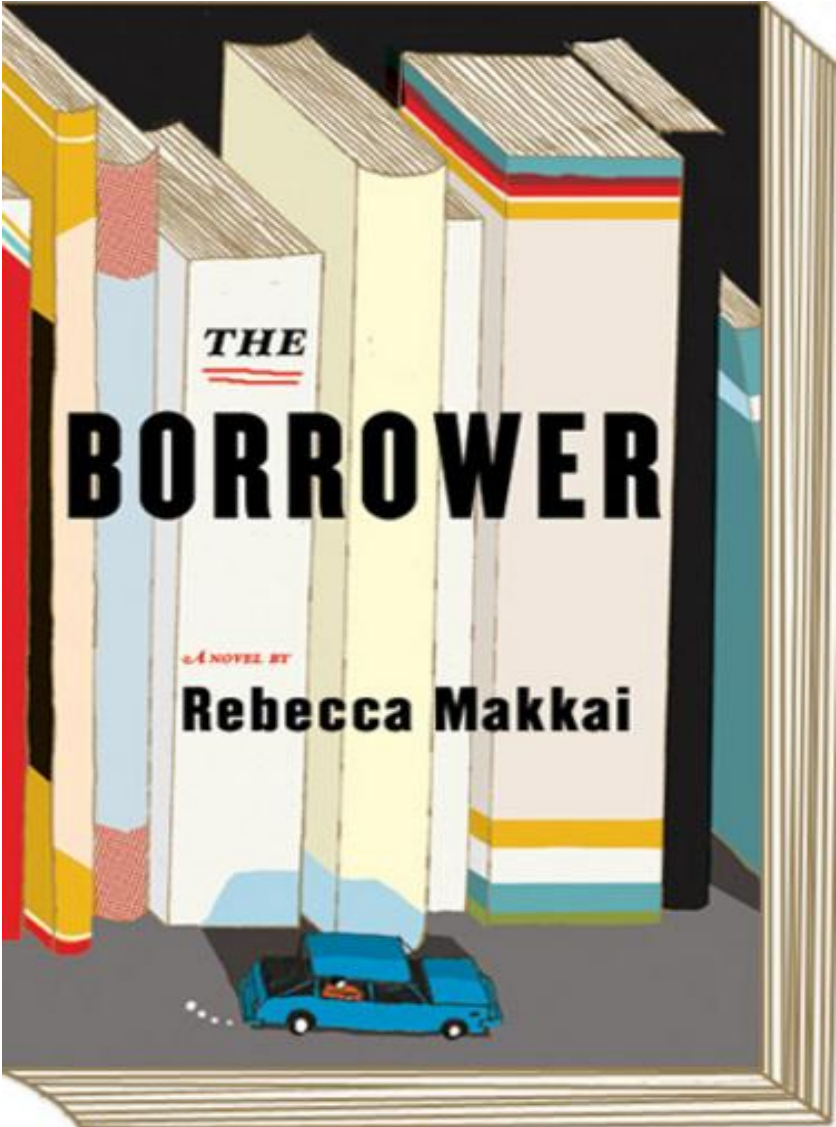


About the book



Lucy Hull, a young children's librarian in Hannibal, Missouri, finds herself both a kidnapper and kidnapped when her favorite patron, ten-year-old Ian Drake, runs away from home. The precocious Ian is addicted to reading, but needs Lucy's help to smuggle books past his overbearing mother, who has enrolled Ian in weekly antigay classes with celebrity Pastor Bob.

Lucy stumbles into a moral dilemma when she finds Ian camped out in the library after hours with a knapsack of provisions and an escape plan. Desperate to save him from Pastor Bob and the Drakes, Lucy allows herself to be hijacked by Ian.

The odd pair embarks on a crazy road trip from Missouri to Vermont, with ferrets, an inconvenient boyfriend, and upsetting family history thrown in their path. But is it just Ian who is running away?

About the Author (rebeccamakakai.com)

Rebecca Makkai's first story, at the age of three, was printed on the side of a cardboard box and told from the viewpoint of her stuffed Smurf doll. Sadly, her fiction has never since reached such heights of experimentalism.

Rebecca holds an MA from Middlebury College's Bread Loaf School of English and a BA from Washington and Lee University. Her short fiction has been anthologized in *The Best American Short Stories* 2011, 2010, 2009 and 2008, *The Best American Nonrequired Reading* 2009, *New Stories from the Midwest* and *Best American Fantasy*, and featured on Public Radio International's *Selected Shorts* and *This American Life*. She has held fellowships at Yaddo and the Sewanee Writers Conference.

