

The Quiet Room: A Journey Out of the Torment of Madness Study Guide

The Quiet Room: A Journey Out of the Torment of Madness by Lori Schiller

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Plot Summary

The Quiet Room is the story of Lori Schiller, a young Jewish woman who suffers from schizophrenia and her attempts to cope with the disease. The story is unusual not only because it is genuine but because Schiller reveals, in great detail, the state of her psychology throughout the course of her illness from its inception at age seventeen to finally bringing it under manageable control when she turned thirty, in 1989.

Lori was raised in a normal, upper middle class Jewish family. Her parents, Marvin and Nancy Schiller, and her two brothers, Steven and Mark Schiller are frequent contributors to the book, offering their own perspectives on Lori's disease, her suffering and the impact her disease had on her family as a whole.

Lori did not always suffer from schizophrenia; instead, it manifested while she was at summer camp. All of a sudden, she heard The Voices, manifestations of her illness that constantly blasted commands into her ears, telling her to do any number of horrible things, attacking her verbally and encouraging her to kill herself. In some visions, they even told her to kill herself and occasionally got her to try.

Lori was able to hide the Voices for awhile, enough to graduate high school and get through most of college at Tufts. Towards the end of school, Lori was able to graduate but she gradually withdrew and after college, she started to downward spiral until she tried to commit suicide and was placed in a hospital.

From there, Lori spent the next eight to nine years in and out of hospitals and halfway houses. Sometimes the Voices would subside and she would stay on her medication, leading her to make some modest recovery, but then the Voices would rage again, and she would act out in an outrageous way, landing herself back in the hospital, horrifying her parents, scaring her family and exhausting hospital staff. For awhile, Lori was addicted to cocaine and had a boyfriend who helped her get drugs named Raymond, but after her rehospitalization she was alone.

Eventually, Lori was placed in a long-term treatment facility which began to help her get on her feet. She finally began to accept that the Voices didn't need to be in control of her life and started to trust her counselors. Next she was given a—then experimental—drug named clozapine, which significantly helped her to cope.

Around 1989, Lori started to recover and finally left the hospital for good, at least as a patient. She lost weight, organized a new life routine, reconnected with friends and family, got a job and even started to date again, as described in an epilogue Lori wrote in 1994.

The Quiet Room is a brisk read, with five parts containing twenty-seven short chapters on the whole, along with an introduction and an epilogue.



Part I, I Hear Something You Can't Hear, Chapter 1, Lori, Roscoe, New York, August, 1976, Chapter 2, Lori, Scarsdale, New York, August 1970-August 1977

Part I, I Hear Something You Can't Hear, Chapter 1, Lori, Roscoe, New York, August, 1976, Chapter 2, Lori, Scarsdale, New York, August 1970-August 1977 Summary and Analysis

Lori's Voices came to her in her seventeenth year. She was a camp counselor at Lincoln Farm, and had been a camper there before. As the summer progressed, she expected nothing out of the ordinary. But all of a sudden, everything started to see brighter, more important, more meaningful and more beautiful. She met an exchange student who was twenty-three that same year, and fell for him until she met his fiancée. After this, her mood darkened. She obsessed over figuring out why. And all the while, her memories were becoming more vivid.

In her memory, she and the exchange student snuggled and kissed but he became more insistent and Lori was scared. In her memory, a huge Voice spoke to her, "You must die!" She had no idea where she was, but she was at camp, two years later. The long-ago scene played out in her mind and she realized she never fell asleep. She only wanted to escape from the Voices. So she ran outside and tried to jump to get away from them, but she jumped for hours and could not escape. They continued to tear her down. The nights that followed, the Voices continued. She could not sleep. During the days, she stayed calm but distant and many began to notice that she was gone. Just as the summer was ending, the camp owner told a staff member to take her home to Scarsdale.

Lori has never been totally free of the Voices since then. Eventually they became a full-scale illness, schizophrenia. They took everything from her: a career, a husband, and children. While her friends acquired these things, she was locked behind closed doors. At times, the Voices have been quiet, but others times they were unmanageable. Ultimately, though, Lori believes she has won with a powerful new drug, good therapists and the support of her family, along with her own fierce battle. Eighteen years later, Lori has a job, a car, an apartment and has friends and dates. She teaches at the hospital where she was once a patient. The book tries to be a guide for those who want to travel a similar road.

In chapter two, Lori mentions that a memory from her childhood plagues her. When she was young, her family had a dog and in a burst of rage she beat him to death with a golf



club. She has no idea why she did it and over the years she has punished herself. The problem is that she never did it; her mind made it up. When Lori looks back on her childhood now, she sees few signs of illness; instead, she was happy.

In the summer of 1970, Lori and her family were travelling across the country. Lori was eleven, her brother Mark was eight and Steven was five. Lori was born in Michigan where her father, a graduate student finishing his psychology Ph.D in psychology at Michigan State, had met Lori's mother. When her father graduated, Lori and her parents moved to Chicago where Mark was born. At six, her father was promoted to Los Angeles, where Steven was born. But five years after that, her father was promoted again, and so they travelled across the country, to Scarsdale, New York.

The Schiller family was happy in Scarsdale. Lori then describes their many happy events. The family was close and Lori always felt special growing up. She loved being the center of attention and performing. Her parents were talented and expected a lot of their children. Lori was happy to rise to the challenge. But when Lori came home from camp that summer, she had to keep her terrible secret. Her parents were only mildly concerned, but her friend Gail was seriously worried. As the weeks went on, Lori sometimes worried that she was mentally ill. As time progressed, her personality seemed to change and she continually stressed out from hiding her Voices. In her last year of high school, her Voices came and went but she always had to be on guard. And she slowly became terrified of ordinary objects, including the television.



Part I, Chapter 3, Lori, Tufts University, Medford, Massachusetts, September 1977 - June 1981

Part I, Chapter 3, Lori, Tufts University, Medford, Massachusetts, September 1977 - June 1981 Summary and Analysis

At first, Lori had more relief than torment. She was able to finish high school and go to college. Lori went to Tufts and at first had a great time. Half-way through her first year, she moved in with Tara Sonenshine and then the two of them met Lori Winters. The three became inseparable. The next fall, Lori and Tara moved to Wren Hall right on the quad. That year, she made lots of friends and always had something to do. Lori dated quite a bit as well. Things were good but the Voices were getting louder and faster. A lot of the time they were friendly, and other times they were monstrous, telling her that she would die.

