



LISA SCOTTOLINE

#1 BESTSELLING AUTHOR

Reading
Group
Guide

The Unraveling of Julia

A Psychological Thriller

HELLO FRIENDS!

Thank you so much for choosing to read my novel **THE UNRAVELING OF JULIA**! I'm so grateful for each and every one of my readers, and when I write, I always have you uppermost in mind. I've written 37 novels at this point, and each time, I try to deliver a heartfelt story that will keep you turning the pages, and at the same time, move you emotionally. That's what life is all about, isn't it?

THE UNRAVELING OF JULIA is special because I like to think that it takes you on a number of journeys. First is the obvious journey, in that the novel transports you to Tuscany and you spend time in its lush rolling hills and charming small towns like the fictional Croce, which I modeled on an actual Tuscan town that I visited, San Donato in Poggio. I took lots of videos on my research trip and they will all be on my website, so you can watch them as companions to the novel, whether you're in a book club or not.

The novel also takes you on a deeper, more profound psychological journey, since Julia has to figure out who left her this Tuscan villa and vineyard, which leads her on a path to discovering her own identity and the nature of her very self. I love to use the theme of identity in my novels, because I feel that we change and grow in so many different ways, after good events in our life, and after bad, like the death of someone we love. It's really a lifetime quest to understand who you are, and I love that Julia has just begun to understand herself. The truth about life journeys is that we don't often set out on them intentionally because we don't know where life will lead us. Often we don't realize we're on one until our emotional baggage is packed. I don't know if you've had that experience, but I sure have.

Finally my favorite journey in the book is a lighter one, and that has to do with carbohydrates. I really loved drinking and eating my way through Tuscany, all in the name of research lol! I'm sharing that delight with you by loading the novel with authentic Tuscan cuisine, delicious Chianti wines, and freshly-baked bread (saltless, the way it is made in Tuscany). I'm sharing my food love here with authentic Toscana cucina recipes, and one very personal recipe, of my beloved Mother Mary's gnocchi, which you will go crazy for.

Eat, drink, read, and enjoy all the pleasures of your life. I'm so grateful that you are one of the pleasures of mine, and I'm truly honored to write for you.

LOVE,



XOXOXOO

Discussion Questions

1. In the beginning of the book, Lisa Scottoline included the quote “I look quiet and consistent, but few know how many women there are in me,” from Anaïs Nin. How do you think this applies to *The Unraveling of Julia*? Do you resonate with this?
2. *The Unraveling of Julia* contains various settings in Italy and includes a lot of Italian history, primarily with Caterina Sforza. Were you familiar with any of the locations and history prior to reading? Did anything stand out to you about these locations and history after reading this book?
3. In the beginning of the novel, Julia describes the cyclical nature of depression and grief: “Julia’s memories would keep her in bed, where she was most miserable, and the more she remembered, the more miserable she’d be and the more stuck in bed.” Have you ever related to this? What helped you navigate it?
4. Astrology is a prevalent component in the novel. Do you believe in astrology? How much would you let it dictate/influence your decision making?
5. Courtney and Julia can often be seen throughout the book with opposing viewpoints even though they’re best friends. What about their dynamic do you think makes their friendship work? Do you have a Courtney in your life?
6. Analyze the various situations and locations where Julia either struggled to feel or strongly felt a sense of belonging. Do you think she still struggles with belonging by the end of the novel?
7. When visiting Caterina’s castle, Julia feels a familiarity as she’s walking through the grounds she’s never visited before; and while talking on the phone with Courtney about the villa, Julia tells her that it is “giving up its secrets.” Have you ever felt spiritually connected to a location?
8. Have you seen any spirits? Do you think they exist? Discuss.
9. In a conversation with Julia, Gianluca says that “Love connects us to the divine. We talk about soulmates, but I believe it, literally and everything has a soul...” And Julia replies: “That’s what I like about astrology. The connection, to everything.” Do you have a belief or practice that helps you connect with the world and aid in your understanding of it?
10. When confessing his feelings to Julia, Gianluca says, “Maybe that’s what love at first sight is, two souls recognizing each other.” Do you agree with this? Why or why not? Do you believe in love at first sight?
11. Julia felt guilty of “missing Mike and wanting Gianluca at the same time.” How much time do you think is enough time to move on? Do you think Julia was ready to start a new relationship with Gianluca when she did?

