A BOOK CLUB DISCUSSION GUIDE

A Love Like Ours

A novel · A.R. Hollowell

ABOUT THE BOOK

Owen Tarrant, a furniture restorer living with an incomplete spinal cord injury, and his wife, Claire, run Ordinary Tuesday, a channel four million people watch. The love they show is real, and the channel pays for his care. Then a private moment she promised would go nowhere goes out to the world, and Owen begins to see what the camera never shows.

THEMES TO TALK ABOUT

Care and control | Privacy and the audience | Dignity and disability

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

36 questions in 7 parts. Choose the ones that spark your group, or work through them in order.

First Impressions

01 The novel opens with Owen speaking straight to us: “If you watched us long enough, you probably thought you knew our marriage.” How did it feel to be addressed as one of the audience, and did that feeling change by the last page?

02 The first chapter ends with Claire alone at the counter saying “You only had to ask,” to nobody. What did you make of that line at first, and what did it mean to you once you had finished the book?

03 When a viewer asks about “the bathroom side,” Owen says “Stop filming,” Claire stops at once, and the clip is shared around the world. Why do you think audiences loved that moment so much?

04 The fitter offers a privacy bolt for the wet room, and Claire refuses: “It never locks. So I can always get to him.” Did that door read as love or control when it went in, and how did it read at the end?

05 Owen tells Claire that when Sylvie is grown and goes looking for him, “nine hundred videos of me being helped” are what she will find. How does that fear shape everything he does afterward?

Owen

06 Owen says, “You don’t start with the damage,” but with “the part that’s still carrying weight.” How does his craft as a restorer shape the way he handles his marriage and, later, his way out?

07 Owen’s nine-tab spreadsheet finally shows that videos with his voice in them bring in sixty-one of every hundred pounds, and he realizes, “I could stop saying it.” Why is that discovery such a turning point for him?

08 In the old house, Owen lay on the floor for most of an hour and could not say her name, after once telling her, “If I ever want you, I’ll say your name.” How did that sentence come back to haunt them both?

09 For months Owen gathers only “a date, a time, a figure, and who said it” in a notebook and tells no one. Did you understand his silence, or did you want him to speak sooner?

10 Owen is never written as a victim waiting to be rescued. Where did you see him fight for himself, and where did you most want someone else to step in?

11 On the live broadcast, Owen tells the good part first: “She loved me. Those years were real.” Why do you think he insisted on saying that before he said he was leaving?

Claire

12 Claire slept most of five months in a wingback in the hall so she could hear both Owen and Sylvie, and never used it to look good. How did you hold that devotion alongside what she later did?

13 Thea says of Claire’s stories, “every one of them in the same voice as the truth. That’s the part I can’t get past.” What do you think she means, and do you agree?

14 Claire tells Owen, more than once, “I have never once refused you anything you asked me for directly,” and it is technically true. How does she turn true statements into weapons?

15 Claire argues, “The life we have now, imperfect as it is, did not exist before the channel. You want to go back to the nine months. I will not.” Was there anything fair in her argument?

16 In the wet room, at Owen’s most exposed, Claire taps the empty phone clamp and says brightly, “Nobody’s filming this one.” Why did such a small moment feel so cruel?

17 Everything Claire does to keep Owen is, to her, love. What is the difference between love and possession, and where do you think Claire crossed that line?

Sylvie and the People Around Them

18 Sylvie's magic has rules: you never show the method, and when her mother asks for one more run-through "for them," she answers, "They didn't ask." How does a young girl's card trick come to carry the book's biggest ideas?

19 Claire asks Sylvie to tell her father she misses him in the films, "For the family." How did you react to a parent using a child this way?

20 Owen opens his hardest talks with Sylvie the same way: "I'm going to tell you what's true. Some of it I know and some I don't." Is that the right way to speak to a child in a crisis?

21 Colm noticed the "four steps" that did not add up and chose the year Claire carried the house instead: "The year let me go home." Have you ever looked away because the truth would cost you a family?

22 Gareth Pym, the unsettling fan who has "all of them. Twice," ends up holding the recording that breaks the case. How did you feel about him by the end, and does his help excuse his watching?

23 Halina's one condition is the alarm pendant, and her one rule is that she will not stay in a house she decides isn't safe. Why do you think the book gives Owen a carer with such firm lines of her own?

24 Thea put the eggs video back in the cut after a single phone call from Claire, and later tells the court, "That was my mistake." How much responsibility does she carry, and what did you make of how she changed?

The Twists

25 Owen finds thirty-one messages in his own sent items that he never wrote, including the ones that drove away Marnie and Jonah. Which of Claire's quiet acts of control shocked you most?

26 Owen suspects a man in a blue car and a devoted fan, and both turn out to have nothing to do with it. What did those false leads do to the way you saw the house itself?

27 Owen blames the night of the ambulance on a late supply delivery, Claire weeps, and he forgives her, until the statement reads "Nothing outstanding." How did that false comfort make the later truth hit harder?

28 A timestamp on the hall camera, 20:47:31, and ninety seconds trimmed as “dead air” show that Claire stopped when Owen called and then went on talking. Did you believe her when she said she froze?

Choices With No Right Answer

29 Every exit Owen considers comes back to two questions: who will turn him at two in the morning, and what a court would read in his file. How did the book change your understanding of why people stay?

30 On the live broadcast, Owen says Claire did it “deliberately,” but keeps Sylvie and the evidence out of it. Was going public the right choice, and would you have done it?

31 The count about the night of the two o’clock turn ends in acquittal, because, as the detective says, “This one has you.” How did you feel about that verdict, and about the judge stopping Owen’s statement?

32 Owen tells the court, “I have not forgiven her. I don’t know that I will.” Did you want him to forgive her, and does a story like this owe us forgiveness?

The Ending and Beyond

33 Sylvie finally lands the four of hearts, asks “Should we film it?” and decides “No.” Why do you think the book ends on that choice?

34 In the last lines Owen speaks to the viewers again: “You once drew a red ring around my mug and wrote ‘still waiting for him.’” What is he telling them, and you, as the book closes?

35 Has this book changed how you watch family content online, and would you keep following a couple like Claire and Owen?

36 The title comes from viewers who wrote that they wanted “a love like ours.” After reading, what would you say a love worth wanting looks like?

IDEAS FOR YOUR MEETING

- Put every phone in a basket by the door for the whole meeting, the way the Tarrants did at nine each night, and talk at the end about whether it felt like rest or like control.
- Talk about a family or couple you follow online, and what you imagine happens when the camera is off.
- If anyone in the group knows a card trick, have them perform it from three feet away, then debate Sylvie’s rule: should a performer ever explain the method?

- Rewrite one scene: retell the live broadcast, “An Honest Conversation,” from Claire’s side of the table, and compare versions.
- Hold a vote on the ending. Did the verdicts and the sentence feel like justice to you, and what would you have changed?
