

Readers Group Guide

My Lovely Wife in the Psych Ward, by Mark Lukach

Discussion Questions

1. What unique and shared qualities and values bring Mark and Giulia together so powerfully? How do you see their “growing pile of trivialities” become “the foundation of...intimacy”?
2. After her first day of work at an exciting new job, Giulia experiences anxiety that Mark notices is “more personal.” What does this mean? Why is this a significant shift in her mental health?
3. Giulia is “offended by the initial diagnosis of depression.” Why might it have been difficult for her—personally or socially—to accept?
4. When Giulia is first diagnosed as psychotic she is admitted to the psych ward as a “5150.” What does this mean? What are some examples of the “inflexibility of the mental health system” that Mark notices?
5. Over time, Mark experiences the world of the ward as a “perverse dystopia.” What does he mean? What might explain this state of things?
6. To help with his rage and grief Mark goes to the beach and surfs. Confronted by the immensity of the ocean, Mark relinquishes a certain amount of control of Giulia’s illness and situation. What effects does this have? How does one decide what a healthy amount of control or responsibility is?
7. After Giulia is inappropriately kissed by a fellow patient Mark finally “air[s] out his anger.” What role does anger play in his complicated emotional experience? What is the value of anger? How do you think it is best handled? What are some ways in which Mark acknowledges or represses that anger?
8. Over time Mark and Giulia find that “psychiatry, and the prescribing of medications, is more art and guessing game than science.” How does this affect the process of Giulia’s recovery?
9. After various supportive responses to Giulia’s consistent talk of suicide Mark decides not to respond but to simply “listen without judgment or fear.” Why is this an “invaluable gift” to someone suffering as Giulia is? How might this kind of listening be beneficial in all relationships?
10. During a celebration after her first recovery, Mark and Giulia “squealed in laughter” at several morose jokes about her illness. What is the value of laughter? Why is this particular release of emotion not offensive, but healing for both of them?
11. Why do you think Mark’s bike trip along the coast and vow of silence was so important for him?
12. After his bike accident Mark realizes he wants “some acknowledgement of [his] sacrifice” for Giulia. What’s the value of recognition for one’s efforts?
13. During his second phone call to Giulia after his accident, Mark says, “Maybe the best person to help take care of me is you.” Do you agree with Mark? Do caregivers need someone to take care of them? What makes someone a good caregiver? Who do you take care of, and who do you rely on to take care of you?
14. Mark and Giulia’s storybook romance is challenged by their situation making them question whether or not they are still “in love.” What does being “in love” mean when love is beset by extreme circumstances?
15. Mark suggests that love “is about being kind to someone with no expectation of how they’re going to respond.” Do you agree with this definition? Why or why not?
16. Mark feels his loyalties are split between taking care of Jonas and taking care of Giulia. Do you think this conflict is resolvable? What would you do?
17. What is “antipsychiatry”? What’s the potential value of this perspective? Why is it initially offensive to Mark?
18. How difficult is it to manage the triggers that lead to psychosis: sleeplessness, anxiety, work stress etc?
19. After emerging from her third episode, how has Giulia’s understanding of and attitude toward her illness evolved? Mark’s?

20. What does the muddy hike to “the love tree” in Briones suggest and reveal about Mark, Giulia, and Jonas as a family?