As the Voices got worse, Lori could no longer keep her fear of them from finding their way into her life. The Voices would often laugh at her and she would feel that her friends hated her. Lori spent her junior year abroad, the first semester in Spain and the second in London. In London, Lori became more depressed and the Voices would not leave her alone.

When Lori returned to Tufts, Lori Winters, Tara and she moved in with another girl in a big house off campus. Lori found her highs getting higher and her lows lower and the Voices were with her constantly. Eventually Lori was so terrified that she eventually decided to transfer and then transferred back the same day. Finally she called her parents and told them she needed to talk to someone.

Lori met with a counselor at Tufts and then a psychiatrist in private practice. Lori found that she couldn't talk about the Voices and her thoughts grew more confused and full of poison. She even started to hallucinate. Six weeks later, they all graduated and moved to New York City, Tara to Columbia University's School of International Affairs, and Lori and her to live together and work.



Part II, I Can Fly, Chapter 4, Lori Winters, New York City, July 1981 - March 1982, Chapter 5, Marvin Schiller, Scarsdale, New York, March 1982 - June 1982, Chapter 6, Payne Whitney Clinic, New York City, June 1982

Part II, I Can Fly, Chapter 4, Lori Winters, New York City, July 1981 - March 1982, Chapter 5, Marvin Schiller, Scarsdale, New York, March 1982 - June 1982, Chapter 6, Payne Whitney Clinic, New York City, June 1982 Summary and Analysis

Chapter four is written from the perspective of Lori Schiller's (the main character's) friend Lori Winters. Winters loved being Schiller's roommate when they lived at Tufts and she expected to be happy living with her in New York. They both had good jobs and were the same age. But Lori W. was worried about Lori S. Lori S. was once incredibly fun but she grew increasingly weird. No one knew what was wrong. Lori W. and her friends worried that Lori S. was doing drugs and they didn't know what to think.

Some of Lori S.'s friends thought she was faking, but Lori W. tried to be supportive. But she didn't really like to be. When Lori S. was up she felt great and Lori W. thought Lori S. had a good support group nearby, so she would be okay.

In fact, things were okay for awhile. The summer was fine, and while living in McAlpin in New York was difficult, they didn't care at first. They even met some guys. But things did not go well after a time. Her moods started to swing and the guys went away. She even started to insult their friends. Lori W. would often call Tara to ask what they should do.

That winter, Lori S. received a beautiful bracelet from her parents and lost it gambling in a manic phase. She felt invincible. A few days later, Lori S. took a job working for a big real estate company and invited Lori W. out with her and some friends. She then started to dish up dirt on everyone at the table and everyone was furious. The next day she was fired.

A few days later, she got a job selling insurance and seemed fearless selling door to door. A few days after that she came home with an engagement ring from someone who wanted to marry her. Her parents protested, the ring disappeared and it was all



forgotten. Lori W. was desperate to leave. When her brother visited, he didn't recognize the personality of the Lori S. he had known in college. They both worried that Lori S. was going to kill herself.

Days afterward, Lori S. took all her tranquilizers and locked herself in the bathroom. Lori W. was terrified and called 911.

Chapter five is written from the perspective of Marvin Schiller, Lori's father. It begins with Marvin and Lori's mother Nancy waking up to hear from Lori W. about Lori's overdose. Marvin was initially incredulous, despite knowing that his daughter had had problems. When they eventually reached Lori, she was incredibly contrite.

Apparently Lori had struggled with the police when they came, and when the paramedics arrived, they took her to Bellevue Hospital Medical Center. Marvin saw that Lori's psychiatrist had arrived and started to think about how he could conceal his daughter's problem. He checked her into a medical ward and refused to see her problems as serious.

Marvin admits that he always pushed his children, and he knew that striving and initiative were important to success. His parents had struggled and he did too. And when Lori had her breakdown, he was having stress at work. He also had to face the fact that Lori's problems wouldn't go away. She couldn't go back to work and had stopped taking care of herself. Plus, Lori W. had moved out. Eventually Lori's doctor told Marvin and Nancy that Lori's problems were very serious.

Lori's parents took her to see a psychiatrist, Dr. Nathan Kline, who was experimenting with psychopharmacology. After several weeks of treatment, she seemed better to Marvin, but Nancy didn't see her daughter. But a few weeks later, Lori was back in the hospital, having tried to commit suicide again. At this point, Marvin finally accepted that her problems were serious. On the way home, Marvin blamed himself.

When Marvin and Nancy returned to the hospital, Lori was not the same person; she was only her illness. They tried to speak to her normally but she told her father that she thought she could fly.

Chapter six consists of Lori's medical records from the Payne Whitney Clinic in New York City. The records show her having severe auditory hallucinations, oblivious to external stimuli, and often angry, refusing to talk.



Part II, Chapter 7, Steven Schiller, Scarsdale, New York, July 1982, Chapter 8, Nancy Schiller, Payne Whitney Clinic, New York, August 1982 - September 1982, Chapter 9, New York Hospital, Westchester Division, White Plains, New York, September 1982 - Octo

Part II, Chapter 7, Steven Schiller, Scarsdale, New York, July 1982, Chapter 8, Nancy Schiller, Payne Whitney Clinic, New York, August 1982 - September 1982, Chapter 9, New York Hospital, Westchester Division, White Plains, New York, September 1982 - October 1982, Chapter 10, Nancy Schiller, New York Hospital, White Plains, New York, November 1982 - April 1983 Summary and Analysis

Chapter seven comes from the perspective of Steven Schiller, Lori's younger brother, who was sixteen when she was first committed. He wouldn't accept her problems at first and was angry with his parents for hushing up her problems. He records his frustration at watching the stress of Lori's illness on their family. However, Steven was also afraid that what happened to Lori would happen to him, particularly given how sudden her problems came on her.

Chapter eight is about Nancy, Lori's mother's perspective. Her life was incredibly stressful while her daughter was at Payne Whitney. Nancy describes how Lori wasn't just her daughter when she was a baby, but everything she wanted. Her parents were distant and she was not going to be the same to her child. In fact, until Lori's breakdown, Nancy had her ideal life. But Lori's illness alienated her from her daughter the first time. And she hid where Lori was from her friends and community, partly because Marvin demanded it. As a result, she didn't get the emotional support she needed. And the strain was destroying her marriage.



