

## Task for *Grace*

### Extension Task: *Grace and John Molloy*

The connection between Grace and her father's experiences – including their relationship with each other – is a central narrative in the novel. The text explores the relationship between fathers and daughters, the effect of memory and past traumas, and the difficulties of coming to appreciate people for who they are, rather than for who we would like them to be.

The Grace skeleton is a key motif and symbol relevant for our understanding of how Grace and her father come to understand each other.

Grace and her father's relationship is also caught up in that perennial problem of moving forward through time, whilst simultaneously looking back. For Grace it is her efforts to recover from the trauma of her stalking, something which could at any moment re-appear; for John Molloy, it is the discovery of his Salt End Woman, and the ongoing distinction and controversy that it adds to his academic career as he moves forward. In both cases, the effects of past experience, and the character's attempts to resolve them, are tied to their respective identities: how they see themselves, and how they see each other.

### Passages

#### Chapter: *The Capricorn Mug* (pp. 173–176)

*Yes, the only lasting relationship had been his and Grace's. His love for his only child had always been sentimental, dutiful and boundless. From the astonishing moment when she entered the world, pointy-headed and so creamed with vernix that she resembled a tiny New Guinean mudman, he'd felt she was an old soul. Their lives seemed connected in ways that predated her birth. Naturally genetics came into it - genetics, the most emotion-laden and newsworthy branch of science. The one that caused him all the trouble.*

*As well as his sole genetic link to the future, she was his only connection to the past. In her physique, the shape of her nose and ears, her hair colour, her moods, her love of films (why not a gene for that?), she matched him. The same went for the angle of her walk, her distinctive running style (head thrust forward, arms pumping across the body), even in the way she chewed an apple. In her appearance and habits he hungrily sought clues to his own background. He thought of her as predating him as well as following him.*

*He could hardly look at her without thinking of her genes. Her familiar characteristics were one thing (that seventy-degree running style); others were a total mystery.*

*Her affinity for the water, where had that come from? As a swimmer he was still a tentative London orphan boy, an easily sunburned and surf-dumped paddler. Her mother had been no sportswoman either. And here was this earnestly splashing, spitting toddler from Jellyfish swimming class turning into a solemn Crab, a buoyant Turtle, a sleek Platypus, then a Redfin, a Snapper, and finally - her body mysteriously lengthening and streamlining along the way - a lean and hungry member of the Barracuda Squad. Overnight she'd metamorphosed into a competition swimmer. Where had those genes come from?*

*She'd been a natural from the start. Even at five and nominally a jellyfish, she'd skittered across pool surfaces like a water beetle. Year after year, in a multitude of fuggy indoor swimming centres and breezy outdoor pools, condensation dripping on his head, his eyes smarting from the chlorine fumes, he'd watched with awe those endless laps. The little arms slicing the water the relentless pat-a-kick legs. Inherently she understood the rhythm, the alternate breathing, the tumble turns, and when she skipped from the pool into the towel he proudly held out for her only her pinker cheeks hinted at the slightest effort.*

*Of course she was proud of herself and wanted his eyes on her the whole time. The universal child's cry: Look at me! Woe betide him if she glanced up between laps and caught him reading. She needed his ardent attention: the proud nod, the congratulatory thumbs-up. He gave them with gusto and she basked in his approval. Look at me! And he did. Many times he wondered, with a sort of loving envy, what that experience must feel like.*

*Not once during those countless dawns and afternoons as she churned up and down the pool had he imagined his daughter's future as less than limitlessly successful. With that focus and effort she could do anything she wanted. How confident and doting his love had been. How smug. Sitting in the stands, he'd feel for those hopeful endomorph parents watching their broad-hipped, chunky kids and dreaming of Olympic medals. You poor bastards, he'd think. They're not going to make it. Next time come back tall and slim.*

*He clung to the idea that in her genes his daughter preceded as well as followed him. He supposed it was because they had the other connection as well: the link to his discovery. Here, too, father and daughter went right back to the beginning of the age.*

**Chapter: Into Africa (pp. 274–279)**

*'Who were those actors?' he wondered.*

*She shrugged and smiled. 'Who knows? My showbiz days are over. I'm a daylight person.'*

*It suited her, he thought. As they edged down their row to the aisle it struck him again how healthy she looked. She'd grown her hair; it hadn't been this long since she was a teenager. She was tanned and fit and seemed to have regained her old confidence. A wildlife park was not where he imagined his daughter would end up, but she looked surprisingly settled. In the circumstances he could hardly argue with that.*