Discussion Questions

12. Helen, Julia's medium, introduces Julia to the existence of thin places. Were you familiar with the concept of thin places prior to reading this book? Do you think they're real, and have you experienced a thin place before?
13. Originally, Julia had thought that Mike's death was a senseless act of murder until she found out the truth. Do you think it's easier to cope with loss when you know the reason behind it? Why or why not?
14. Towards the end of the novel, the spirit of Caterina Sforza helps Julia evade an untimely death. Do you believe in the power of adrenalin to provide someone with unnatural strength in moments of grave danger or would you consider a more spiritual energy as the source of strength? In your opinion, was Caterina able to protect Julia?
15. Examine the different types of love and protection Fiamma and Julia experienced from their mothers. How does that impact the child?
16. "Not everything was knowable, whether for good or for ill." Do you believe there's a certain unknowability to life? Does one have to be open to other explanations to experience them?

Mother Mary's Gnocchi

THE UNRAVELING OF JULIA reference: "Aroma of tomatoes, onion, and garlic, putting fresh basil on top of a delicious-looking platter of gnocchi covered with tomato sauce." – Chapter 23

INGREDIENTS

- 3 cups sifted flour
- 1lb. Italian ricotta (not skim)
- 2 eggs
- 1/2 cup water

1. Put flour and salt on work board (or kitchen table), make a hole in the middle. Put eggs and ricotta into the hole. Knead the mixture until smooth. Cover with a pot (or a clean cloth) for about 1/2 hour.
2. Cut dough in half. Knead on the floured board. Cut off strips (enough to roll each into a foot-long piece), then cut each long strip into one-inch chunks.
3. Roll each chunk on the floured board by pressing down on each chunk under your index and middle finger.
4. Fill a large pot with water and 4 tablespoons of salt. Cover pot and bring water to a boil. Once water is boiling, drop all the gnocchi into the pot. Stir (slowly). Cover pot until water boils again, then lower the flame. Stir occasionally to prevent gnocchi from sticking to the bottom of the pot. Cover for 15 minutes. Pour into a colander to drain. Do not run cold water over the gnocchi.



INGREDIENTS — TOMATO SAUCE

- 2 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil
- 1/2 medium-sized onion, finely chopped
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- Pinch of red pepper flake, or to taste
- 1 28 oz. can crushed tomato
- 1/2 teaspoon dried oregano
- 1/2 teaspoon sugar
- Kosher salt
- Freshly ground black pepper
- 1 tablespoons chopped fresh Italian parsley, plus more for sprinkling
- 1 tablespoons chopped fresh basil, plus more for sprinkling

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Warm olive oil in a 10-inch sauté pan (with high sides). Once you see the oil shimmering, add the chopped onion and sauté for 1 minute, stirring occasionally. Add the minced garlic and pinch of red pepper flake then continue to sauté until onions are soft and translucent, stirring occasionally (about 4 minutes more).
2. Add crushed tomato, oregano, sugar, a few pinches of kosher salt and several turns of freshly ground black pepper, stirring to combine. Bring sauce to a boil, reduce heat to low then simmer, partially covered, for 30 minutes. Stir in chopped parsley and basil, then season to taste with salt and pepper.
3. Mix gnocchi in the sauce and then serve.

Source: Mother Mary's personal gnocchi recipe

Source: Tomato Sauce: <https://www.kitchenkonfidence.com/2021/05/gnocchi-with-tomato-sauce-recipe>

Pappa al Pomodoro

THE UNRAVELING OF JULIA reference: "Pappa al pomodoro. Tomat', garlic, basil, salt." – Chapter 17

INGREDIENTS

- 2 Tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil plus more for drizzling
- 2 medium garlic cloves finely chopped
- 1 28- ounce can crushed tomatoes with juice
- 6 ounces rustic bread day-old or fresh crust removed and torn into 1-inch pieces
- 2 sprigs fresh basil plus torn leaves for serving
- 1 teaspoon sea salt
- ½ teaspoon freshly ground pepper or more to taste