While Marvin blamed himself, Nancy did not. She thought she was a great mother and could see no sign of illness from recalling Lori's youth. But after some soul-searching, she realized that there were things she could have done differently.

Seeing Lori was deeply painful with her and the hospital was getting increasingly irritated with her. Lori had cycled through various doctors. The doctors told her that Lori was hallucinating and they had to consider electroshock. Lori had eighteen or more electroshock treatments and it had little effect. Payne Whitney was running out of ideas. Eventually Nancy and Marvin were summoned to the doctor's office and they were told that Lori had schizoaffective disorder, part manic-depression and part schizophrenia. The doctors recommended that she be transferred and that Lori would likely never be the same again.

Nancy responded by studying schizophrenia but was devastated. She found out that schizophrenia was a chemical imbalance, and drugs only sometimes helped. She felt that Lori had no hope.

Chapter nine is another compilation of Lori's medical records, this time from the Westchester Division of New York Hospital. It notes that when she was initially admitted that she presented few symptoms but got worse over time.

Chapter ten returns to Nancy's perspective. She notes that the new hospital was much nicer than the older one. The doctors seemed more professional, but Nancy and Marvin were not more grateful. Instead, they were angry. Lori's social worker at New York Hospital, Jody Shachnow, encouraged the family to have group meetings to help Nancy and Marvin cope. And they needed help because they were having trouble accepting that Lori's illness was permanent.

Jody tried to explain to Nancy and Marvin that Lori worshipped them in an unhealthy way and had repressed anger. They responded by avoiding her and expressing hostility. And yet Lori got worse, and the hallucinations got worse. With medication, her symptoms were merely hidden, and without medication, they were full blown. After interacting with Lori for some time, Nancy realized that her mother had probably been schizophrenic as well, along with her cousin Sylvia. She then started to worry about her sons.

As time progressed and Lori took her medication, things improved for her. Marvin pushed for her release. By Christmas, she could regularly leave the hospital. On April 22nd, 1983, Lori was discharged from New York Hospital, four days before she turned twenty-four.



Part III, There's Nothing Wrong With Me, Chapter 11, Lori, Scarsdale, New York, May 1983 - August 1983, Chapter 12, Lori, Scarsdale, New York, September 1983 - May 1984

Part III, There's Nothing Wrong With Me, Chapter 11, Lori, Scarsdale, New York, May 1983 - August 1983, Chapter 12, Lori, Scarsdale, New York, September 1983 - May 1984 Summary and Analysis

Lori was glad to be home; she had hated the hospital, largely because everyone thought she was sick, when she didn't think she was. In fact, the Voices were real to her, and when the doctors told her they weren't, she got angry with them. After she returned home, she wasn't entirely sure how to do it. She had no one to spend time with either, although she had her family. But in her mind, her family had changed. Her brothers were gone and her parents had to take care of her in part because she refused to have a private nurse.

Lori could barely remember anything, and recounts her last available memories; this frustrated her. She knew it was the shock therapy. While in the hospital, Lori learned to hide her Voices. That said, the Voices' power was too great. They were worse outside of the hospital, although they were softer.

As part of the agreement letting her out, Lori had to see her psychiatrist three times a week, named Dr. Lawrence Rockland. He was enthusiastic about seeing her but their sessions often didn't make sense to Lori. She couldn't explain the Voices to him well, but when she tried, Rockland would simply start to teach her psychiatry and how the brain works. And so she fought his help.

Rockland argued that while the Voices weren't a part of her, what they were saying came from a deep part of her. Yet Lori couldn't understand, because to her, he knew nothing and the Voices knew everything. Lori just sat through each session and refused to talk.

The worst for Lori is people thinking she was a freak and keeping their distance from her.

Lori was never without music, though, and often listened to cover up the sound of the Voices. It was a kind of drug for her. She particularly liked upbeat and emotional music.



Yet her moods controlled the music, not the other way around. Lori then discusses the various songs and bands that had meaning to her.

Towards the end of the summer, Lori started looking for a job. She thought she needed something to do. So she landed a job waitressing with her experience working with Tara and Lori W. in college. Lori had a lot of trouble and had trouble keeping up. The Voices also continually harassed her. At one point, they got so bad that Lori lashed out at some customers after they taunted her.

Lori hung on, though. And later she got interested in cocaine. She had never done drugs seriously before but cocaine helped soften her Voices. Cocaine was everywhere in any event and so was easy to get. With cocaine, Lori felt alive and could ignore the voices. The crashes led her back for more.

Cocaine also led her to Raymond, the man who bought her cocaine. He helped her ignore her pain and he eventually fell in love with her. She liked him, a cute, black man, over six feet tall. Lori always looked forward to seeing him. He never cared about her illness and just thought of her as normal. Yet they mostly just did cocaine together.

Eventually the drug took over Lori's life, and staying high was all she cared about. It was a form of self-medication. The falls became disastrous and she almost killed herself again. People became suspicious, especially Dr. Rockland, as was her friend Gail. Her parents started to catch on.



Part III, Chapter 13, Marvin Schiller, Scarsdale, New York, June 1984 - August 1984, Chapter 14, Scarsdale, New York, September 1984 - March 1985, Chapter 15, Lori, Scarsdale, New York, April 1985 - October 1985

Part III, Chapter 13, Marvin Schiller, Scarsdale, New York, June 1984 - August 1984, Chapter 14, Scarsdale, New York, September 1984 - March 1985, Chapter 15, Lori, Scarsdale, New York, April 1985 - October 1985 Summary and Analysis

Marvin narrates chapter thirteen. At first, he and Nancy were happy that Lori had a job. It seemed like good work. She was often gone, and they were okay with it. He notes that Lori had even started dating a bit. Marvin encouraged her in all of her activities, but he knew she wasn't completely well. He accepted her progress though and was grateful for it.

Marvin tried to maintain simple relations with Lori and even tried to talk to her about her voices and suicide. Their relationship grew. But Marvin's life had its own difficulties. He had a higher position in his firm and was increasingly busy. He tried to hide Lori's difficulties at work but he and Nancy didn't hide things from their friends. Their friends didn't not all react as they expected. Some did not understand.

