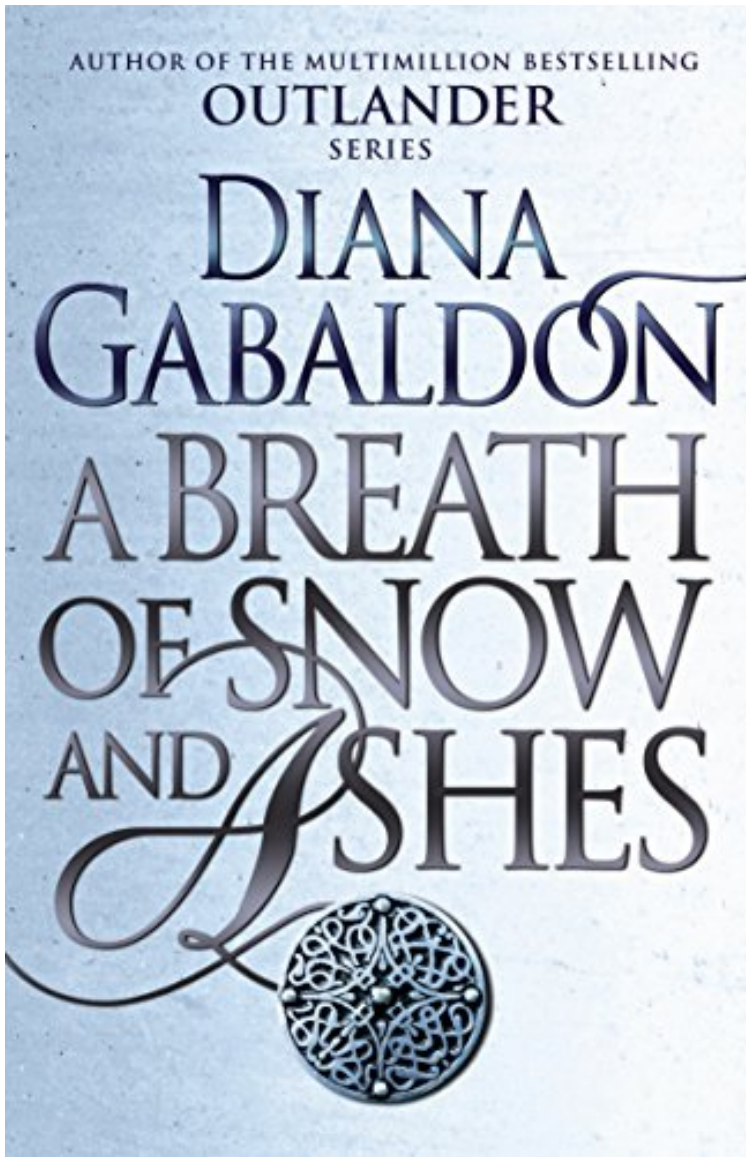


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A Breath Of Snow And Ashes



Par DIANA GABALDON
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Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurTHE SIXTH NOVEL IN THE BESTSELLING OUTLANDER SERIES. The long fuse of rebellion has already been lit.Its 1772, the Royal Colony of North Carolina, and the governor calls upon Jamie Fraser to unite the backcountry and preserve the colony for King and Crown.One minor problem: Jamie Frasers wife, Claire, is a time-traveller, as are his daughter and son-in-law. And Jamie knows that three years hence, the shot heard round the world will be fired, and the end of it all will be independence - with those loyal to the King either dead or in exile.Beyond present danger, though, looms the threat of a tiny clipping from the Wilmington Gazette, dated 1776, which reports the destruction of the house on Frasers Ridge and the death by fire of James Fraser and all his family.For once, Jamie Fraser hopes the