INSTRUCTIONS

1. In a large sauté pan or medium saucepan, heat olive oil over medium-high until it's shimmering.
2. Add garlic and cook until fragrant (no more than a minute, or it will brown).
3. Add in the tomatoes and the juice (if using plum tomatoes, break up the tomatoes with clean hands, removing the hard ends before adding to the sauce).
4. Bring the tomatoes to a boil and use a wooden spoon to stir, if using plum tomatoes, breaking up the tomatoes while they're cooking.
5. Lower heat. Season with the salt and freshly ground pepper, and let the sauce cook and thicken for 20 minutes.
6. Stir in the bread pieces and let simmer with the tomatoes until it's soft and has a custard like texture. Check the consistency of sauce: If it's getting too thick, add a little bit of vegetable broth or water (start with a ¼ cup).
7. Finally, stir in the fresh basil and stir to combine.
8. Serve immediately, garnished with extra basil and a drizzle of extra-virgin olive oil.



Source: <https://www.savoringitaly.com/pappa-al-pomodoro/#recipe>

Layered Polenta with Broccoli Rabe

THE UNRAVELING OF JULIA reference: "Polenta with mozzarella and broccoli rabe, like lasagne." – Chapter 30

INGREDIENTS

- Extra-virgin olive oil
- 1 teaspoon sea salt + black pepper
- 500g cups instant polenta
- 1kg broccoli rabe
- 4 garlic cloves; 2 coarsely chopped, 2 minced
- 1 small red onion, chopped
- Generous pinch of hot red pepper flakes
- One large can (800g) peeled tomatoes in juice, pureed with their juice in a blender
- Generous handful of coarsely chopped fresh basil
- 500g fresh mozzarella cheese, shredded
- 100g freshly grated Parmigiano Reggiano cheese

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Lightly oil a 22 x 12 cm loaf pan. Bring 1.5 liters of salted water to a boil in a medium heavy-bottomed saucepan over high heat. Slowly whisk in the polenta, making sure the mixture is smooth. Change to a wooden spoon and stir constantly until the polenta comes to a boil. Cook according to the package directions, stirring often, until smooth and thickened. Spread the polenta in the loaf pan (it will be very full). Let cool until tepid, about 1 hour. Invert and unmold onto a cutting board, and let cool completely, about 1 hour more.
2. Bring a large saucepan of salted water to a boil over high heat. Add the broccoli rabe and return to a boil. Cook until crisp-tender, about 5 minutes. Drain well.
3. Heat the oil with the garlic in a large skillet over medium heat until the garlic is fragrant and softened, about 2 minutes. A handful at a time, stir in the broccoli rabe. Cover the skillet and reduce the heat to medium low. Cook, stirring occasionally, until the broccoli rabe is tender, about 15 minutes. Transfer to a colander and let it drain and cool. Coarsely chop the broccoli rabe and drain again to remove any excess liquid.
4. Cook the onion and oil in a large saucepan over medium heat, stirring often, until the onion is tender but not browned, about 4 minutes. Stir in the garlic and cook until it is fragrant, about 1 minute. Stir in the hot red pepper flakes, followed by the pureed tomatoes, and bring to a simmer over high heat. Reduce the heat to medium low and simmer, stirring occasionally, until the sauce has slightly reduced, about 20 minutes. During the last few minutes, stir in the basil. Season to taste with the salt and pepper.
5. Position a rack in the center of the oven and preheat the oven to 180°C. Lightly oil a flameproof 22x33 baking dish.
6. Cut the polenta crosswise into 30 slices, about 1cm thick. Arrange 10 of the polenta slices in a single layer in the dish, trimming them as needed to fit the dish and fill in gaps. Top with one-half of the broccoli rabe, followed by one-third each of the sauce, mozzarella and Parmigiano. Repeat with another layer of polenta, the rest of the broccoli rabe, sauce, mozzarella and Parmigiano. Finish with the remaining ingredients. (The dish can be covered loosely with plastic wrap and kept at room temperature for up to 2 hours. Remove the plastic wrap before baking.)
7. Place the baking dish on a baking sheet. Bake, uncovered, until the mozzarella is melted and the juices are bubbling, about 50 minutes. Remove from the oven.
8. Position a broiler rack about 20cm from the source of heat and preheat the broiler on high. Return the dish to the oven and broil just until the mozzarella topping is golden brown, 1 to 2 minutes. Let stand for 10 minutes. Cut into serving portions and serve hot.



Travel Through Tuscany with Lisa

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