As time went on, Nancy and Marvin started to notice changes in Lori's behavior and they learned about Raymond, who made them uncomfortable. They also realized Lori was lying to them about Raymond and drugs, and decided to confront her. She confessed and Marvin blew up and put Lori in a drug treatment program in Connecticut. By August, she was clean.

Lori takes over narration in chapter fourteen. Lori wanted to try another job in the fall, in the mental health field, thinking that she could help someone. She had several interviews and had a few job offers. Eventually she got a job at Rye Psychiatric Hospital Center. It was small and well-kept. It was also not a closed door facility. All of a sudden, she was doing for patients what hospital employees once did for her. She ended up doing a lot of paperwork and patient intakes. She also did EKGs.



As time went on, she started working marathon shifts. She liked overtime and the money. She was also good at work, writing and conscientious. She was trying hard to be normal, and spent good time with her mother. Dr. Rockland encouraged her to exercise. So Lori started aerobics and took a Club Med vacation. She even tried nursing school, although she couldn't concentrate or focus and quit.

But Lori rarely messed up, and even started helping with electroshock therapy, though she was upset by it. She often helped patients recover and found herself growing close to some patients.

In chapter fifteen, Lori notes that she was thinking about suicide again. The Voices were louder than ever. She felt hopeless and fought suicide fantasies. Eventually, the Voices forced her to make an attempt. She would have been successful, but she went quickly and woke up her father, who took her to the hospital. She promised not to do it again.

She felt better for the next few months and tried another vacation in the spring. But it was a disaster and was alone in Morocco. Her medicine made her hypersensitive to the sun and her scalp often burned so she stopped her medicine and was psychotic three days later. She looked for cocaine to help her feel sane and found Mohammed to help her. They went out together, and he isolated her. He then threatened to kill her and tried to rape her. But he couldn't do it and ran off.

Lori had survived the rape physically but not psychologically. She called Dr. Rockland from Morocco. She spent the next three days in her room, and that was the beginning of the end. She went back on the Thorazine but stopped taking it regularly. It had too many side effects. And she started to feel reckless. Dr. Rockland eventually suggested the hospital again, and Lori was furious. But she eventually agreed to a short stay.



Part IV, The Quiet Room, Chapter 16, Lori, New York Hospital, White Plains, New York, November 1985 - February 1986, Chapter 17, Steven Schiller, Baltimore, Maryland, January 1986 - March 1986, Chapter 18, Lori, Futura House, White Plains, New York, April

Part IV, The Quiet Room, Chapter 16, Lori, New York Hospital, White Plains, New York, November 1985 - February 1986, Chapter 17, Steven Schiller, Baltimore, Maryland, January 1986 - March 1986, Chapter 18, Lori, Futura House, White Plains, New York, April 1986 - October 1986 Summary and Analysis

Chapter sixteen, narrated by Lori, finds her back in the hospital. She was not in an acute care treatment facility. She was so upset to be back that she resolved not to listen to anyone but the Voices, who would keep her safe. At first, Lori was thought to be too much of a danger to walk freely. Months passed by. She would often meet with a community group and spent the rest of her days alone and disturbed. She couldn't see Dr. Rockland anymore but enjoyed seeing her parents.

The only things that made her days eventful were occasional rage. Dr. Rockland had tricked her into returning to the hospital. She was a captive and wanted to hurt him. Her Voices became vindictive. Some of the staff was kind to her, but others were cruel. Lori fought them all and the Voices took her over.

At first, she only provoked others verbally but she started to grow violent. And once she escaped to Dr. Rockland's office, but the secretary called the unit on her. The Voices never seemed satisfied and started to demand that she not take her medicine. For five days, she was completely insane. The staff switched her to liquid medicine.

After spitting some of the medicine in a nurse's face, she was sent to the Quiet Room. It was largely empty and was intended to be safe and tranquil and alone. When Lori got out of control, she would often be sent there with a tranquilizer. The room was very lonely but was intended to lower her stimulation. It was punishment, as she saw it. As time went on, she had to spend more and more time there.



The Voices were mean to Lori and terrified her. They were constantly with her and the Narrator, one of the Voices, constantly described her actions, interlacing the descriptions with insults. But he was the best. The worst were those who talked about taking her to hell; they also gave her horrifying images of a hell beyond any she'd ever heard of. Lori could not escape them.

The Quiet Room allowed the Voices to project a series of terrible fantasies upon her mind. One time she got so out of control that she had to be restrained with cold-wet-packing to chill her, which would drain her energy. Eventually she calmed down and felt so shockingly calm that she never wanted to suffer that again.

Chapter seventeen is narrated by Steven. He had more trouble visiting her the second time in college. School at Johns Hopkins was serious and Steven decided to study psychology and become a psychologist like his father. Steven didn't do too well in class but loved the work. He also started to be a peer counselor. When he visited Lori, he felt closer to her. During one visit, several of the other patients went crazy and a small riot broke out; Steven was deeply shaken.

Chapter eighteen is narrated by Lori. Her increasing problems led some of the doctors to suggest sending her to the state hospital. Lori was terrified, but after a few more cycles they decided to discharge her. But Lori begged them to let her stay and she began to do better, earning off-unit privileges. Eventually, she and Dr. Rockland and her doctors decided that she would stay at Futura House, a halfway house. She had to be on her best behavior.

She had to control herself at Futura and others tried to control her as well. There were nine mentally ill patients there and they shared management duties. Lori spent her days taking small classes at the hospital. Her problems started in the afternoon when the classes were over. She started to push the boundaries her social worker with unapproved travels. She also became lonelier as she realized how sick she was.

Lori started seeing Dr. Rockland again but she felt like little progress was being made and she didn't connect with others at Futura. Only Deanna and Robin helped her. Deanna was her assigned social worker and Lori thought the world of her. She felt safe with her. But Robin, a resident, was a bad influence. They were both schizophrenic and became inseparable. She often pushed Lori to get into trouble.

But that summer, Lori decided to stop taking her medicine and the Voices became too strong to fight. She cut herself with rose thorns and was involuntarily re-hospitalized. She was in another hospital with another Quiet Room. But she worked hard to get out and in nine days could regularly leave.

After another suicide attempt, the Voices quieted down once more. With some calm, she enrolled in Pace University's School of Nursing. She passed her first semester, working as hard as she could. But the stress was taking its toll. The Voices were coming back.