Favorite writers, dead, living, and immortal, include Nabokov, Stoppard, Marquez, Munro, Bronte (two out of three Brontes, actually), Borges, Amis, Kundera, Rushdie, Flaubert, Dickens, Austen, Russo, Egan, Calvino, Kingsolver, Shirley Jackson, McEwan, Gogol, Wilde, Sedaris, the playwright Sarah Ruhl and the children's author Lois Lowry.

Rebecca has two young daughters, a husband, and a serious *Mad Men* problem. She does not run marathons or do cartwheels, but she does know how to make marshmallows. She was an elementary Montessori teacher for twelve years before stopping to write full time. She is currently at work on her second novel, *The Happensack*,

the story of a haunted house and a haunted family, told in reverse.

To pronounce her last name: It's basically mac-EYE. More like mah-KAH-ee, though. But don't pronounce the H's. It kind of rhymes with Hawaii, but not if you're the kind of person who puts that glottal stop before the I's. It's actually not that hard. It's just hard to explain.

Writings

Stories Online:

- *Cross*
- *The November Story*
- *The Way You Hold Your Knife*
- *The Briefcase*
- *Wedding Night*

Stories in Print:

- *Our Plastic-American Brethren*
- [Peter Torrelli, *Falling Apart*](#)

Books:

- [*The Borrower*](#), Viking (New York, NY), 2011

Reviews

Library Journal

This entertaining first novel reads like a liberal librarian's illicit fantasy—save a child from an overbearing, ultra-religious mother by surreptitiously introducing him to new

ideas through great literature. Lucy Hull is a young, accidental children's librarian with few friends. Her one interest is ten-year-old voracious reader Ian, who she predicts will come out one day. Lucy willfully ignores the list of forbidden subjects that Ian's mother presents to her, checking out books for him on her own library card. When Lucy discovers Ian camped out at the library, backpack and getaway plan at the ready, it doesn't take much convincing for her to drive off with him, launching a wacky, aimless cross-country road trip. Lucy is a self-centered, exasperating heroine, but her relationship with Ian is charming and original. VERDICT Librarians may beef that Lucy's reading suggestions and Makkai's descriptions of library practice are not current, but the general public probably won't notice. Overall, a stylish and clever tale for bibliophiles who enjoy authors like Jasper Fforde and Connie Willis. Christine Perkins, Bellingham P.L., WA (c) Copyright 2011. Library Journals LLC, a wholly owned subsidiary of Media Source, Inc.

Booklist

Starred Review Lucy, a 26-year-old children's librarian, has a favorite patron, a bright, book-loving 10-year-old named Ian. The trouble is, the boy's fundamentalist mother insists he read only books with the breath of God in them. When the parents enroll their son in a behavior-modification program designed to cure him of his nascent homosexuality, the boy runs away, and Lucy decides she must help. Borrowing the boy, Lucy takes Ian two fugitives now on the road. But who is really running away? Is it Ian or is it Lucy, replicating the experience of her émigré

parents, who, years before, had run away from their Russian homeland? And is America, as a friend of Lucy's family claims, truly a nation of runaways but with no place left to run? Time (and considerable driving in Lucy's ancient car) may tell. An accomplished short story writer, Makkai has written a splendid first novel that cleverly weaves telling references to children's books into her whimsically patchwork plot. Larger-than-life characters and an element of the picaresque add to the book's delights. Best of all, however, is Lucy's absolutely unshakable faith in the power of books to save. From her lips, readers, to God's ear.--Cart, Michael. Copyright 2010 Booklist

Publisher's Weekly

Makkai shows promise in her overworked debut, an occasionally funny crime farce about a hapless librarian-cum-accidental kidnapper. Lucy Hull is a 26-year-old whose rebellion against her wealthy Russian mafia parents has taken the form of her accepting a children's librarian job in small town Missouri. After an unnecessarily long-winded first act, the novel picks up when Lucy discovers her favorite library regular, 10-year-old Ian Drake, hiding out in the stacks one morning after having run away from his evangelical Christian parents, who censor his book choices and are pre-emptively sending him to SSAD (Same-Sex Attraction Disorder) rehab, and Lucy soon aids and abets his escape. The tale of their subsequent jaunt across several state lines dodging cops, a persistent suitor of Lucy's, and a suspicious black-haired pursuer is fast-paced, suspenseful, and thoroughly enjoyable-the real meat of the book. Unfortunately, the padding around the

adventure too often feels like preaching to the choir (censorship is bad, libraries and independent booksellers are good) and the frequent references to children's books-including a "choose-your-own adventure" interlude-quickly go from cute to irritating. There's great potential, but it's buried in unfortunate fluff. (June) (c) Copyright PWxyz, LLC. All rights reserved.

