

# DIANA GABALDON

THE *NEW YORK TIMES* BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF  
*OUTLANDER*



## A BREATH OF SNOW AND ASHES

A NOVEL

DIANA  
GABALDON<sup>(2)</sup>



A BREATH OF  
SNOW AND ASHES

DELACORTE PRESS



A BREATH OF SNOW AND ASHES  
A Delacorte Press Book / October 2005

Published by Bantam Dell  
A Division of Random House, Inc.  
New York, New York

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents either  
are the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously.

Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, events,  
or locales is entirely coincidental.

All rights reserved  
Copyright © 2005 by Diana Gabaldon  
Title page art from Corbis

*Book design by Virginia Norey*

Delacorte Press is a registered trademark of Random House, Inc., and  
the colophon is a trademark of Random House, Inc.

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data on file with  
the publisher.

ISBN-13: 978-0-385-32416-8  
ISBN-10: 0-385-32416-2

Printed in the United States of America

[www.bantamdell.com](http://www.bantamdell.com)

RRC 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

A BREATH OF  
SNOW AND ASHES

*Also by Diana Gabaldon*  
(in order of publication)



OUTLANDER

DRAGONFLY IN AMBER

VOYAGER

DRUMS OF AUTUMN

THE OUTLANDISH COMPANION  
(non-fiction)

THE FIERY CROSS

*and*

LORD JOHN AND THE PRIVATE MATTER

*This Book is Dedicated to*



CHARLES DICKENS

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

DOROTHY L. SAYERS

JOHN D. MACDONALD

*and*

P. G. WODEHOUSE

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My ENORMOUS thanks to . . .

My two marvelous editors, Jackie Cantor and Bill Massey, for insight, support, helpful suggestions (“*What about Marsali?!?!?*”), enthusiastic responses, (“*Eeew!*”), and comparing me (favorably, I hasten to add) to Charles Dickens.

My excellent and admirable literary agents, Russell Galen and Danny Baror, who do so much to bring these books to the attention of the world—and put all of my children through college.

Bill McCrea, curator of the North Carolina Museum of History, and his staff, for maps, biographical sketches, general information, and a delightful breakfast in the museum. Love them cheese grits!

The staff of the Moore’s Creek Bridge battlefield Visitors’ Center, for their kind attention and for supplying me with forty-odd pounds of new and interesting books—particularly gripping works like *Roster of the Patriots in the Battle of Moore’s Creek Bridge* and *Roster of the Loyalists in the Battle of Moore’s Creek Bridge*—and for explaining to me what an ice-storm is, because they had just had one. We do not have ice-storms in Arizona.

Linda Grimes, for betting me that I couldn’t write an appealing scene about nose-picking. That one is all her fault.

The awe-inspiring and superhuman Barbara Schnell, who translated the book into German as I wrote it, almost neck-and-neck with me, in order to complete it in time for the German premiere.

Silvia Kuttny-Walser and Petra Zimmerman, who have been moving heaven and earth to assist the German debut.

Dr. Amarilis Iscold, for a wealth of detail and advice—and periodic rolling on the floor with laughter—regarding the medical scenes. Any liberties taken or mistakes made are entirely mine.

Dr. Doug Hamilton, for expert testimony on dentistry, and what one could or could not do with a pair of forceps, a bottle of whisky, and an equine tooth-file.

Dr. David Blacklidge, for helpful advice on the manufacture, use, and dangers of ether.

Dr. William Reed and Dr. Amy Silverthorn, for keeping me breathing through the pollen season so I could finish this book.

Laura Bailey, for expert commentary—with drawings, no less—on period



## viii Acknowledgments

clothing, and in particular, for the useful suggestion of stabbing someone with a corset-busk.

Christiane Schreiter, to whose detective skills (and the goodwill of the librarians of the Braunschweig Library) we owe the German version of Paul Revere's ride.

The Reverend Jay McMillan, for a wealth of fascinating and useful information regarding the Presbyterian church in Colonial America—and to Becky Morgan, for introducing me to the Reverend Jay, and to Amy Jones, for information on Presbyterian doctrine.

Rafe Steinberg, for information on times, tides, and general seafaring issues—particularly the helpful information that the tide turns every twelve hours. Any mistakes in this regard are definitely mine. And if the tide did not turn at 5A.M. on July 10<sup>th</sup>, 1776, I don't want to hear about it.

My assistant Susan Butler, for dealing with ten million sticky-notes, photocopying three copies of a 2500-page manuscript, and FedExing it all over the landscape in a competent and timely fashion.

The untiring and diligent Kathy Lord, who copy-edited this entire manuscript in some impossible time frame, and did not either go blind or lose her sense of humor.

Virginia Norey, Goddess of Book Design, who has once again managed to cram The Whole Thing between two covers and make it not only readable but elegant.

Steven Lopata, for invaluable technical advice re explosions and burning things down.

Arnold Wagner, Lisa Harrison, Kateri van Huystee, Luz, Suzann Shepherd, and Jo Bourne, for technical advice on grinding pigments, storing paint, and other picturesque tidbits, such as the bit about "Egyptian Brown" being made of ground-up mummies. I couldn't figure out how to work that into the book, but it was too good not to share.

Karen Watson, for her former brother-in-law's notable quote regarding the sensations of a hemorrhoid sufferer.

Pamela Patchet, for her excellent and inspiring description of driving a two-inch splinter under her fingernail.