time-travelers in his family are wrong about the future. But only time will tell. **Extrait DUTCH CABIN** March 1773 No one had known the cabin was there, until Kenny Lindsay had seen the flames, on his way up the creek. I wouldna ha seen at all, he said, for perhaps the sixth time. Save for the dark comin on. Had it been daylight, Id never ha kent it, never. He wiped a trembling hand over his face, unable to take his eyes off the line of bodies that lay at the edge of the forest. Was it savages, Mac Dubh? Theyre no scalped, but maybe. No. Jamie laid the soot-smear'd handkerchief gently back over the staring blue face of a small girl. None of them is wounded. Surely ye saw as much when ye brought them out? Lindsay shook his head, eyes closed, and shivered convulsively. It was late afternoon, and a chilly spring day, but themen were all sweating. I didna look, he said simply. My own hands were like ice; as numb and unfeeling as the rubbery flesh of the dead woman I was examining. They had been dead for more than a day; the rigor of death had passed off, leaving them limp and chilled, but the cold weather of the mountain spring had preserved them so far from the grosser indignities of putrefaction. Still, I breathed shallowly; the air was bitter with the scent of burning. Wisps of steam rose now and then from the charred ruin of the tiny cabin. From the corner of my eye, I saw Roger kick at a nearby log, then bend and pick up something from the ground beneath. Kenny had pounded on our door long before daylight, summoning us from warm beds. We had come in haste, even knowing that we were far too late to offer aid. Some of the tenants from the homesteads on Frasers Ridge had come, too; Kennys brother Evan stood with Fergus and Ronnie Sinclair in a small knot under the trees, talking together in low-voiced Gaelic. Dye ken what did for them, Sassenach? Jamie squatted beside me, face troubled. The ones under the trees, that is. He nodded at the corpse in front of me. I ken what killed this puir woman. The womans long skirt stirred in the wind, lifting to show long, slender feet shod in leather clogs. A pair of long handsto match lay still at her sides. She had been tall though not so tall as Brianna, I thought, and looked automatically for my daughters bright hair, bobbing among the branches on the far side of the clearing. I had turned the womans apron up to cover her head and upper body. Her hands were red, rough-knuckled with work, and with callused palms, but from the firmness of her thighs and the slenderness of her body, I thought she was no more than thirty likely much younger. No one could say whether she had been pretty. I shook my head at his remark. I dont think she died of the burning, I said. See, her legs and feet arent touched. She must have fallen into the hearth. Her hair caught fire, and it spread to the shoulders of her gown. She must have lain near enough to the wall or the chimney hood for the flames to touch; that caught, and then the whole bloody place went up. Jamie nodded slowly, eyes on the dead woman. Aye, that makes sense. But what was it killed them, Sassenach? The others are sing'd a bit, though none are burned like this. But they must have been dead before the cabin caught alight, for none o them ran out. Was it a deadly illness, perhaps? I dont think so. Let me look at the others again. I walked slowly down the row of still bodies with their cloth-covered faces, stooping over each one to peer again beneath the makeshift shrouds. There were any number of illnesses that could be quickly fatal in these days with no antibiotics to hand, and no way of administering fluids save by mouth or rectum, a simple case of diarrhea could kill within twenty-four hours. I saw such things often enough to recognize them easily; any doctor does, and I had been a doctor for more than twenty years. I saw things now and then in this century that I had never encountered in my own particularly horrible parasitical diseases, brought with the slave trade from the tropics but it was no parasite that had done for these poor souls, and no illness that I knew, to leave such traces on its victims. All the bodies the burned woman, a much older woman, and three children had been found inside the walls of the flaming house. Kenny had pulled them out, just before the roof fell in, then ridden for help. All dead before the fire started; all dead virtually at the same time, then, for surely the fire had begun to smolder soon after the woman fell dead on her hearth? The victims had been laid out neatly under the branches of a giant red spruce, while the men began to dig a grave nearby. Brianna stood by the smallest girl, her head bent. I came to kneel by the little body, and she knelt down across from me. What was it? she asked quietly. Poison? I glanced up at her in surprise. I think so. What gave you that idea? She nodded at the blue-tinged face below us. She had tried to close the eyes, but they bulged beneath the lids, giving the little girl a look of startled horror. The small, blunt features were twisted in a rictus of agony, and there were traces of vomit in the corners of the mouth. Girl Scout handbook, Brianna said. She glanced at the men, but no one was near enough to hear. Her mouth twitched, and she looked away from the body, holding out her open hand. Never eat any strange mushroom, she quoted. There are many poisonous varieties, and distinguishing one from another is a job for an expert. Roger found these, growing in a ring by that log over there. Moist, fleshy caps, a pale brown with white warty spots, the open gills and slender stems so pale as to look almost phosphorescent in the spruce shadows. They had a pleasant, earthy look to them that belied their

