the merits of hanging yourself with nylon rope versus an appliance cord, serve your children baked ziti while your suicide note lies in a desk drawer like a cruel bird of prey waiting to unfold its wings until, one morning when the world is diamond-strung with rain and your daughter is coming home from another night of ruining herself (because you were never there for her, you were never there), you get up before everyone else and calmly step into the garage, and that noose, and eternity.

She'd planned it for years. Knew it was coming and kept tending that garden. Those roses she would never see bloom, the irises and peonies, the daughter and son, all of us left behind to flower, somehow, without her.

Well, I did. I bloomed into the dark thing she made me.

I am a creature with a vast capacity for patience, and for violence. For watching. For waiting. For taking the moment only when it is perfect and sure. I'm a hunter like my mother, patient and watchful and still, my fangs full of black venom. There is a terrible thing tucked inside me raring to lunge forth into the light. And I'm just waiting for that perfect moment. Just waiting. Just waiting.

## Users Review

### From reader reviews:

#### Heather Snyder:

The ability that you get from Black Iris may be the more deep you excavating the information that hide inside the words the more you get thinking about reading it. It does not mean that this book is hard to recognise but Black Iris giving you thrill feeling of reading. The writer conveys their point in a number of way that can be understood by means of anyone who read this because the author of this book is well-known enough. This kind of book also makes your vocabulary increase well. Making it easy to understand then can go along with you, both in printed or e-book style are available. We suggest you for having this Black Iris instantly.

#### Jeffrey Richard:

Hey guys, do you wants to finds a new book to see? May be the book with the concept Black Iris suitable to you? The particular book was written by well-known writer in this era. The actual book untitled Black Iris is the main of several books this everyone read now. This specific book was inspired a number of people in the world. When you read this reserve you will enter the new dimensions that you ever know prior to. The author explained their concept in the simple way, consequently all of people can easily to comprehend the core of this reserve. This book will give you a lot of information about this world now. So that you can see the represented of the world in this book.

#### Lucy Broussard:

Exactly why? Because this Black Iris is an unordinary book that the inside of the book waiting for you to snap that but latter it will shock you with the secret the item inside. Reading this book beside it was fantastic author who all write the book in such wonderful way makes the content inside easier to understand, entertaining way but still convey the meaning entirely. So , it is good for you for not hesitating having this nowadays or you going to regret it. This amazing book will give you a lot of positive aspects than the other book get such as help improving your talent and your critical thinking technique. So , still want to hold off having that book? If I have been you I will go to the e-book store hurriedly.

#### Marc Medina:

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