*Maybe it wasn't so surprising after all. He reflected on all the hours they had put in at zoos, circuses, aquariums, even reptile parks. A particular menagerie they'd visited when she was ten or eleven came to mind. On holiday in the Tasmanian countryside they'd found an eccentric zoo run by a testy farmer type. Indigenous fauna crouched in the dust beside humdrum farm animals and exotic importations. Runny-eyed kangaroos and scabrous wombats lolled beside ostriches; camels and sheep foraged competitively with alpacas and geese.*

*And she'd loved it. Rather, she desperately wanted to love it. He'd realised she was willing it to be terrific and although those desiccated paddocks depressed him mightily he kept his opinion to himself. Every animal was sulky and territorial: miniature horses shied at llamas, deer butted emus out of the way, and stags and donkeys attempted to mount nanny-goats. Displaced seagulls bickered and a bad-tempered monkey viewed proceedings from atop a guano-encrusted dovecote. Addled sheepdogs circled everything, barking incessantly. Every shred of vegetation was gnawed and pecked*

*down to the ground and each creature, like the proprietor and his monkey overseer, seemed ready to bare their teeth and snap.*

*Aggressive familiarity was the man's style. Once he had their admission money he shook his head at their obtuseness. 'You would've done much better to come next week, champ. We're getting zebras and an albino water buffalo.'*

*For an extra charge the farmer enticed his customers to 'help feed the animals'. Naturally Grace went for the idea. So they boarded an open-sided van already jammed with families and sped recklessly down the hillside into the paddocks. The man's feeding method was to ring a bell for the animals; when they charged the van he would scoop up a pail containing chaff, bran and some concentrated feed pellets and throw it over a particular customer sitting nearby. Naturally, in their busload Molloy was it - the human dinner plate.*

*Wedged in his seat for the next half-hour, he was pecked and buffeted by an assortment of famished ostriches, camels and llamas. What registered most vividly was how alive they all seemed up close, and how massive their heads were. From an inch away the brown and yellow eyes were greedy and avid, totally single-minded. But as the farmer sped into yet another field, frenziedly ringing his bell and tossing feed, it was his eyes that looked demented.*

*Even as the next wave of animals thundered out of the landscape, and more shaggy and beaky heads slammed and slobbered against him, Molloy couldn't believe it was happening, that he was the necessary scapegoat. Demeaning the customers and frightening children was the man's commercial modus operandi. 'This'll make your hair grow, boss,' said the crazed zookeeper, grinning humourlessly and chucking more chaff and bran over him. 'Lucky for you none of them are carnivores!'*

*'Unluckily for you I've got a good lawyer,' he managed to gasp out.*

*'Keep your shirt on, champ!' the man shouted, unfazed, frowning at such lack of humour and flinging another pail of feed in his face for good measure.*

*Speeding down into yet another paddock, he thought his ordeal would never end. From nowhere a wildebeest and a pugnacious red kangaroo bounded up to dine off him. So, horns and claws, too. A new troop of camels and llamas blew their faecal breath into his face and swung their heavy moulting necks against him. Rough tongues scraped his neck. Snot ran down his cheeks. Grains and twigs filled his hair, ears and nose and trickled down inside his clothes. His head throbbed; all his skin itched with dust and prickles and the detritus of animals.*

*What could he do but take the indignity sitting down? There was no room to stand up, much less physically react. Would he have done so, anyway? Grace hated to be embarrassed even when he shooshed noisy cinema patrons. And now they were confident they wouldn't be sharing his plight, the other passengers were lapping up the performance. Their grateful laughter forced him to be a good sport. But what he ached to do was knock the zookeeper to the ground, punch his lights out, then sue him for everything he owned, every last ulcerated wombat.*

*'What a weirdo!' she offered later, as she brushed him down and combed the chaff and mucus from his hair. 'I felt very sorry for you.'*

*From where he'd sat, his recollection was quite different. As each snorting muzzle burst into the van, his daughter's face had expressed fascination, wonder and something else besides, something harsher and colder -- curiosity to see what would happen next.*

*Why wouldn't her fascination with animals overcome sympathy for her father? She was still a child. But for a few minutes a childhood sensation of his own had floored and almost overwhelmed him: the ache of betrayal. It was the Home, the ship, Lion Island all over again. He felt deserted again, small and young -- years younger than her, in fact. Alone.*

*The feeling hadn't lasted beyond that half-hour on that peculiar Tasmanian afternoon. Back in their rental car, the cranky menagerie behind them, squirming as errant grains of chaff still itched his back and slid down between his buttocks, he could begin to joke about it.*

*Maybe she'd seen a glimpse of her future? Anyway, it seemed the ranger life suited her. How different was her present healthy glow to her grim pallor at their last movie outing? Day for Night in Centennial Park. Another evening under the stars. Except her life had been in turmoil back then: Joel had just left her; the stalking agony dominated everything. Whereas this evening they inhaled serene, mango-scented air and ahead of him his daughter seemed to shine as she walked.*