deadline. Panther toadstools, I said, half to myself, and picked one gingerly from her palm. Agaricus pantherinus or that's what they will be called, once somebody gets round to naming them properly.

Pantherinus, because they kill so swiftly like a striking cat. I could see the gooseflesh ripple on Brianna's forearm, raising the soft, red-gold hairs. She tilted her hand and spilled the rest of the deadly fungus on the ground. Who in their right mind would eat toadstools? she asked, wiping her hand on her skirt with a slight shudder. People who didn't know better. People who were hungry, perhaps, I answered softly. I picked up the little girl's hand, and traced the delicate bones of the forearm. The small belly showed signs of bloat, whether from malnutrition or postmortem changes I couldn't tell but the collarbones were sharp as scythe blades. All of the bodies were thin, though not to the point of emaciation. I looked up, into the deep blue shadows of the mountainside above the cabin. It was early in the year for foraging, but there was food in abundance in the forest for those who could recognize it. Jamie came and knelt down beside me, a big hand lightly on my back.

Cold as it was, a trickle of sweat streaked his neck, and his thick auburn hair was dark at the temples. The grave is ready, he said, speaking low, as though he might alarm the child. Is that what's killed the bairn? He nodded at the scattered fungi. I think so and the rest of them, too. Have you had a look around? Does anyone know who they were? He shook his head. Not English; the clothes are wrong. Germans would have gone to Salem, surely; they're clannish souls, and no inclined to settle on their own. These were maybe Dutchmen. He nodded toward the carved wooden clogs on the old woman's feet, cracked and stained with long use. No books nor writing left, if there was any to begin with. Nothing that might tell their name. But they hadn't been here long. A low, cracked voice made me look up. Roger had come; he squatted next to Brianna, nodding toward the smoldering remains of the cabin. A small garden plot had been scratched into the earth nearby, but the few plants showing were no more than sprouts, the tender leaves limp and blackened with late frost. There were no sheds, no sign of livestock, no mule or pig. New emigrants, Roger said softly. Not bond servants; this was a family. They weren't used to outdoor labor, either; the woman's hands have blisters and fresh scars. His own broad hand rubbed unconsciously over a homespun knee; his palms were as smoothly callused as Jamie's now, but he had once been a tender-skinned scholar; he remembered the pain of his seasoning. I wonder if they left people behind in Europe, Brianna murmured. She smoothed blond hair off the little girl's forehead, and laid the kerchief back over her face. I saw her throat move as she swallowed. They'll never know what happened to them. No. Jamie stood abruptly. They do say that God protects fools but I think even the Almighty will lose patience now and then. He turned away, motioning to Lindsay and Sinclair. Look for the man, he said to Lindsay. Every head jerked up to look at him. Man? Roger said, and then glanced sharply at the burned remnants of the cabin, realization dawning.

Ay, who built the cabin for them? The women could have done it, Bree said, lifting her chin. Y... From AudioFile The sixth book of the adventures of Claire and Jamie Fraser, set in North Carolina from 1772 through 1777, provides glimpses of the beginnings of the American Revolutionary War and reacquaints us with the extended Fraser clan and friends. Geraldine James enchants the listener with her varied accents, from British and Scots to twentieth-century American and an occasional Irish brogue. Using foreknowledge and their usual survival skills, Claire doctors the hurts and Jamie avenges the wrongs. James's performance brings out the adventurer in the listener. Some pops and skips are audible throughout, adding charm to the narration and the ever complicated plots. This story vibrates with the energy of an America seeking its freedom and the battles that ensue, philosophically and physically, throughout this tumultuous period.

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