Discussion questions (oprah.com)

1. In the eyes of the law, taking Ian away from Hannibal is a criminal act, but it's difficult to fault Lucy for her actions. Do you trust Lucy's version of events? Is she a reliable narrator?
2. Lucy claims that "Hannibal" is not the town's true name. Do you think that "Hull" is her true name, or did she choose it because it fits "snug between Huck and Humbert"? (p. 2)
3. Under what circumstances is it acceptable to take a child away from his or her parents? Based on what you know about Janet Drake, is she an "unfit" parent?
4. Who is "the borrower" in the novel?
5. Sophie Bennett, a teacher at Ian's school, tells Lucy that Ian will "do fine no matter what. Shit will hit the fan when he announces he's gay, but he'll get through it." (p. 25) Is Ian as resilient as Sophie thinks?

6. Even though she was born in America, Lucy frequently meditates on her Russian heritage. Do you think Americans ever completely shrug off the shadow of their ancestors' homeland?
7. The "reformed" homosexual Pastor Bob is both a hilarious and a tragic character. Is he driven purely by profit, or do you think he truly believes it's possible and right to change one's sexual orientation?
8. What were the seminal books of your childhood? Are any of them mentioned in *The Borrower*?
9. In many ways, *The Borrower* is Lucy's coming-of-age story as much as it is about Ian. Is she—like Jim in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*—freed at the end of the novel or—like Humbert in *Lolita*—diminished by her experiences?
10. Do you agree with Lucy when she writes: "You think you can't go home again? It's the only place you can ever go"? (p. 301)
11. Does one have to first become a parent—or, in Lucy's case, a parent proxy—in order to come to terms with one's own parents?
12. Books have been written and accessible for only a fraction of humankind's time on earth. Can you imagine living in a world without literature? How might your life have turned out differently if there were no books to read?

Read-Alikes

Michael Cunningham, [*Specimen Days*](#) (2005)

In each section of Michael Cunningham's bold new novel, his first since *The Hours*, we encounter the same group of characters: a young boy, an older man, and a young woman. "In the Machine" is a ghost story that takes place at the height of the industrial revolution, as human beings confront the alienating realities of the new machine age. "The Children's Crusade," set in the early twenty-first century, plays with the conventions of the noir thriller as it tracks the pursuit of a terrorist band that is detonating bombs, seemingly at random, around the city. The third part, "Like Beauty," evokes a New York 150 years into the future, when the city is all but overwhelmed by refugees from the first inhabited planet to be contacted by the people of Earth. Presiding over each episode of this interrelated whole is the prophetic figure of the poet Walt Whitman, who promised his future readers, "It avails not, neither time or place . . . I am with you, and know how it is."

[*Emma Donoghue, Room*](#) (2010)

To five-year-old Jack, Room is the entire world. It is where he was born and grew up; it's where he lives with his Ma as they learn and read and eat and sleep and play. At night, his Ma shuts him safely in the wardrobe, where he is meant to be asleep when Old Nick visits. Room is home to

Jack, but to Ma, it is the prison where Old Nick has held her captive for seven years. Through determination, ingenuity, and fierce motherly love, Ma has created a life for Jack. But she knows it's not enough...not for her or for him. She devises a bold escape plan, one that relies on her young son's bravery and a lot of luck. What she does not realize is just how unprepared she is for the plan to actually work. Told entirely in the language of the energetic, pragmatic five-year-old Jack, *ROOM* is a celebration of resilience and the limitless bond between parent and child, a brilliantly executed novel about what it means to journey from one world to another.

Steve Kluger, [*Last Days of Summer*](#) (1998)

"April 9, 1940. I have decided to turn to a life of crime." Thus begins a riotous novel-in-letters to and from 12-year-old smart aleck Joey Margolis, a Brooklyn boy in search of a hero. After his parents' divorce, Joey is left to his own devices: sending top-secret notes to his pal Craig Nakamura, dodging bullies, and advising President Roosevelt on foreign policy. Joey's hatred of the Brooklyn Dodgers inspires him to strike up a correspondence with the New York Giants' rookie third baseman, Charlie Banks. Reluctantly, Charlie grows fond of the little scam artist, and the two become friends. But when the war intervenes, Joey must learn what it takes to be a man. This quick read

from playwright/novelist Kluger is laugh-out-loud funny, with one-liners and hilarious situations on every page.

