

## **THE THIRD GRACE DISCUSSION STARTERS FOR BOOK CLUBS:**

### **COVER AND TITLE:**

- Can you tell anything about this book from its cover?
- Consider the picture on the front: How does it relate thematically to the novel?
- Identify the mythological and theological implications of the book's title: To what does "Grace" refer mythologically and theologically? What might "Third" mean?

### **NAMES:**

- What do you think is the significance of the main character's names (given and self-appointed): "Mary Grace" and "Aglaia"?
- Why did Mary Grace change her name?
- How is Aglaia like or different from her Greek mythical namesake?
- How is the process of finding her identity tied to Mary Grace/Aglaia's name?
- Do the other characters in the book match the meanings of their names (François, Lou, Naomi, Ebenezer . . .)?
- Do you know the meaning of your own name? How do you personally fulfill or reject it?

### **SETTING:**

- Have you ever lived on or visited a farm like the Klassens'? Are you familiar with large-city life? Consider the problem of transition from one locale to the other—a farm girl moving to the city or a "city mouse" in the country.
- How does Aglaia's interest in Denver's arts scene influence her decisions?
- Does Paris live up to Aglaia's dreams?
- Note the difference between the office bookshelves of Lou, the professor (p. 61), and Eb, the boss (p. 71). What might this say about their differing views on literature and learning—in fact, on their overall world views?

### **PLOT:**

- Do you remember being in love for the first time? Did this novel remind you of your own teenaged puppy love? In what ways?
- What is it about François that attracts Mary Grace? What is he looking for in the relationship?

- Did you find the sensual scenes too graphic? Why do you think the author included them, and how do they further the storyline?
- What is Aglaia/Mary Grace seeking in her life? From what is she running?
- Aglaia runs, faces, finds, and embraces. Give plot examples of how she *runs* (from family, faith, and farm), *faces* (her fears, her lover), *finds* (peace, her own identity), and *embraces* (her heritage, her spiritual mooring).

#### **THEMES:**

- Art appreciation plays a part in this novel; comment on your impressions about costume making and the stage, movies, literature, and paintings mentioned in the story.
- Consider the following quote and talk about what part the Bible plays in Aglaia's life:
 

*Her reading matter since her childhood days might surprise and even disturb [her mother] if she understood its content; it was nothing like the holy pap Aglaia was brought up on (p. 20).*
- François's notations in the Bible margins are strategically placed. How do these notes affect Aglaia emotionally and spiritually?
- Discuss the tension between the Greek mythological and the biblical stories in this novel (such as the mention of the rainbow on pp. 90-91). Do you ever struggle with the more "legendary" aspects of stories you read in the Bible—for example, questioning the historicity behind (and connecting) Noah's flood and God's judgment, Jonah's great fish and Jesus' resurrection?
- Talk about the web of relationships in *The Third Grace* that includes aspects of love and lust, friendship, business interactions, familial bonding, and spiritual mentorship. Which relationships seem most real to you in a personal sense, and what does this look like in your interpersonal relationships?
- How does spiritual integrity fit in with the aesthetic yearning for beauty and belonging? For example, Aglaia's love of sewing begins early in her life and is first expressed in costumes she makes for Vacation Bible School—a desire that becomes twisted up with soulish cravings (pp. 107-109). Have you ever been tempted to worship creation rather than the Creator?