

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS for *Out of the Ashes* by Vanessa Evetts

Written in collaboration with *Anya McKee of Torn Curtain Publishing*

1. Grace pulled in and disappeared into her grief, but it was the act of release and allowing others back into her world that ultimately led her to her freedom. Discuss the turning points in her journey to healing. Which response to grief, or challenges can you relate to?
2. Simon and Sarah stepped up and stepped into Grace's world and home when she lost her ability to cope with her loss. How would you deal with the presumptuousness that is required in these kinds of situations? Have you been in a position where you've needed that of somebody, and/or had to face this quandary as a friend or loved one.
3. Do you think Grace could have had the same breakthrough had she stayed home in New Zealand? How do you think this would have impacted or changed her relationship with Simon and her sense of identity?
4. The accident that killed Grace's family was something that could happen to anybody at any time. How did that thought affect your response to the story?
5. What annoyed you about Grace's response to the tragedy?
6. Grace blamed herself for David, Allie and Patrick's deaths. How much of that blame do you think was warranted?
7. While hiking with Ben in Bavaria, Grace had the revelation that she had to forgive God. How important was this for her to move forward? How much does forgiveness—of God, people and self—impact your ability to live a joy-filled life?
8. Throughout the book, Grace heard a quiet whisper which she identified as the voice of God. Have you ever experienced that encouraging whisper in times of hurt, indecision or doubt? Discuss.
9. When tragedy struck, Sarah and Simon were Grace's village (her people). Who do you have in your life who would help you weather a storm?
10. Many cultures allow people space to grieve. Discuss the concept of grief in your culture. How important is it to give people time to breathe and heal after a tragedy?
11. Discuss situations where your life, or that of somebody you care about has changed in an instant. Does a reminder about the frailty of life make you live or think any differently?
12. To what extent would you be willing or able to re-arrange your life if a close friend or loved one encountered tragedy?
13. Was there a scene or conversation in the book that captured or moved you? Discuss.
14. Vanessa Evetts writes with unusual insight. If you could sit down with the author, what would you ask?
15. How do you think people's experience of grief differs depending on their stage of life?
16. Overcoming fear was a strong theme throughout the novel. Is there something that is holding you back from living your best life?

17. Grace needed Ana to remind her of the fulfilment of her wedding vows. *Your vows said, 'Till death do us part, and death parted you.'* How did this reminder impact her ability to move forward? What did this look like?
18. Discuss the difference between breaking a vow and being released from it.
19. Loyalty and a sense of duty are great attributes, but they can also hold you back from stepping into your purpose or the next stage of your life. Discuss some examples of this.
20. Grace experienced the richness of other cultures during her journey. How important is it to you, to witness and experience other cultures, their practices and customs in formulating or adjusting your own belief structures, perspectives, worldview and sense of self?
21. Discuss some of your favourite places in the world. If you haven't travelled, and were given the opportunity—where would you go?
22. Discuss how your identity is wrapped up in your sense of place.
23. Grace's sense of home changed as she journeyed towards her healing. What does home mean to you?
24. When Grace found the bucket list on the back of Patrick's wardrobe, it launched her out of her comfort zone and towards her new life. What is, or would be on your, or your loved ones' bucket lists?
25. What could you take from Grace's story to enable you to better serve others who are grieving?
26. Near the end of the book Grace recognises that 'The old her died with her family,' and questions whether Simon would accept who she'd become or always be waiting for the 'old Grace to return'. Have you lived through an experience yourself or with a loved one, where parts of yourself/or them have been lost during the battle? How have you, and those you love managed to navigate the changes?
27. How does the author's literary style contribute to the message, or the story? Give an example.
28. If you could rewrite Grace's story, or part thereof, what would it look like?
29. If you could choose a soundtrack to accompany this book, what would it be?
30. If *Out of the Ashes* was to be made into a film, and you were the casting director, who would you cast?
31. If a novel was to be based in your town, what would be some of your favourite haunts or experiences you'd like to see explored?
32. The impact that other people—friends and strangers—had on Grace's journey to freedom was immeasurable. Discuss the presence of compassion, or lack thereof in our communities/world, and brainstorm ways to show kindness and compassion in our everyday lives.