Part IV, Chapter 19, Mark Schiller, Chicago, November 1986, Chapter 20, Lori, Futura House, White Plains, New York, December 1986 - April 1987

Part IV, Chapter 19, Mark Schiller, Chicago, November 1986, Chapter 20, Lori, Futura House, White Plains, New York, December 1986 - April 1987 Summary and Analysis

Lori's brother Mark narrates chapter nineteen. He opens noting that he would break up with his girlfriend Sally every time it was time to bring her home to meet his family. He deliberately sabotaged things, but eventually Sally met his parents and they got engaged. Mark then discusses how he felt ignored as a middle child and went far away to school to develop his own identity. He was very nervous about Sally meeting Lori.

Things went alright and Sally took Lori for where she was, but Mark had trouble accepting her illness after growing up and thinking of her as perfect.

Chapter twenty returns to Lori in Futura House. Things were becoming hard again and Lori started to be tempted to find cocaine. She was successful, since Robin had her sources. But she wanted Raymond back. Eventually Robin and Lori got caught with drugs. Deanna was very disappointed and her parents were furious. Futura House accepted her back on the condition that she did no drugs. She accepted and things still got worse and her violence escalated.

At nursing school, Lori's behavior grew more random. She couldn't even make her bed well and did many odd things. The Voices took over her exam taking and followed their orders for answers; she failed. Robin realized she was in trouble before anyone else did, listening to her talking about killing herself. Lori had a real plan to kill herself with carbon monoxide. But Robin notified Deanna, who had her recommitted.



Part V, The 9925 Key, Chapter 21, New York Hospital, White Plains, New York, May 1987 - June 1988, Chapter 22, Lori, New York Hospital, White Plains, New York, June 3, 1988 - June 9, 1988, Chapter 23, Lori, New York Hospital, White Plains, New York, June

Part V, The 9925 Key, Chapter 21, New York Hospital, White Plains, New York, May 1987 - June 1988, Chapter 22, Lori, New York Hospital, White Plains, New York, June 3, 1988 - June 9, 1988, Chapter 23, Lori, New York Hospital, White Plains, New York, June 1988 - December 1988 Summary and Analysis

On Tuesday, December 15th, 1987, Lori arrived in 3 South in one of New York Hospital's long-term units. Lori was furious and wanted to be left alone. She knew that a unit like this was the end of the line. However, she moved there because the hospital staff had offered her a new choice: she could check in to a long-term unit for a year and the staff would do everything they could to find a medicine that would help her, or she could leave. They didn't think she'd choose to stay.

But Lori had had some insight; she was coming to accept that she had an illness. She knew now that she had to fight the Voices and hope that she could be cured. So in the long-term unit, Lori started to meet with Dr. Jane Doller, her new psychiatrist. Dr. Doller was no ordinary psychiatrist, but was the administrator for her case. The Voices constantly harassed Lori during this time but she was still able to communicate with Dr. Doller. She would have to choose a therapist and claimed that she wanted a woman therapist.

Lori spent months watching the days pass by at 3 South. Things moved slowly; she was not pressured to make progress. The goal at 3 South was for Lori to understand her illness and learn to live with it. Patients were, to some degree, to guide their own treatment and to help others. Lori's new therapist was Dr. Diane Fischer, who the Voices strongly reacted to. Diane was, to Lori, what she could have been without her illness



and so Dr. Fischer deeply threatened her. So Lori wouldn't be alone with her, in part because she was afraid she would hurt her. They had to struggle to find ways to meet.

To handle the Voices and talk to Diane about them, Lori learned to start writing down what she was thinking. And she started to do better until she ran away again. When she got outside, she ran to a chapel to pray for one of the first times in her life and prayed for two and a half hours.

Chapter twenty-two is a seven day record of Lori's thought-journals at various hours of the day. Chapter twenty-three picks up where chapter twenty-one left off. In therapy, Lori felt torn between her therapists and the Voices. Sometimes she felt in control, but one day she lashed out at her parents in a way she hadn't before. Lori realized that for years she had felt rage beyond her control at the staff around her, but at 3 South, she actually made friends. The growing support network helped her fight the Voices.

The Voices did not want to let Lori go and Lori also had trouble interacting appropriately with Dr. Fischer, at one point worrying that she was falling in love with her. The Voices jeered at her for this and Lori tried to talk to Dr. Doller about it. Dr. Doller helped her feel better about the course of her therapy. While Lori and Dr. Doller sometimes fought, the Voices were afraid of her, unlike anyone they'd ever encountered. As a result, Lori found the strength to confide in her.



Part V, Chapter 24, Lori, New York Hospital, White Plains, New York, January 1989, Dr. Jane Doller, New York Hospital, White Plains, New York, January 1989, Chapter 26, Nancy Schiller, Scarsdale, New York, February 1989, Chapter 27, Lori, New York Hospita

Part V, Chapter 24, Lori, New York Hospital, White Plains, New York, January 1989, Dr. Jane Doller, New York Hospital, White Plains, New York, January 1989, Chapter 26, Nancy Schiller, Scarsdale, New York, February 1989, Chapter 27, Lori, New York Hospital, White Plains, New York, March 15th, 1989 - November 6th, 1989 Summary and Analysis

As 1989 began, Lori started to try and understand the Voices, to finally believe that they weren't there. The Voices, she found, weren't her, but reflected her bad feelings. She even started trying to pretend not to hear them. The Voices were simply her own thoughts and had real emotions behind them. Dr. Doller and Dr. Fischer helped her see that she could deal with the Voices by dealing with the emotions behind them. To be safe, Lori compartmentalized her thoughts and when one would be opened, poison would flow out of them.

Lori developed a method of characterizing the strength of the Voices and she also mastered the Quiet Room. It was now a way to calm down, not a punishment. People thought she was making real progress but it was sapping her energy. And she was hallucinating horrible images and creatures everywhere. Lori also still had difficulty separating the Voices from reality. She had also gained an enormous amount of weight, at 170 from her normal 115. She struggled to lose weight but failed.

Lori's medicines often produced bad side effects, antipsychotics and antidepressants. But a new medication, Clozapine, came along, and Lori wanted to try it.

Chapter twenty-five is narrated by Dr. Doller. She begins by noting her decision-making process over whether Lori should try the clozapine. The drug was experimental and



might not be worth the risk. But Doller often sympathized with Lori over what she was struggling with. She thought that over the two years Lori had been with them, that her team was helping. No one wanted to give up on her as many others had. While her case was daunting, Doller and her team took Lori on and focused both on medicine and therapy.

