

The Month of Borrowed Dreams

Harper Perennial

By Felicity Hayes-McCoy

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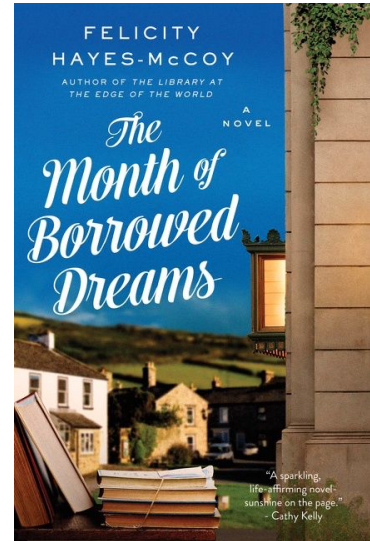
Introduction

“A sparkling, life-affirming novel—sunshine on the page.”

—Cathy Kelly

“Heartwarming.”—*Irish Independent*

Return to *USA Today* bestselling author Felicity Hayes-McCoy’s Finfarran Peninsula with this enchanting novel in the vein of Jenny Colgan, Maeve Binchy, and Nancy Thayer—humming with the rhythms of modern rural Irish life—in which librarian Hanna Casey and her family and friends face new challenges and possibilities.



On the Finfarran Peninsula on Ireland's west coast, the blue skies and warmer days of summer are almost here. At the Lissbeg Library, Hanna Casey has big plans for the long days ahead. Beginning with the film adaptation of *Brooklyn*, she's starting a cinema club, showing movies based on popular novels her friends and neighbors love.

But the drama that soon unfolds in this close-knit seaside village rivals any on the screen.

Just when Lissbeg begins to feel like home, an unexpected twist leaves Hanna's daughter, Jazz, reeling and may send her back to London.

Aideen worries that her relationship with Conor won't survive the pressures of their planned double wedding with overbearing Eileen and manipulative Joe.

Saira Khan throws herself into helping a troubled new arrival to Finfarran.

Hanna enjoys getting closer to Brian until her ex-husband Malcolm returns, threatening her newfound contentment.

As the club prepares for the first meeting of the summer, they'll all face difficult choices. But will they get the happy endings they deserve?

Questions for Discussion

1. *The Month of Borrowed Dreams* centers on a public library in rural Ireland where librarian Hanna Casey has started a club to show film dramatizations of well-loved books. According to its author, Felicity Hayes-McCoy, Lissbeg Library with its warm, neighborly atmosphere and patrons from differing backgrounds and generations could be found in any small town anywhere in the world. Do you agree?

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2. Hanna worries when her daughter Jazz breaks up with her boyfriend. Louisa, Hanna's ex-mother-in-law, frets about her adult son Malcom. And Hanna's mother, Mary, interferes in Hanna's life even though Hanna is a divorcee with a daughter in her twenties. The author tells us that, despite resenting Mary's behavior "*at times Hanna harbored a sense of fellow-feeling for her mother. It was hard not to wade in with solutions when you saw your child in trouble.*" Do you think this is true? Have you known anyone in a similar situation?
 3. Towards the beginning of the book, Hanna tells herself that "*people so often projected their own dilemmas and dreams onto books they borrowed that sometimes she felt librarians ought to have specialist training in counselling.*" Are you a librarian, or do you know of any, who feels that way? Are there other jobs – such as hairdressing – that put people in that position with regard to the public?
 4. Each of the main characters in *The Month of Borrowed Dreams* identifies in some way with a character from the film of *Brooklyn* (based on the novel of the same name by the Irish author Colm Tóibín). Do you find yourself doing this when you watch a film or read a book? Is there a particular fictional character that you identify with - or one that's completely unlike you, whom you'd secretly love to be?
 5. Were you drawn in by the book's descriptions of Finfarran's landscape and seascapes? Without them, do you think the story might have affected you differently?
 6. One of the book's central plotlines concerns Aideen and Conor's planned double wedding with Eileen and Joe. Did you have, or have you ever been to, a double wedding? Do you think they're a good idea? Have you ever met someone like Eileen, a bossy character with a heart of gold?
 7. Neither Conor nor his dad Paddy like the idea of accepting money from Joe's prospective father-in-law, and they insist on regarding his investment in the McCarthy farm as a loan. Do you understand their reluctance? Does it have to do with the length of time the McCarthy's have farmed their land? What do you think of the relationship between Conor and his brother Joe?
 8. Aideen and Eileen have very different ideas about the perfect wedding. Why do you think that's so? Which of the two girl's ideas do you prefer?
 9. What do you think of Saira Khan's relationship with Rasher? Does it develop as the story goes on? Do you understand Rasher's nervousness when he first meets her? What characteristics does Saira have that make her a good counsellor?
 10. "*There's decent people up and down the length and breadth of this country that never got a hand-out in their life. Never asked for it and wouldn't get it if they did ask. Because of the likes of you.*" Nugent isn't racist. He dislikes Rasher because he assumes that anyone living on the streets is a scrounger likely to want welfare payments. What do you think of this kind of prejudice? Do you think police officers like Nugent can be helped by retraining? Were you

