

Study Guide for *Out of the Canyon*

Art Daily is driving home with his wife, Kathy, and two boys Tanner, eleven and Shea, six, from a hockey game in Vail, Colorado when a boulder falls from the high walls of Glenwood Canyon and hits the SUV they are driving. Kathy is killed instantly; the two boys die at the hospital shortly after. Art enters a world of deep grief and longing, as he realizes his life will never be the same without his family, and wonders if he will ever recover from such a loss.

Allison Snyder lost her brother to suicide a few years earlier. She's in Aspen working and healing from her brother's death and a divorce that followed. She hears of Art's loss, prays for him, and reaches out to him by sending an anonymous letter and a tape of songs to grieve to. The two meet and begin a strong friendship based on shared grief.

Shortly after meeting Art, Allison goes hiking with friends into the Grand Canyon, and finds herself on Tanner Trail. While there she has a powerful encounter with Art's deceased son, Tanner, who wants his Dad to know that the three of them miss him very much but are in a good place.

This opens up communication between Art and the family that was taken away from him. It is also the beginning of a love story between Art and Allison, who eventually marry and have two boys of their own.

Questions:

1. Art lost his wife and two young boys when a boulder fell from the high walls of Glenwood Canyon. Could you have survived a tragedy like the one Art did? What would be your means of support and comfort? Would you blame God? Or do you believe in Fate?

2. Art and Allison meet and fall in love fairly quickly. Do you think you'd be open to a new relationship and more children if you had lost everything? Do you think Art stopped grieving when he became involved with Allison? Is there a proper time to grieve? Within society?

3. Tanner appears to Allison on the Tanner Trail. If you had an encounter as Allison did with Tanner, would you be open to it? What would it take to prove the experience was real to you? Would it make you feel uncomfortable? Or blessed?

4. Allison continues to have encounters with Tanner and with Kathy. Were those encounters believable? Was it difficult for you to accept/relate to them? Have you ever felt like someone was trying to communicate with you from “another place”?

5. Grief is a common thread in Art and Allison’s life. Do you think the grief made their relationship stronger? Could they understand one another’s pain with more compassion? Could you be in a relationship with someone who experienced such a loss?

6. Allison admits she is sometimes jealous of Kathy, Tanner, and Shea. Would you feel that way? What things would you need to do to make yourself comfortable in the house and in a man’s life after such a loss?

7. When Rider is born, Art says, “the last time I held a son he was leaving this world, now I am bringing one into the world.” How did you feel as you read about Rider’s birth? When Burke is born, Art now has two sons again. Did it feel at all like completing a circle of life?

8. Rider and Burke grew up knowing they have angels around them. They consider Kathy, Tanner, and Shea their extended family. Do you think that is healthy? How would you handle it if you were Allison or Art?

9. When Rider sees Tanner in the window and calls Art to his room, how did you feel? Did you wonder if he was making it up, being a young child? Do you think children are closer to God and the afterlife because of their innocence?

10. Burke makes the comment that he is glad Kathy, Shea, and Tanner died so that he could be born. How did his honesty and openness affect you? Did that reaction tell you something about him (and Rider)?

11. The story ends following a hockey game in Vail ten years after the accident and a ride into Glenwood Canyon to visit the site where the three were killed by the boulder. What feelings did you have at the end? Did it feel complete?