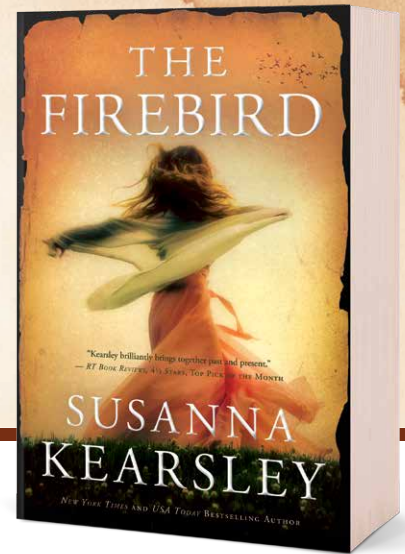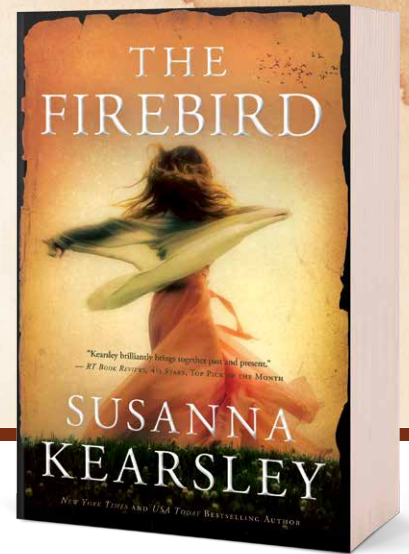# THE FIREBIRD
by Susanna Kearsley

Discussion Questions

1. The psychic ability of remote viewing—of "seeing" things that are removed from the viewer by time or distance—is one that has been studied and documented over the years by reputable individuals and organizations, from archaeologists like J. Norman Emerson, who used psychics to help him survey dig sites, to the American C.I.A., who investigated the possible intelligence applications of the ability in their Stargate Project from the 1970s through the 1990s. Does knowing that others have taken this seriously make a difference in how you yourself view the possibility of such a thing existing? Did the psychic elements of *The Firebird* make the story more or less enjoyable for you?

2. If you were suddenly gifted with Nicola's ability to hold an object and "see" things about its history, what one object would you want the most to hold, and why?

3. Rob encourages Nicola to develop and acknowledge her psychic gifts, and to not hide her abilities, even if that means risking public ridicule. As he tells her, "If we cannae be what we were born to be, the whole of it, we die a little on the inside, every day we live the lie." Do you agree with him?

4. In the Russian fairy tales of the Firebird, the hero might set out to find the bird itself, but what he finds along the way, and what he brings back with him in the end, is always more than that. Do you think Nicola's quest for the Firebird's history resembled the quest of those fairy-tale heroes? If so, what things of value do you think she found on the way? And what was the true prize she found at the end?

5. What similarities and differences did you see between the two heroines, Anna and Nicola? Did you relate to one of them more than the other?
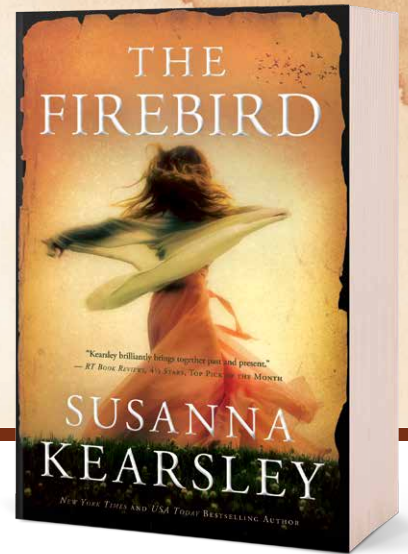
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Discussion Questions continued...

6. Anna, as she grows throughout the story, gains a large extended "family" of strangers and blood relatives, each of whom contributes in some way to the development of her character. Who do you think had the greatest influence on her, and why?

7. How do you feel about Anna's father not telling her right from the start who he really was? Why do you think he concealed his identity? How might it have changed their interaction at the convent if Anna had known that "Captain Jamieson" was really "Colonel Moray"? Do you think they would have bonded in the same way?

8. Throughout the book, the Jacobites we meet are living in exile, forming their own communities in foreign lands. What would be the most difficult thing for you about having to live in exile, unable to return to your own country?

9. Was the Russian setting what you had expected it to be? Did anything surprise you about the description of early St. Petersburg and its inhabitants?

10. The first Empress Catherine is largely dismissed by most historians as an inconsequential ruler who moved, through her life, from one man's bed to another, even though this assessment doesn't necessarily fit with the record of her life and reign as written by those who actually knew her. In the book, General Lacy remarks, "'Tis the curse of a woman of influence that she must always be reckoned unvirtuous." Do you agree? Can you think of any other powerful women whose abilities have been dismissed or diminished in this way, either by the people of their own time or by historians? Do you think we still do this to women of influence today?

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Discussion Questions continued...

11. Anna and Edmund still have many obstacles lying ahead of them. Do you think they'll be able to overcome those obstacles and find happiness? What qualities in each of them make you believe this?

12. The events of the historical story are taken from a little-known real-life historical episode. Do you prefer reading historical novels based on better-known events and characters, or ones like this, in which the people and their actions are less familiar?