Nora Roberts, [*Key of Knowledge*](#) (2003)

A mysterious invitation brings three strangers--gallery manager Malory Price, librarian Dana Steele, and hairdresser Zoe McCourt--to Warrior's Peak, a castle like estate outside of Pleasant Valley, Pennsylvania, where their elegantly enigmatic hosts, Rowena and Pitte, offer the opportunity to participate in an unusual quest. Malory, Dana, and Zoe will each have 28 days to find one of the keys to a mystical box, which holds the trapped souls of three sister Celtic demigoddesses imprisoned by a jealous sorcerer. *Key of Knowledge*, the second book, following *Key of Light*, in Roberts' irresistible new trilogy, centers on Dana, whose search leads her to author Jordan Hawke, but their prior romantic history complicates things when the two of them are forced into working together to locate the next key.

Walter Mosley, [*Fortunate Son*](#) (2006)

New York Times bestselling author Walter Mosley's novel about two boys, one ensconced in a life of privilege and the other in a life of hardship, explores the true meaning of fortune. In spite of remarkable differences, Eric and Tommy are as close as brothers. Eric, a Nordic Adonis, is graced by a seemingly endless supply of good fortune. Tommy is a lame black boy, cursed with health problems,

yet he remains optimistic and strong. After tragedy rips their makeshift family apart, the lives of these boys diverge astonishingly: Eric, the golden youth, is given everything but trusts nothing; Tommy, motherless and impoverished, has nothing, but feels lucky every day of his life. In a riveting story of modern-day resilience and redemption, the two confront separate challenges, and when circumstances reunite them years later, they draw on their extraordinary natures to confront a common enemy and, ultimately, save their lives.

Watch-Alikes

[*The Time Traveler's Wife*](#) (2010)

Clare (Rachel McAdams) has been in love with Henry (Eric Bana) her entire life. She believes they are destined to be together, even though she never knows when they will be separated: Henry is a time traveler--cursed with a rare genetic anomaly that causes him to live his life on a shifting timeline, skipping back and forth through the years with no control. Despite the fact that Henry's travels force them apart with no warning, and never knowing when they will be reunited, Clare desperately tries to build a life with her one true love.

[*The Hollywood Librarian: A Look at Librarians Through Film*](#) (2009)

This is the first full-length documentary film to focus on the work and lives of librarians. Using the entertaining

and appealing context of American movies, the film holds some surprises for people who may think they know what librarians do. American film contains hundreds of examples of librarians and libraries on screen -- some positive, some negative, some laughable and some dead wrong. Films such as *Sophie's Choice*, *Philadelphia* and *It's a Wonderful Life* show librarians as negative stereotypes. The librarians in *Lorenzo's Oil*, *Desk Set* and *The Shawshank Redemption*, on the other hand, are competent and professional. Dozens of interviews of real librarians are interwoven with movie clips of cinematic librarians and serve as transitions between the themes of censorship, intellectual freedom, children and librarians, pay equity and funding issues, and the value of reading.

[Raising Arizona](#) (1987)

An ex-con and a police officer decide to get married and start a family. To their dismay, they discover that they can neither have nor adopt children. Desperate, they resort to kidnapping one of the newborn quintuplets of the wealthy Arizona family. However, their attempt at living a normal life is complicated by neurotic co-workers, two fugitives, and a mysterious bounty hunter.

[A Mighty Heart](#) (2009)

On January 23, 2002, Wall Street Journal reporter Daniel Pearl is to fly from Karachi to Dubai with his pregnant wife, Mariane. She is also a reporter. On the day they are to

leave, Daniel carefully arranged an interview in a café with an Islamic fundamentalist cleric. When Daniel doesn't return, Mariane initiates a search. The Pakistani police, American embassy personnel, and the FBI examine witnesses, phone records, e-mails, and hard drives in an effort to discover who has him. They find that some of the reasons behind his kidnapping are based on the the U.S. abuse of prisoners at Guantanamo, because of a history of Journal cooperation with the CIA, and possibly because Pearl is a Jew. Nine days later he is murdered and beheaded. Through it all, Mariane is clearheaded, direct, and determined. Based on a true story.

[Harold and Maude](#) (1971)

Harold and Maude is a 1971 American dark comedy film directed by Hal Ashby and released by Paramount Pictures. It incorporates elements of dark humor and existentialist drama, with a plot that revolves around the exploits of a young man named Harold (played by Bud Cort) intrigued with death. Harold drifts away from the life that his detached mother (Vivian Pickles) prescribes for him, and develops a relationship with a 79-year-old woman named Maude (played by Ruth Gordon).

Listen-Alikes

- Rufus Wainright, [*Release the Stars*](#) (2007)
- The Kinks, [*Village Green Preservation Society*](#) (1968)
- Love, [*Forever Changes*](#) (1967)
- The Beatles, [*Let it Be*](#) (1970)
- Hank Williams, [*Hillbilly Hero*](#) (2002 release)



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