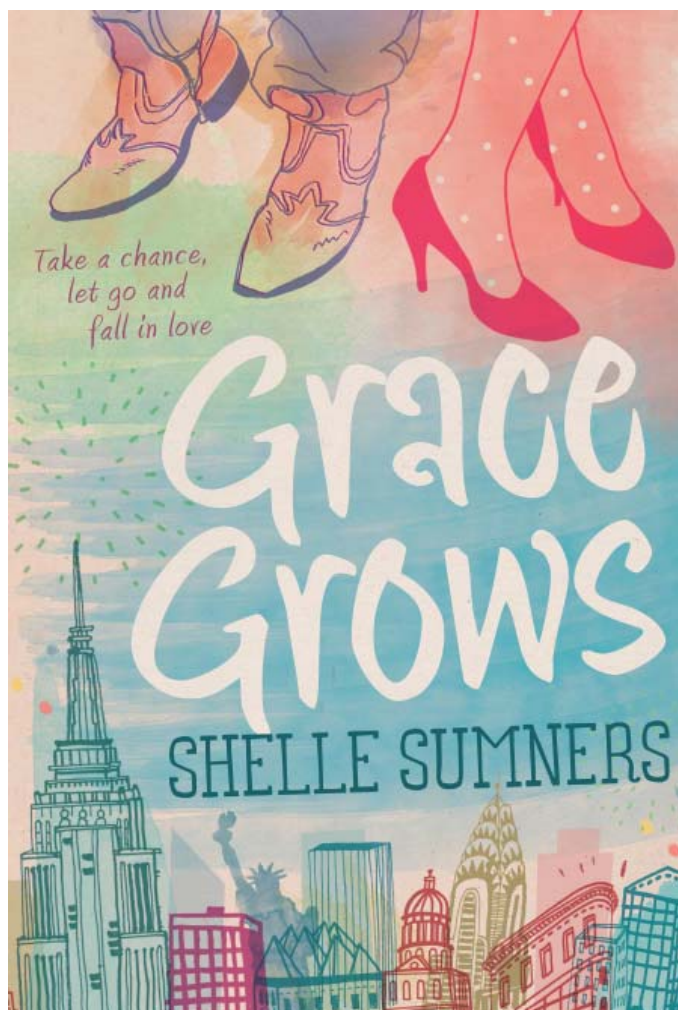


ALLEN & UNWIN



READING GROUP NOTES

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About the book

A wonderfully upbeat and quirky romance in which a young textbook editor in New York, who takes herself a little too seriously, falls for a singer-songwriter who appears to take nothing at all seriously...

Like many young women, Grace Barnum's life is precariously balanced on sensible choices and uncomfortable compromise. She dutifully edits textbooks that she fears may be more harmful than helpful to kids. She is engaged to a patent attorney with whom she has a reliable relationship. She has a cautious relationship with her fascinating father, a renowned New York painter, and she prefers her mother slightly drunk as she's easier to handle that way.

Always organised, always a planner, Grace carries her life around in a handbag - until the responsibility-challenged Tyler Wilkie shows up. Tyler of the warm eyes and a smile that makes Grace drop things. Worst of all, he writes tender, loving, devastating songs - about her. Tyler reaches something in Grace, something she needs, but can't admit to. Something she wants, but won't succumb to. Falling in love with him would ruin everything. And yet . . .

An enchanting story about learning to love and learning to let go.

About the author

Shelle Sumners has worked as a waitress, actress, copy editor, bookseller, and wedding chapel receptionist.

Sometimes she only pretended to do these things while furtively scribbling notes for screenplays and novels.

Sumners lives with her husband, Lee, and their daughter in Newtown, Pennsylvania. The soundtrack of Ty's songs for Grace is now available for listening on Shelle's website: shellesumners.com/grace-grows-book/original-songs. The soundtrack is also available on iTunes.

Author, Shelle Sumners, on writing *Grace Grows*

While I was writing the first drafts of *Grace Grows*, I was working full time as a program coordinator at a church in Princeton, NJ. I'd come home at night and write for two or three hours (my husband made dinner a lot), and I spent chunks of weekend time writing, when I could squeeze it in. I have a wonderful daughter who always, always came first, but who was also very patient when mom was writing. By the time the book was being published and I was revising it with my editor, I was recovering from a health crisis and had to give up my job, so I was able to make editing the novel my main focus.

When you're writing your first draft, just do the work and don't worry about whether or not you're being brilliant. Just write. It will turn out that some of what you create will be very useful, and some you will discard. I think of the first draft as the time when you are making the raw material, the "clay" that you will sculpt and refine in the second draft and then polish in subsequent drafts (and there may be many). Fun fact: The final, published version of *Grace Grows* was my *eleventh* draft.

Reviews & Quotes

'The story's focus on its frustratingly stubborn heroine, her well-developed family ties, and the confusing dance between longing heart and shuttered psyche creates a slow yet satisfying, engaging quality that keeps the pages turning.' - *Publishers Weekly*

'Readers will fall for the swoonworthy hero and root for the couple to overcome each obstacle.' - *Booklist*

'Shelle Sumners' sparkling debut novel is romantic, funny, and wise. You will root for Grace Barnum as she lets go, takes a chance, and falls in love. You will swoon as a troubadour wins her heart the old fashioned way, through poetry and persistence....And to think he's from the Poconos. You just never know.' - Adriana Trigiani, *New York Times* bestselling author of the *Viola* series and *The Shoemaker's Wife*

'*Grace Grows* is enormously fun and tender, a new take on the whole opposites attract approach to love ... and sex.' - Julie Klam, *New York Times* bestselling author of *You Had Me at Woof*

'Grace Barnum is such a charming, relatable character—torn between playing it safe and going for it—that you'll find yourself smiling and swooning as you fly through Sumners' witty, honest, and delightful novel about taking a chance on love.' - Elisabeth Robinson, author of national bestseller *The True and Outstanding Adventures of the Hunt Sisters*

For discussion

- 📖 One reader reviewer said, 'If I ever decide to write anything, I can only hope that I make readers fall in love with my heroine as much as Grace'. Was this your reading experience?
- 📖 The author shows a wonderfully dry and lively wit and it's her use of humour that draws the reader closer to Grace and Tyler's relationship and keeps the pages turning. Would you agree with that? What other novels have you read that use humour throughout?
- 📖 The song lyrics, in the novel written by Tyler, were written by the author's husband. To Shelle Sumners, the songs are integral to the text (see www.shellesumners.com) with the result that music is entwined throughout the novel. Was this an aspect you enjoyed? You can hear the songs at Shelle's website.
- 📖 The plot of this novel is not intricate, indeed it's quite a classic relationship drama, and therefore to keep a reader engaged, the author needs subtleties of emotion, freshness of character, of tone and of pace. Do you think this author has succeeded in bringing something new to her story?
- 📖 Although the payoff story belongs to Grace and Tyler, were you interested in the secondary characters? Did Grace's very different relationships with her divorced parents shed light on her own character? How did the secondary characters support the main storyline?

Suggested Reading

Overseas by Beatriz Williams

The Storyteller's Daughter by Maria Goodin

The Rosie Project by Graeme Simsion

The Secret Keeper by Kate Morton