aware of how much help libraries can give to people down on their luck or trying to improve their prospects of employment?

11. Towards the end of the book, when Pat and Rasher meet in the nuns' garden, Pat talks about her children who have busy lives and whom she seldom sees. Then she remarks that the mother of the heroine in *Brooklyn*, is "*left at home in a town that was grey and cold*" and says she'd sad that the younger film club members don't seem to be aware of that aspect of *Brooklyn*: "*... but the young are like that, Rasher. They have to be. They don't think.*" At the end of their conversation, she asks Rasher to call his own mother, to let her know he's safe and well. Do you agree with Pat's conclusion about young people? Do you think Rasher will call home?
12. What do you think of Fury as a character? Is he a lonely man or do you see him as self-sufficient? What do you think of his relationship with The Devil?
13. Can you describe Fury's relationship with Brian? Do you think that sharing a physical task makes it easier for people to talk to each other – gardening, for example, or quilting, or building a wall together, as Brian and Fury do?
14. Aideen says there's a difference between "*... real dreams and ones you've just borrowed from things in celebrity magazines*". Do you agree that there's a difference? Do you think Conor and Aideen are right to want to make their own dreams?
15. If Fury were working for you, would you find his idiosyncrasies attractive or annoying? How is his bossiness different to Eileen's? Are there well-respected tradespeople with a similar role to Fury's in your community? Do you empathize with his respect for craftsmanship from the past?
16. Hanna is furious with her cheating ex-husband and worries about how badly their divorce has affected Jazz. Yet in Chapter Two, looking back on her wedding night, "*neither worry nor guilt had flooded her mind ... Instead she'd seen sage-green painted walls, smelt beeswax and remembered moonlight. The thought of her perfect bedroom and of blossom shining on the pear trees had, for a moment, blotted out all sense of the years in between.*" Have there been bad times in your life which, nevertheless, have left you with sweet memories?
17. Rasher can't understand why Saira volunteers for unpaid work at the hallway house. In fact, she helps out in order to give something back to the country that's welcomed her as an immigrant. What do you think of her philosophy? Do you have people in your own community who always step up and offer to help when others are in need? What kinds of characteristics or upbringing make such a person?
18. The psalter is central both to Hanna's library and to the Finfarran peninsula's ancient roots. The nuns' garden, which is central in *The Month of Borrowed Dreams*, is also at the center

of Lissbeg town. How has the author used the book and the garden to throw light on the story she tells in her novel?

19. Having been cheated on and lied to by Malcolm, Hanna is distraught to find that Brian hasn't told her he has a son. When Brian says there's no comparison between Malcolm's behavior and his own, Hanna replies that "*There is because I feel there is. There is because God alone knows what else you've kept from me.*" Do you understand her anger? Would you feel the same way? Can you accept Brian's explanation? Do you see why, in the end, Hanna accepts it?
20. At the end of *The Month of Borrowed Dreams* Hanna realizes that the past can't be changed, which frees her to make a choice that allows her to enjoy the future. In the final chapters, speaking of herself, she says to Jazz that she's "*needed to discover how to be happy*", and tells Brian that their relationship is fine as it is: "*I don't want to be married. I want to be happy*". Which other characters in the novel find ways to be happy with what they've got, instead of wasting their time chasing borrowed dreams?