

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY



Rebecca Makkai is the author of this year's *New York Times* bestselling [*I Have Some Questions For You*](#) as well as the novels [*The Great Believers*](#), [*The Hundred-Year House*](#), and [*The Borrower*](#), and the short story collection [*Music for Wartime*](#). *The Great Believers* was a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize and the National Book Award, and received the ALA Carnegie Medal and the LA Times Book Prize among other honors. A 2022 Guggenheim Fellow, Rebecca teaches graduate fiction writing at Northwestern University, UNR Tahoe, and Middlebury College's Bread Loaf School of English; and she is Artistic Director of [*StoryStudio Chicago*](#). She lives in Chicago and Vermont.

Rebecca's work has been translated into over 20 languages, and her short fiction has been anthologized in *The Pushcart Prize XLI* (2017), *The Best American Short Stories 2011, 2010, 2009 and 2008*, *The Best American Nonrequired Reading 2016 and 2009*, *New Stories from the Midwest* and *Best American Fantasy*, and featured on Public Radio International's *Selected Shorts* and *This American Life*.

She was an elementary Montessori teacher for the twelve years before the publication of her first book. Rebecca holds an MA in Literature from Middlebury College's Bread Loaf School of English.

Her first novel, *The Borrower*, was a *Booklist* Top Ten Debut, an Indie Next pick, and an *O Magazine* selection.

Her second novel, *The Hundred-Year House*, is the story of a haunted house and a haunted family, told in reverse; *Library Journal* called it "stunning, ambitious, readable and intriguing." It was chosen as the Chicago Writers Association's novel of the year, and received raves in *The New York Times Book Review* and elsewhere.

Her short story collection, *Music for Wartime*, appeared in July, 2015. It was printed on paper made from that one tree that fell in the forest when no one was there to hear it.

The Great Believers, a novel set in Chicago at the height of the American AIDS epidemic, as well as in 2015 Paris, was a finalist for the 2019 Pulitzer Prize and the 2018 National Book Award. One of the *New York Times*' Top Ten Books of 2018, it also won the ALA Carnegie Medal, the LA Times Book Prize, the Stonewall Award, the Chicago Tribune Heartland Prize, the Midwest Independent Booksellers Award, the Clark Fiction Prize, and the Chicago Review of Books Award. Writing in the *New York Times Book Review*, Michael Cunningham called the novel a "page turner... An absorbing and emotionally riveting story about what it's like to live during times of crisis."

Rebecca has received fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts, the Guggenheim Foundation, and the Illinois Arts Council, as well as residencies at Yaddo, Ucross, and Ragdale. She was awarded the 2020 Mark Twain Award for Distinguished Contributions to Midwestern Literature.

Authors website.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Several characters in *I Have Some Questions for You* reflect on their adolescent selves—versions of themselves that feel at once remote and familiar. Do you think it's possible, with enough distance, for any of us—including Bodie—to see our high school selves clearly? How do you think cultural norms have shifted since you were a teenager? How does Bodie's sense of herself, then and now, affect her understanding of Thalia's case?
2. True crime media has become exceedingly popular in recent years. Why do you think fans of the genre find it so fascinating and even therapeutic to dissect such gruesome events? What considerations factor into being an ethical creator or consumer of true crime media?
3. Bodie's husband, Jerome, is publicly accused of predatory behavior in a relationship with a younger woman. Were you surprised by the way Bodie handles the allegations, or the fact that she was pressured to address them in the first place? How has the advent of social media shaped how public opinion forms and evolves when an alleged crime is made public? How does an awareness of a wider audience affect Bodie's choices in her professional and private life?
4. On p. 174, Bodie thinks, "Every article about Thalia's death had fixated on how Thalia and Robbie were the perfect prep school couple, moneyed and talented and privileged, and Omar Evans—no mention of his mother working at Dartmouth—was this outsider. That made the best narrative." How does the novel's setting shape the story, both past and present? How does prejudice and the idea of the "outsider" function at Granby and in the novel as a whole? Have you experienced any situations in your own life where the truth was warped by a community's biases?
5. On p. 83, Omar's mother, Sheila Evans, says, "They made Omar out to be a bad person all-around. This one accusation wasn't enough, they have to say he was dealing drugs, he was a violent man, he was sleeping with students. They paint a whole picture. They talk about him as if he came from nowhere, as if he had no family." Does this resonate with media coverage you've witnessed in real life?
6. Reflecting on her reaction to Sheila Evans's account of what happened to Omar, Bodie thinks, "I hated that I was thinking about myself rather than becoming a pure vessel to absorb Sheila's grief, but the truth is that while anyone with a heart would have felt it break right then, my heart cracked along familiar fault lines" (pp. 84-85). What does it mean for one's heart to break along "familiar fault lines"? What do you make of Bodie's—and other characters'—tendency to center themselves and their own grief and anxieties, even in the face of the profound suffering of Omar and his family? How do these frameworks shift over the course of the story?
7. Throughout the novel, we are reminded of how many stories of violence against women we regularly encounter on the news, on social media, and in pop culture—the contours of the cases hauntingly familiar even as locations and details differ. What was the cumulative effect of these references as you read? How did they inform your understanding of what happened to Thalia?

