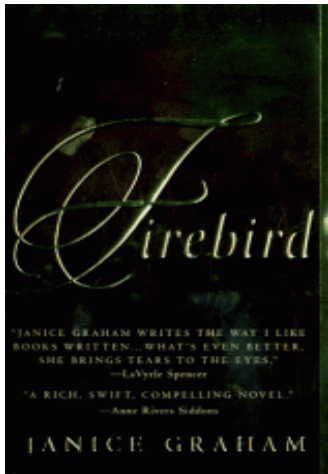


Firebird

by Janice Graham



About the Book

Set in the majestic Flint Hills of Kansas, Janice Graham's extraordinarily accomplished first novel tells of a man caught between two women--one who shares his life and his dream of land and cattle; the other a stranger whose love threatens to destroy the dream he has built. Ethan Brown is a gentleman rancher, an Ivy-educated lawyer who is as comfortable amid his books as he is at ease in the company of cowboys. Engaged to the daughter of the wealthiest landowner in the county, he is within reach of the life he has worked so hard to achieve. Then Annette Zeldin enters Ethan's life, when she returns from Europe to settle her mother's estate. A concert violinist, she feels every inch the outsider in the closed ranching community of Cottonwood Falls and clings to her darling young daughter, her lifeline. The time Annette spends with Ethan in his office gives her moments of comfort and communion, and before long, both must acknowledge the passion growing between them.

Annette and Ethan begin a clandestine, transcendent affair that promises to change the landscape of their lives, but is too soon torn apart by tragedy. Yet their connection is soul-deep and everlasting, and their love transforms the lives of those around them in ways subtle and unknown long after its embers have died down. Graham skillfully infuses the novel with ethereal touches that transport the reader from the vast prairies of the Midwest to the intimate realm of the heart. *Firebird* richly articulates the enduring possibilities of love; it is a novel impossible to forget.

Discussion Guide

1.The book's title evokes the legend of the phoenix, a mythological bird that burned to death on a pyre, only to be resurrected and reborn. How does Janice Graham adapt and adopt the story of the phoenix? How are the elements of sacrifice in the phoenix legend echoed in *Firebird*?

2.Like every responsible rancher, Ethan must burn his fields in order to clear the way for new life. What other characters destroy their old lives--or parts of their old lives--so that new ones may emerge? Are they always successful? How are

the practices of farming and ranching appropriate metaphors for these characters' re-creations and rebirths?

3. The novel suggests the possibility of redemption in both sacred and everyday ways. At one point, Mrs. Winegarner tells Ethan how Annette's music renewed her son's interest in life. In what other ways do the characters receive some sort of redemption? Have you experienced a similar renewal?

4. The three main characters are forced, through tragedy, to broaden their perspectives. Who do you think undergoes the greatest transformation?

5. One of the novel's main themes is loss, and the ways in which we cope with it. After losing her first child, Annette has Eliana, whose name means "God has answered me." How are the other characters' losses "answered," or left unanswered?

6. Annette is an expatriate who makes a home for herself and her daughter in Paris; both her father and Ethan are shocked that she'd ever leave the land of her birth. At midlife, though, Annette thinks that she could move back to Kansas and live there happily. What do you think Graham is saying about our ties to our land? Do you think people can definitively leave behind their homelands, or will they always return? Is there a place you feel as strongly about as Ethan feels about the Flint Hills?

7. Each of the characters in this book is afraid of something. Even Ethan, who gives the impression of security and self-confidence, has his fears. What frightens him, and how does he address his worries? What are other characters in the book afraid of, and how do they overcome--or succumb to--their fears?

8. In her unsent letter, Annette accuses Ethan of not opening himself to profound or unsettling emotions. She also accuses him of cowardice and asks him how he can so love the poets he does, when "misery is so distasteful" to him. Is Annette correct in her assessment of Ethan? Is there a turning point for him?

9. By book's end, Katie Anne, Ethan, and Annette are inextricably bound to one another. One physical incarnation of their relationship is the volume of Yeats's poetry passed among them. What does Yeats mean by "But one man loved the pilgrim soul in you"? How do Katie Anne's and Annette's "pilgrim souls" differ, and what do they have in common?

Author Bio

Janice Graham began her career as a screenwriter in Los Angeles. Her first novel, **Firebird**, became a *New York Times* bestseller and was translated into eighteen languages. Visit her Web site at www.janicegraham.com.

Critical Praise

"Janice Graham's dexterous storytelling pulls at the heartstrings, and her evocations of the wind and skies over the Kansas prairie give an extra dimension to a multifaceted love story that's sure to be a strong contender for the women's fiction hit of the season. "

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