**Chapter: The Sacred Ibis (pp. 398–400)**

*The boy had looked different when they saw him off on the plane to New Zealand. In the past three months, while the network moved him between safe houses in New South Wales, his lip scars had faded. The Titanic haircut had gone. Shorter hair changed his whole appearance. He looked older, more Western. Less foreign. Less just off the boat.*

*'How long is the flight to New Zealand?' she asked her father.*

*'Only a couple of hours. He'd be in Auckland already.'*

*'He'll have a good life there,' she said. 'In a more sympathetic place. Not running for once.'*

*'Yes, he will.' He was distracted by a sacred ibis that had strolled up behind him and neatly snipped up a sandwich. He shooed it away but it flapped only a few lazy steps. Several other ibises sauntered by, bobbing those strange thin hooked beaks.*

*'The number of ibises around here lately!' he said. He sounded put out. 'They used to be migratory birds, flew here every year to Centennial Park and waded about in the ponds and then flew back to Egypt or wherever they used to be sacred -- back to the Nile. They don't go home any more. They can hardly be bothered wading -- they prefer asphalt. They're worse scavengers than pigeons or seagulls. You see them in Kings Cross eating pizza crusts.'*

*'Just vagabonds at heart.'*

*'No, no, something's upset the species' equilibrium. They're sort of footloose and restive.'*

*'Like the birds in The Birds?'*

*'Almost.'*

*'Maybe we should put them in detention camps.'*

*'Without further ado.'*

*He was still looking askance at an island in the middle of the pond where the birds had taken up residence. They were noisy tenants. As the island's lone, guano-painted tree pitched and rolled with squabbling ibises he was shaking his head in bafflement.*

*He's disturbed about the sacred ibis problem? After her time away the whole city seemed rattled and out of whack. It was easy to take things personally: the unfamiliar road rage; the orange juice she'd bought this morning tasting of onions; the fake pools of vomit on the footpath -- some advertising genius's idea of a cool urban promotional campaign. Everyone and everything seemed to be getting at her. Even her father was becoming self-centred and eccentric. More easily exasperated. Sacred ibises? For the first time she noticed he was getting older.*

*And on top of everything, the old tension was back. She was back to square one. The suspense. The waiting. The looking over her shoulder. The Icelander.*

*'I looked them up in a book of Egyptian symbols. The ibis represents the transforming power of the moon, the trickster.'*

*'Really?'*

*'It also represents the source of inspiration.'*

*'What's so inspiring about ibises? Heads like umbrella handles.'*

*He frowned at her. 'They don't inspire you?'*

*'Not much.'*

*He laughed. 'Me either.'*

*'Sorry I'm not very good company,' she said. How would she tell him, of all people, that she was pregnant? The why. The how.*

*Now was not the time, when she already felt so agitated, and with him still glaring at random ibises. It was hard to imagine when the right time would be. She thought to herself, Just don't get him started on gene flow.*

*'Don't laugh at this,' she said. 'Sometimes over the years when things were going wrong for us I've wondered whether Salt End Woman did have a malign side. What with her having been ritually destroyed and maybe being a witch or something.'*

*'Then wouldn't the bad luck have gone to the people who destroyed her? Rather than the person who brought her to the surface?'*

*'Maybe it did that as well. When you think about it, their luck hasn't been fabulous in the last two hundred years.'*

*'Anyway.' He squeezed her shoulder like he used to when she was a little girl. 'Now I've handed her back our luck will definitely improve.'*

*'I've got some news,' she said.*

**Questions & Activities**

These activities may be undertaken individually, or divided up among groups of students.

- Read the above passages that depict aspects of Grace and John's father-daughter relationship.
- Locate the passages within the actual text. Where within the plot do these recollections occur?
- What does this passage tell the reader about the relationship between John and Grace?
- What do the events within the passage contribute to the understanding of either Grace or John?
- Locate another passage within the text that also explores the relationship between Grace and her father and how it has been impacted by their past. Explain its significance.
- Answer the following question in an extended response:
  - "To what extent do Grace and John Molloy come to understand each other as a result of the events detailed in the novel?"
- Write your own passage – to be inserted anywhere into the narrative – that depicts a hypothetical (but believable) event in Grace and John's life, and the effect it has on them.
  - Write a justification to accompany your own passage, explaining what it shows about the two characters, and how it accurately connects with the original novel.

[\(ACEEN022\)](#), [\(ACEEN028\)](#), [\(ACEEN030\)](#), [\(ACEEN038\)](#), [\(ACEEN039\)](#), [\(ACEEN040\)](#)