8. After hearing Beth’s account of her own high school experience, Bodie stifles a fleeting urge to chime in with her own perception of the school’s dynamics: “I’d learned long ago not to counter people’s trauma with my own” (p. 373). Discuss this revelation. When do the characters in this novel act empathetically and put their own egos aside, and when do they privilege their own versions of events?

9. Toward the end of the novel, on p. 419, Bodie thinks, “I was wrong about you, too, Mr. Bloch, but I still don’t feel that wrong. To put it another way: I was mistaken, but I wasn’t incorrect.” What do you think she means? Do you agree with her? Have you ever felt “mistaken, but [not] incorrect”?

10. Did this novel subvert or expand your knowledge of the criminal justice system? If so, how? What do you predict for the future of Omar’s case?

11. Whom did you personally suspect over the course of the novel? Did your judgment ever differ from Bodie’s? What surprised you the most as Bodie’s understanding of the case evolved?

Citation.

BOOK REVIEWS

Booklist

Beloved novelist Makkai follows up *The Great Believers* (2018), winner of the Carnegie Medal and a host of other awards, with this beguiling campus novel that blends true-crime obsession and #MeToo-era reckoning with a woman's inevitable exorcism of the past. Host of a popular podcast that reexamines the lives of female film stars, Bodie Kane returns to the New Hampshire boarding school she attended in the 1990s to lead a brief, intensive winter course on podcasting. As Bodie knew, however subconsciously, one student would investigate the death of Bodie's classmate Thalia Keith, a crime a devoted following of online sleuths believes is far from resolved, though the school's former athletic trainer has been imprisoned for decades. Drifting back to her own student years, Bodie narrates her contemporary collision course with the case to the Granby music teacher she's now certain behaved inappropriately with underage Thalia, a man who also took self-protective teenage Bodie--and how many others?--under his wing. Both wide-angle observer and genius provocateur, Bodie is so real readers will expect to find her in their own yearbooks. Chilled as the deep New England winters during which it takes place and twisty with the slowly found and then suddenly illuminated branches of memory, Makkai's rich, winding story dazzles from cover to cover. HIGH-DEMAND BACKSTORY: Fingers are already poised over the hold button for Makkai's first novel since the still-raved-about *The Great Believers*.

Publisher's Weekly

Makkai returns after her Pulitzer-finalist *The Great Believers* with a clever and deeply thoughtful story involving a 1990s boarding school murder and its repercussions decades later. Bodie Kane, a successful 40-year-old podcaster, returns from Los Angeles to her alma mater in New Hampshire in 2018 to teach. After two of her students team up on a Serial-like podcast about the killing of Thalia Keith, whose murder was pinned on the school's Black athletic trainer, Omar Evans, questions are raised about the state's flimsy case against Omar and Thalia's classmates' racist assumptions about his guilt. Meanwhile, Bodie reexamines her own understanding of what happened, and comes to

grips with the predatory behavior of her and Thalia's beloved music teacher. Just as Makkai brought a keen perspective to the 1980s with her previous novel, she does a brilliant job here at showing how in the '90s girls were conditioned to shrug off sexual assault. A steady stream of precise, cringe-inducing period details--Thalia's manipulative jock boyfriend belts out "Come to My Window" while drunk--prove the reader's in good hands. A final act, set in spring 2022, brings more of the classmates together for a deliciously complex reckoning. This is sure to be a hit. Agent: Nicole Aragi, Aragi Inc. (Feb.)

Library Journal

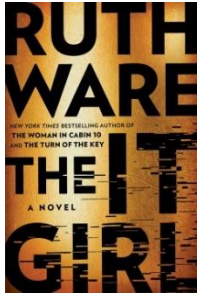
Bodie Caine, a successful podcaster, returns to the boarding school she attended to teach a mini-semester class on podcasting. This provides her with the opportunity to encourage her students to investigate the murder of her classmate Thalia Keith. A Black staff member, Omar Evans, was convicted of her murder, but Bodie believes it was a wrongful conviction, and the killer is a teacher who may have been grooming Thalia. Her actions set into motion an investigation that raises more questions and reveals some truths. The narrative moves back and forth between Bodie when she was a student and current events, starkly illustrating the casual sexual harassment and assault of female students by their male classmates that was brushed off as "boys will be boys." Omar is granted a hearing, the result of new information uncovered by Bodie's student podcasters, bringing former classmates back to town. These adults now find themselves facing the dark parts of their teen past. Throughout the narrative are brief montages of women killed by violence: "Wasn't it the one where she was stabbed?--no. The one where she got in a cab with--different girl. The one where she went to the frat party, the one where he used a stick, the one where he used a hammer...." These run like a lament. Bodie is introspective and manipulative and writes her story directed at the teacher Thalia was involved with. The ending is realistic and not what Bodie hoped for, but she does find some closure. VERDICT A page-turning examination of power, sex, and murder as characters revisit their pasts with a new perspective.--Tamara Saarinen

