



### **Grief Graphic Medicine Discussion Guide:**

*Rosalie Lightning* by Tom Hart

From the publisher... “Rosalie Lightning is Eisner-nominated cartoonist Tom Hart’s beautiful and touching graphic memoir about the untimely death of his young daughter, Rosalie. Hart uses the graphic form to articulate his and his wife’s ongoing search for meaning in the aftermath of Rosalie’s death, exploring themes of grief, hopelessness, rebirth, and eventually finding hope again.”

#### **Why a Graphic Novel?**

- Research suggests that we are better at understanding and absorbing information presented in visual forms, such as comics.
- Stories are more engaging than factual information alone. How much easier is it to remember and empathize with something a friend experienced versus hard statistics alone?
- Coined by Ian Williams, a physician in the UK, Graphic Medicine “is the intersection of the medium of comics and the discourse of healthcare.”
  - Graphic medicine, then, combines visual storytelling and medicine, creating a unique opportunity for readers to experience and learn about healthcare experiences through comics.

#### **To Learn More...**

- [www.graphicmedicine.org](http://www.graphicmedicine.org) – The home base for all things graphic medicine.
- *The Graphic Medicine Manifesto* by MK Czerwiec et al. Available from Penn State University Press.



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### Questions for Discussion

1. Grief is often an overwhelming, all-consuming experience that is subjective even by emotional standards and can be difficult to express clearly. Did Hart succeed in conveying he and his wife's grief?
2. Did you appreciate the visual aspects of this book? Do you think the format of a graphic novel is more or less effective for a memoir than for a fictional account? How is it different than a memoir written in prose?
3. Does the book remind you of an aspect of your own life? A particular event? A person – like a friend, family member, co-worker, etc.?
4. Can you point to specific passages/panels that struck you personally? Why?
5. Did *Rosalie Lightning* change your view on “grief retreat” programs? Or, if you had never heard of them before, what are your impressions after Tom and Leela's experiences?
6. *Rosalie Lightning* is illustrated entirely in shades of black. Do you think this was effective? How might color have changed the way you perceived the story?
7. Rob Clough, in a review of *Rosalie Lightning* for *The Comics Journal* describes Tom Hart's empathetic character creation in all of his comics, with this being no exception. How do you think Tom showed the characterized versions of he and his wife empathy?
8. In the publisher's description of the book, “rebirth” is explicitly stated. Throughout, we are led through the story by various incarnations of acorns – from inception to fully realized trees. Did you notice this relationship in your reading? Was it effective? What could we learn from it?
9. Have you read other memoirs or stories about grief? How does *Rosalie Lightning* compare to them?
10. Would you share *Rosalie Lightning* with people in your life? Why or why not?

**Remember:** These are just suggested questions and there could be many, many more. Don't feel tethered to these – let the conversation flow naturally and use these questions as starting points when conversation stalls.