Doller then explains how she got into psychiatry and her approach to understanding how schizophrenics dealt with their illness on an experiential basis in order to help them cope. Doller also thinks that schizophrenics have an essential longing to explain what is happening inside of themselves to others. This is why it is important for them to have emotional relationships.

When Doller saw Lori's journal entries, she was afraid because she saw that Lori was starting to trust her. Clozapine was a potential threat to that trust because it was experimental and dangerous.

Chapter twenty-six is narrated by Nancy, who opens noting that it became steadily harder to visit Lori in the hospital. She couldn't take being interviewed and searched before being allowed to see her daughter and the visit itself was often incredibly painful. Over time, Marvin and Nancy grew pessimistic about seeing improvement. Eventually, they were called in for a meeting with Lori and Dr. Doller. She seemed better, but Nancy was terrified of what would happen to her over the long run.

Dr. Doller and Lori's social worker recommended Clozapine to Marvin and Nancy and told them about the side effects. Nancy and Marvin accepted.

In chapter twenty-seven, Lori began clozapine, and the first day she felt like she was stoned. She had high hopes for the medicine, and as the days went on her dosage increased. She felt better in some respects and worse in others. Her emotions were unchained. But the medication was doing its work. Some remarked on her changed demeanor. She seemed less impulsive, brighter and more alive. Lori could not ignore it. She even sometimes slept well and could think clearly. The Voices were even growing softer.

The Voices would sometimes rear their heads again, but they would often hit a glass shield and fall away. They seemed remote and Lori's body kept coming more and more to life. She also started to feel connected to other people and make friends. Old feelings started to unlock and complex emotions came to the surface. Eventually Dr. Fischer announced she was leaving the hospital. It challenged Lori emotionally, but she let herself feel the real feelings and fought hard to resist her old feelings.

Lori's daily life started to change. She had more furniture in her room; she went to the bathroom on her own and she got up and got dressed for herself. As the clozapine stabilized her, Dr. Doller increased Lori's lithium to stabilize her moods. She began to want to leave but rather than run she stayed with the program. Eventually Lori interviewed at a halfway house and did well there as well.

As Lori improved, she was given keys to go to places that were otherwise restricted to her. Her favorite key was the 9925 key, the universal passkey to all the doors on and off the units. It was freedom but it also meant loss because it meant she might be leaving the place she called home for so long.



Epilogue, Lori, Hartsdale, New York, 1994

Epilogue, Lori, Hartsdale, New York, 1994 Summary and Analysis

In 1994, Lori has become a teacher at New York Hospital. She works at a gift shop part-time on weekends and lives in her own apartment. She has her own possessions and her privacy; she teaches courses on schizophrenia, clozapine and staying well after discharge. The road was difficult. Lori spent three and a half years in a halfway house called Search for Change. She had to learn to behave normally again and she started to learn how to live without the Voices.

Lori found that when the Voices left, she missed them and would reminisce about them. She also had less to think about, so she started to devote herself to building a life, keeping in touch with friends and families and taking on new responsibilities. She also dropped from 170 to 140, six months after leaving the hospital. Lori also reconnected with old friends, seeing Lori Winters and Tara again, along with Gail. She has even tried to make new friends.

Lori eventually starts dating again and has gotten back down to 118 pounds. She dresses well and wants to get married and have kids. But she'd probably do better to find a man who already had children. She has resisted drugs and meets with Dr. Doller twice a week. Lori takes twenty-six pills a day for psychosis, mood swings, anxiety and side effects. She and Dr. Doller get along great and Lori stays in touch with her parents. She even had the threat of a relapse and fought it successfully. Lori still has to fight the Voices, but it is much easier.

Writing the book has been hard but rewarding for Lori. It has helped her look forward and she is thankful to everyone who has helped her get to where she is today.



Characters

Lori Schiller

Lori Schiller is the protagonist of *The Quiet Room*. Born in 1959, Lori grew up in a well-to-do upper middle class Jewish home in upstate New York. She had a wonderful childhood, with two loving parents, Marvin and Nancy and two younger brothers, Mark and Steven. She was intelligent, pretty, talented, and had a bright future. The story begins, however, when these dreams begin to be shattered. When Lori was seventeen, she was a camp counselor at summer camp; during the summer, she had her first encounter with *The Voices*, or the auditory manifestation of her burgeoning schizophrenia.

The Quiet Room primarily covers Lori's life between ages seventeen and thirty. During this time, Lori's personality quickly degenerates from a light-hearted, ambitious and witty young girl to a woman whose life is dominated by her severe mental illness. *The Voices* are such a powerful influence in Lori's life that she cannot convince herself that they are an illusion. Their power becomes so strong that she often lets them entirely control her actions. This manifests in a number of suicide trips, emergency hospitalizations, violent outbursts and psychiatric treatments. It even leads to serious drug use in the form of cocaine, which she used to dull the *Voices*.

Lori's life only begins to turn around when she accepts that her life doesn't have to be run by the *Voices*, that she is really sick and that with work, she can learn to manage her illness. With the help of a staff of supportive mental health personnel and clozapine and then-experimental drug, Lori is able to climb out of her illness and learn to live an ordinary life.

The Voices

While there are many constant secondary characters throughout the book, none is more often present or discussed than *The Voices*. *The Voices* are the auditory hallucinations that are the result of Lori's illness. They often have an incredibly powerful effect on her, literally screaming commands and insults into her ears. By and large, their impact is wildly negative, destroying Lori's self-esteem, annihilating her ability to concentrate and making her unable to care for herself or be without constant supervision.

The Voices often threaten to kill Lori or tell her that someone else is trying to kill her. They encourage her to attack others, spit on them, that they hate her or are laughing at her. *The Voices* also taunt her, laugh at her and threaten to trap her in unimaginably terrible visions of hell. In fact, in many cases they literally demand that she come straight into hell with them and her visual hallucinations begin to show her terrible visions of where the *Voices* will take her.



Rarely are the Voices distinguished from one another. Often they have no clear identities, though on occasion they will speak to one another, primarily in small disputes over how to harass Lori best. One character distinguished is The Narrator, who makes constant observations on Lori's life, littering his descriptions with insults and demands.