Kirkus Reviews

Art imitates life: A podcast explores whether a man who has served more than 20 years in prison for the murder of a young woman was wrongfully convicted. While Makkai's latest is likely inspired by the Adnan Syed/Serial story--in the news recently as Syed's conviction was vacated and he was released from prison--she has added intriguing layers of complication to her version. Bodie Kane, producer of a hit podcast about Hollywood starlets, has been invited back to Granby, the elite New Hampshire boarding school she graduated from in 1995, to teach a course on podcasting during the two-week "mini-mester" of January 2018. Among the topics Bodie suggests to her students is the murder of her classmate Thalia Keith, which occurred in the spring of their senior year on the night of the school musical. A Black man who worked for the school as an athletic trainer was convicted and imprisoned for the murder of the White Thalia, but doubts have fueled interest in the case ever since, including a 2005 episode of Dateline and a website promoting the view that the boyfriend did it, robbieserenhoisguilty.com. As Bodie works with her high schoolers to investigate, a major #MeToo--type scandal breaks in her own life, involving her partner, a well-known visual artist. Meanwhile, her return to Granby forces her to confront her troubled younger self: the ways she was affected by her disastrous childhood and her connection to a teacher who was certainly a predator and may even have been the murderer. Punctuating the story with lists of references to familiar crimes--"the one where" this or that happened--Makkai places the fictional murder in a societal context of violence against women and the obsession with true crime. Fans of *The Great Believers* (2018) should be forewarned that this book does not have the profound impact of its predecessor, partly because the emotions brought up by its topic are on the outrage-anger spectrum rather than the grief-sorrow one. Also, Makkai seems not to want us to fall in love with Bodie, who herself is a bit

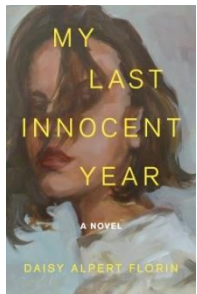
cold, but perhaps this is because the whole narrative is addressed to a "you" she is furious with. Well plotted, well written, and well designed to make its points. Copyright (c) Kirkus Reviews, used with permission.

SOLITO READALIKES - FOOTNOTES



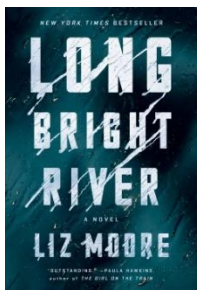
***The It Girl* by Ruth Ware**

April Clarke-Cliveden was the It Girl. “Whatever it was, she had it.” She was dazzlingly beautiful, rich, and irrepressible. Her propensity for playing practical jokes knew no bounds. After her roommate, Hannah, finds April strangled in their shared quarters at Oxford, a university porter is convicted of the murder, thanks in part to Hannah’s testimony against him. He dies in prison 10 years later, still asserting his innocence. Hannah is now pregnant and married to April’s former boyfriend. The media are after her, making her life miserable once again, and then one of their former classmates tells Hannah something that leads her to doubt what she saw—or thought she saw.



***My Last Innocent Year* by Daisy Alpert Florin**

Isabel’s working-class background sets her apart from her peers at her elite New Hampshire college in the late 1990s. In her high-octane senior writing seminar, it’s her skill, at first, that singles her out in the eyes of poet-professor R. H. Connelly, who lights Isabel up creatively, and then in every way. Former teacher, publishing professional, and now novelist Florin conveys Isabel’s experiences and their era dexterously in this wise campus novel.



***Long Bright River* by Liz Moore**

Mickey Fitzpatrick, a single mother, is an officer for the Philadelphia PD, tasked with patrolling Kensington, a neighborhood devastated by opioid addiction. Drugs have impacted Mickey’s life as well: her mother died of an overdose, her father, also an addict, is thought dead after disappearing, and her estranged younger sister, Kasey, is a known user and prostitute. While on her beat, Mickey tries to keep tabs on Kasey by speaking to locals and shop owners, but when Kasey vanishes amid a flurry of unsolved murders of women in the neighborhood, Mickey dedicates herself to finding Kasey and the killer, all the while praying her sister isn’t the next victim.