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Down the Darkest Road, by Tami Hoag, Penguin, 2011

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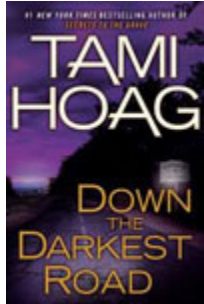
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Recommended Readings



Down the Darkest Road

by Tami Hoag, Penguin, 2011

Reviewed by Larry W. Riggs

Tami Hoag's new novel includes some of the best writing and most acute psychological analysis I have seen in popular fiction. Four years after the disappearance and, almost certainly, the murder of her teenage daughter, Lauren Lawton is obsessed with "justice," or is it revenge? Since the disappearance, Lauren's husband has died in a car accident—a suicide?—and, in the complete absence of hard evidence, the police have come to dread Lauren's demands for vigorous pursuit of the man who, everyone seems morally certain, kidnapped the young woman. Hoag explores this direst of imaginable psychological, moral, and legal predicaments with impressive lucidity and sensitivity. In her obsessive quest for justice/revenge—and for knowledge of her daughter's ultimate fate—Lauren has evolved from victim to predator, following the man who, legally, cannot even be called a suspect, to a new town. One of the many tragic dimensions of this drama is that Lauren has victimized her own younger daughter by sacrificing the docile, obedient girl's most critically formative years to the ghost of her rebellious, irresponsible older sister. Uprooted and too often ignored, the younger daughter has come to hate her kidnapped sister and, of course, to feel devastated by guilt. Is Lauren's quarry actually guilty? Is the quest worth its consequences? Do the legal system's constraints justify vigilantism? Will what is left of Lauren's family survive? Hoag's book explores all of these questions.

- Larry W. Riggs is Professor of French at Butler University.