

# READING GROUP GUIDE

1. “Mistress Jamieson” tells Mary when they meet: “My mother likes to say some people choose the path of danger on their own, for it is how the Lord did make them, and they never will be changed.” Do you agree? Was it more true in the past than today? Did Mary purposely choose a path of danger? Who else?
2. The author has people in her own life with Asperger’s syndrome who helped her with Sara’s character. What was it like to be in the point of view of a person with Asperger’s syndrome? Did you have any preconceived ideas about Asperger’s? Did they change?
3. Journeys (physical and otherwise) are a prevalent theme in many of Susanna Kearsley’s books. What journeys can you identify in this book, past and present? How do they differ for female and male characters?
4. Mary takes “Mistress Jamieson” as a role model. “She closed her eyes a moment...and allowed the poise and grace of Mistress Jamieson to settle round her shoulders like a robe before she turned.” Is there anyone you use as a role model in this way? Why do you think it’s helpful?

5. Why does Mistress Jamieson teach Mary the cipher?
6. Susanna Kearsley has said, “Never underestimate the power of an animal to reveal character within the story.” How does the dog Frisque further the plot? What does Frisque tell us about Mary? About Hugh? In the present, how does the cat Diablo serve these purposes?
7. *I fear the man across the street...* What did you think of MacPherson when he is first introduced? Did you have him pegged as a hero? If not, when did you begin to change your mind? When did Mary stop fearing Hugh? When did you? Can you identify what makes you feel safe or not safe around someone?
8. Hugh was a man of his time. If he lived in the present, what sort of job would he have? What role in society would he fill?
9. Compare the meeting of Mary and Hugh with the meeting of Sara and Luc.
10. It is Luc who points out to Sara that Hugh has fallen for Mary, long before she realizes it: “A woman can start with a man she might find unattractive and slowly begin to see good in him, grow into love with him, but this is not how it happens with men. We’re much simpler.” Do you agree?
11. In fiction, as in life, what people appear to be may differ from what they are. While Hugh first appears as a

sinister character, “Jacques” appears to be a charming gentleman, but is he? Do you think Thompson is a good man or a bad man?

12. By “seeing” the story as it unfolds in the past, the reader is not only a step ahead, but also often has more knowledge than Sara as she deciphers the journal. How did this affect your reading of the story in the present?
13. If you’re familiar with Susanna Kearsley’s writing, you may recognize a number of references to characters, both in the past and the present, whom the author has introduced in other novels. Did you recognize anyone? (Hint: Characters also seen in *The Winter Sea*, *Mariana*, *The Splendour Falls*, *Season of Storms*, and *The Firebird*.)