The Voices only come to be mastered when Lori begins to accept that she is ill and that she can fight them. The Voices are actually afraid of Dr. Doller, and retreat significantly throughout Lori's therapy and under the influence of the clozapine. As time progresses, the Voices grow quiet and Lori is able to accept that while they are not her, they reflect her deepest fears and terrors.

Marvin Schiller

Marvin Schiller is Lori's father, a psychologist and sometimes narrator.

Nancy Schiller

Nancy Schiller is Lori's mother and Marvin's husband. She is a management consultant and constantly worries about Lori. She also narrates a few chapters.

Mark Schiller

Lori's younger brother who only occasionally appears in the story and who is afraid to bring his girlfriend home to meet Lori.

Steven Schiller

Lori's youngest brother who lives at home when Lori comes home after her hospitalizations. At first, he tries to not connect with Lori but later studies psychology in hopes of helping her.

Tara Sonenshine

Lori's best friend in college and college roommate who begins to worry about her early on.

Lori Winters

The third roommate and Lori S's roommate after college who ends up moving out when Lori's disorder becomes too much for her to handle.



Gail

Lori's childhood friend who remains in sporadic contact with her throughout the course of her young adult life.

Raymond

Lori's one-time boyfriend and cocaine connection who refuses to deal with her illness.

Deanna

Lori's social worker who helps her function at Futura House.

Robin

Another schizophrenic at Futura House who is a bad influence on Lori.

Dr. Rockland

Lori's most frequent psychiatrist who struggles valiantly to help her.

Dr. Diane Fischer

Lori's therapist at 3 South who Lori is obsessed with and sees herself in.

Dr. Doller

The administrator of Lori's case and another de facto therapist. The Voices are afraid of her and Dr. Doller ultimately leads Lori to clozapine.



Objects/Places

Scarsdale, New York

Lori's home for most of her life, even after her parents retire and move to Florida.

Summer Camp

Where Lori's Voices first manifest themselves.

High School

Lori's Voices manifest the summer after her junior year, but she is still able to complete high school.

Tufts

Where Lori went to college. She had the best years of her life there and her illness began to manifest her senior year.

New York Hospital

The hospital where Lori is most often institutionalized and where she later goes to work and teach classes based around her experiences.

Futura House

The halfway house where Lori stays most often when she was out of the hospital.

3 South

The area where Lori was placed long-term for extensive psychiatric treatment led by Dr. Doller.

The Quiet Room

A room in the hospital that was completely quiet and largely empty where mentally ill patients could go to calm down.



The 9925 Key

The key in 3 South that could get Lori to any room in the hospital. It represented freedom to her.

Clozapine

The then experimental antipsychotic medication that helped Lori get control of her illness.

Suicide

The Voices often pushed Lori to attempt suicide.

Cocaine

Lori used cocaine over two periods in order to quiet the Voices.

Schizophrenia

Lori's disorder and the disorder that is covered throughout the book.

Therapy

Lori spends a great deal of time and therapy which, for most of the book, seems to help little. Only towards the end does Lori make full use of it.



Themes

The Voices

The Quiet Room has a number of themes, some of which run deep into a number of general, abstract issues. But there is a theme closer to the surface of the book and that is the theme of the Voices. The Voices are characters in the book and the constant auditory hallucination caused by Lori's schizophrenia. They often tell her to kill herself and sometimes take over her life and cause violent outbursts and lead Lori to attempt suicide and use cocaine.

But more generally, the Voices are symbolic. On the one hand, they are entities entirely separate from Lori's identity. The Voices are an Other in this way, threatening Lori's life, portraying themselves as her enemy. At other times, she allies herself with them and uses them to protect her from people and features of the outside world that anger or frighten her.

However, the Voices are also part of Lori's identity. While they do not reflect her deep, permanent desires constitutive of her identity, they often reflect her own anger, rage, terrors and social anxieties in the form of auditory representations of her own inner symbolism and thought process. Thus, they both reflect a distinct aspect from her identity and represent her identity all at the same time. In many ways, therefore, the Voices represent the partially split identity of the schizophrenic, torn between distinct aspects of herself and distinct personality traits and emphases.

Psychological and Biochemical

A non-explicit but ever-present theme in The Quiet Room is the distinction between the psychological and the biochemical. We might understand the psychological as that part of the human person that is conscious or sub-conscious, able to manipulate symbols and engage in thought, whereas the biochemical is that lower level of bodily function that is non-conscious, automatic and governed entirely without the will. Lori's illness is a complex combination of both.

Psychologically, Lori has a great deal of fear and anxiety about her life. It is not clear whether she had major or only minor issues with her parents or siblings. Her primary psychological issues seemed to be struggling to admit her illness, to confront the Voices and to accept that they were illusory. But Lori also had a biochemical struggle. The Voices, her depression, rages, outbursts, etc. were prompted by biochemical malfunctions in her brain. Ultimately, she was able to come out of her psychosis with the help of an experimental drug, clozapine.

From the look of the book, Lori's recover only seemed to start in stride when she began taking the clozapine, but she attributes her recovery to a combination of both psychological and biochemical control. In some ways, the two elements seemed to be



separate, but Lori sees them as a single package, both needing treatment in order to treat the whole person. This philosophy of psychology also seems prevalent among the staff at 3 South.

Will

Lori's most significant struggle is to maintain control over her will and to make her own choices. This theme is also not made entirely explicit in *The Quiet Room* but it is ever present. Before the manifestation of her illness, Lori was talented and bright, more than able to make regular life plans, maintain relationships and achieve her goals. But her schizophrenia disrupted these abilities. Instead, her power to make choices was totally disrupted by the Voices.

The Voices were so loud sometimes that Lori did not have the willpower to resist them. Sometimes she simply gave into them and would let them control her life. Sometimes she would try to commit suicide just in order to quiet them, and in other cases, she used cocaine to the same effect. Nearly everything Lori did was either to fight the Voices or the result of giving into them. In another way, Lori's will was dominated by her illness because she refused to admit that she had a problem and could not face the fact that the Voices were not real. Nonetheless, the biochemical malfunction in Lori's mind may have overpowered her regardless of her psychological attitudes.

Lori believes that her recovery began when her walls broke down and she was willing to admit not only that she had a problem but that she couldn't do it herself. She partly attributes her progress towards a frantic prayer to God, and a realization that she was unable to help herself or to control the Voices on her own. In this way, she had control over her will and surrendered it to a Higher Power rather than to the Voices.



