

The Eternal Return of Clara Hart

Louise Finch

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In Louise Finch's insightful novel *The Eternal Return of Clara Hart*, a boy who's stuck in a time loop confronts the events that led to the death of a classmate.

For Spencer, the anniversary of his mom's death is a painful day. At a party at his best friend Anthony's house, he tries to escape the crowd downstairs. He finds Anthony in his room with Clara, who's drunk in his bed. Spencer thinks nothing of this and returns downstairs.

Minutes later, Clara flees the house and is hit and killed by a car. The tragedy of the day weighs on Spencer. When he wakes the next morning, he is back at the day's beginning. Confused and horrified, but determined to save Clara, he starts the day again and again, working to change his actions and make it right.

Drawing on Nietzsche's idea of eternal recurrence, the book explores toxic masculinity, sexual assault, and personal responsibility. Spencer and his friends make violent jokes and harass their classmates, but with each new do-over, Spencer also gets to know Clara and his classmates better. He begins to examine how the boys' behavior impacts the girls.

The characterizations are vibrant and complex. Spencer learns that Clara's is not the only story that matters and that he needs to change the ways in which he interacts with most of the people in his life. His father's grief, the pain that other girls have suffered, and even the bullying that other boys have been victim to all become clear to Spencer as he goes through his endless day.

The Eternal Return of Clara Hart is an intelligent novel about grief, sexual violence, and the impact of personal accountability.

CATHERINE THURESON (July / August 2023)

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