Style

Perspective

The perspective of the Quiet Room is multifaceted and composed of many different individuals, but with one primary person at the helm. The primary narrator is that of Lori Schiller, the book's main character. The book is written mostly in the first-person as a result. The book ranges over Lori's life between ages seventeen and thirty, but the book was written over five years afterwards, around 1994.

Lori's perspective looking back over her life is one of hope but also of struggle and hard-won self-respect. Her story is a difficult one, full of pain, terror, anxiety, disappointment and family trauma. Lori hated herself and her life was nearly destroyed by her illness, not only through suicide attempts but through entirely losing her sanity.

More than anything, Lori's perspective is of a person who wants to communicate her struggle to others in order to help them cope with their own mental illness. Lori seems to have no obvious ideological axes to grind, not religious, political and even psychological. Subtle opinions are expressed, such as Lori's later mild friendliness to religion after a lifetime of effective agnosticism. She also seems friendly to a mixed view of personal responsibility, where one both has to take responsibility for the pain one has caused but must also learn to acknowledge when she is out of control and ask for help. All in all, Lori's personal perspective seems to be one of care, aid and hope.

Tone

The tone of The Quiet Room is largely evenly-paced, frightened with a strong sense of hope. Lori's story is a difficult one. Her schizophrenia ran her life and the tone reflects the story of one who struggled to maintain her sanity, contact with reality and identity. Sometimes the tone is happy, calm and full of hope for the future. Early chapters discuss Lori's early struggles which she largely won and she also communicates her wonderful childhood and halcyon days in college.

But as the book progresses, the tone of the book grows darker. Lori is suffering horribly; the Voices dominated her life. She gets addicted to cocaine, is in and out of hospitals, and tries to kill herself on numerous occasions. Lori expresses in the tone of her writing the deep sense of shame that she felt at her long decline and the guilt she felt over hurting her family and ruining her life. As the book progresses, Lori's tone is almost that of one who is exhausted, making progress only to have it snatched away by the Voices. But as the book reaches the end, Lori turns a corner and starts to make progress. Here the tone lightens up as well, with the sentences crisper, more hopeful and expressing once again the smooth, happy air of the healthy Lori.

The most striking aspect of the tone, however, comes in Lori's descriptions of her encounters with the Voices. They are truly harrowing, with the Voices making wild,



violent and evil demands of her, cursing her out with incredibly insulting profanity, and bidding her to join them in hell. She shows the reader conversations between the Voices in her mind and the reader gets the sense that Lori truly did live in her own private hell for over thirteen years of her life.

Structure

The Quiet Room is structured much like an ordinary novel. It is around 270 pages and the text is divided into five parts, with twenty-seven chapters spread across those five parts. Each part of the book tells the story of a different period of Lori's experience with her disorder. Part I, "I Hear Something You Can't Hear" introduces the reader to Laurie, discusses her childhood and teenage years and introduces the Voices when Laurie is at summer camp. It also takes the reader through Lori's time in college at Tufts and her increasing struggle to keep the Voices a secret.

Part II, "I Can Fly," covers the increase of Lori's schizophrenia to the breaking point. It explains how Lori came to her first nervous breakdown and suicide attempt while she was living in New York with her friend Lori Winters and also discusses her first emergency hospitalization. Part II contains various reflections from Marvin, Lori's father, Steven, Lori's brother, Nancy, Lori's mother, and notes from Lori's medical records.

Part III, "There's Nothing Wrong With Me," represents the period of Lori's growing insanity and her refusal to admit that she had an illness. During this time, Lori was in and out of the hospital and halfway houses, sometimes living at home, sometimes holding down a job and taking classes, but others times snorting cocaine to medicate the Voices away. It also contains various reflections from her parents.

Part IV, "The Quiet Room," contains Lori's most difficult periods, when she had to be forcibly restrained and was totally withdrawn for an extended period of time. Both of her brothers, Mark and Steven, narrate a chapter where they give their perspective on Lori. Near the end of Part IV, Lori ends up in a long-term care unit.

Part V, "The 9925 Key," is the story of Lori's recovery, where she finally admits that she has a problem, that the Voices aren't real and begins to trust the mental health staff assigned to help her. The team puts her on clozapine, a then experimental drug, which helps her enormously and she is able to ultimately take control of her life.



Quotes

"You must die!" Chap. 1, p. 6

"Today this illness, these Voices, are still part of my life. But it is I who have won, not they." Chap. 1, p. 7

"I'm having some problems. I think I need to talk to someone." Chap. 3, p. 24

"You took all those pills!" Chap. 4, p. 37

"The Lori I knew was gone. And in her place was a stranger, a person who seemed to be living only partly in this world, and partly in some faraway world of her own making." Chap. 5, p. 49

"They were telling us there was no hope." Chap. 8, p. 72

"Cocaine was definitely a form of self-medication." Chap. 12, p. 109

"I was trying so hard to be normal." Chap. 14, p. 125

"The Voices howled with laughter. And I would end up in the Quiet Room again." Chap. 16, p. 147

"You can only hold your breath for so long." Chap. 18, p. 174

"And then I realized: I was back in the fucking hospital." Chap. 20, p. 188

"This time, instead of trying to die, why not try to live?" Chap. 21, p. 193

"You've got no choice but to try this drug. If it kills her—well, maybe she's better off dead." Chap. 26, p. 248

"It was happening. I was being set free. I had prayed to find some peace, and my prayers were finally being answered." Chap. 27, p. 251

"They handed me the 9925 key. ... On November 6th, 1989, I opened the door to the outside world all by myself, and left the hospital forever." Chap. 27, p. 260

"If my life and my experiences can help other people find their own ways out of darkness, I will know that I have not wasted the great gift I have been given: the chance to begin life again." Epilogue, p. 270



Topics for Discussion

What are the Voices? What did Lori think they were? What are they in reality?

To what extent are the Voices features of Lori's personality? To what extent are they separate from her personality?

To what extent was Lori's disorder biochemical? To what extent was it psychological?

What does Lori's story suggest about the connection between neurobiological and psychological disorders?

Why did Lori like cocaine? How did it relate to her illness?

How did Lori come to fight the Voices? What did she have to accept about herself?

What do the other narrators in the book add to the reader's perspective on Lori?