Margaret Campbell, for the wonderful copy of *Piedmont Plantation*.

Janet McConnaughey, for her vision of Jamie and Brianna playing Brag.

Marte Brengle, Julie Kentner, Joanne Cutting, Carol Spradling, Beth Shope, Cindy R., Kathy Burdette, Sherry, and Kathleen Eschenburg, for helpful advice and entertaining commentary on Dreary Hymns.

Lauri Klobas, Becky Morgan, Linda Allen, Nikki Rowe, and Lori Benton for technical advice on paper-making.

Kim Laird, Joel Altman, Cara Stockton, Carol Isler, Jo Murphey, Elise Skidmore, Ron Kenner, and many, many (many, many) other inhabitants of the Compuserve Literary Forum (now renamed as the Books and Writers Community (<http://community.compuserve.com/books>), but still the same gathering of eclectic eccentricity, trove of erudition, and source of Really Strange Facts, for their contributions of links, facts, and articles they thought I might find helpful. I always do.



## *Acknowledgments ix*

Chris Stuart and Backcountry, for the gift of their marvelous CDs, *Saints and Strangers* and *Mohave River*, to which I wrote quite a bit of this book.

Ewan MacColl, whose rendition of “Eppie Morrie” inspired Chapter 85.

Gabi Eleby, for socks, cookies, and general moral support—and to the Ladies of Lallybroch, for their boundless goodwill, manifested in the form of food boxes, cards, and enormous quantities of soap, both commercial and handmade (“Jack Randall Lavender” is nice, and I quite like the one called “Breath of Snow.” The one called “Lick Jamie All Over” was so sweet one of the dogs ate it, though).

Bev LaFrance, Carol Krenz, Gilbert Sureau, Laura Bradbury, Julianne, Julie, and several other nice people whose names I unfortunately forgot to write down, for help with the French bits.

Monika Berrisch, for allowing me to appropriate her persona.

And to my husband, Doug Watkins, who this time gave me the opening lines of the Prologue.

A BREATH OF  
SNOW AND ASHES



## PROLOGUE

**T**IME IS A LOT OF THE THINGS people say that God is. There's the always preexisting, and having no end. There's the notion of being all powerful—because nothing can stand against time, can it? Not mountains, not armies.

And time is, of course, all-healing. Give anything *enough* time, and everything is taken care of: all pain encompassed, all hardship erased, all loss subsumed.

Ashes to ashes, dust to dust. Remember, man, that thou art dust; and unto dust thou shalt return.

And if Time is anything akin to God, I suppose that Memory must be the Devil.



# PART ONE



*Rumors of War*





## AN INTERRUPTED CONVERSATION

**T**HE DOG SENSED THEM FIRST. Dark as it was, Ian Murray felt rather than saw Rollo's head lift suddenly near his thigh, ears pricking. He put a hand on the dog's neck, and felt the hair there ridged with warning.

So attuned as they were to each other, he did not even think consciously, "Men," but put his other hand to his knife and lay still, breathing. Listening.

The forest was quiet. It was hours 'til dawn and the air was still as that in a church, with a mist like incense rising slowly up from the ground. He had lain down to rest on the fallen trunk of a giant tulip tree, preferring the tickle of wood-lice to seeping damp. He kept his hand on the dog, waiting.

Rollo was growling, a low, constant rumble that Ian could barely hear but felt easily, the vibration of it traveling up his arm, arousing all the nerves of his body. He hadn't been asleep—he rarely slept at night anymore—but had been quiet, looking up into the vault of the sky, engrossed in his usual argument with God. Quietness had vanished with Rollo's movement. He sat up slowly, swinging his legs over the side of the half-rotted log, heart beating fast now.

Rollo's warning hadn't changed, but the great head swiveled, following something unseen. It was a moonless night; Ian could see the faint silhouettes of trees and the moving shadows of the night, but nothing more.

Then he heard them. Sounds of passage. A good distance away, but coming nearer by the moment. He stood and stepped softly into the pool of black under a balsam fir. A click of the tongue, and Rollo left off his growling and followed, silent as the wolf who had been his father.

Ian's resting-place overlooked a game trail. The men who followed it were not hunting.

*White men.* Now that was odd, and more than odd. He couldn't see them, but didn't need to; the noise they made was unmistakable. Indians traveling were not silent, and many of the Highlanders he lived among could move like ghosts in the wood—but he had no doubt whatever. Metal, that was it. He was hearing the jingle of harness, the clink of buttons and buckles—and gun barrels.

*A lot of them.* So close, he began to smell them. He leaned forward a little, eyes closed, the better to snuff up what clue he could.

They carried pelts; now he picked up the dried-blood cold-fur smell that had probably waked Rollo—but not trappers, surely; too many. Trappers moved in ones and twos.



Poor men, and dirty. Not trappers, and not hunters. Game was easy to come by at this season, but they smelled of hunger. And the sweat of bad drink.

Close by now, perhaps ten feet from the place where he stood. Rollo made a tiny snorting sound, and Ian closed his hand once more on the dog's ruff, but the men made too much noise to hear it. He counted the passing footsteps, the bumping of canteens and bullet boxes, foot-sore grunts and sighs of weariness.

Twenty-three men, he made it, and there was a mule—no, two mules with them; he could hear the creak of laden panniers and that querulous heavy breathing, the way a loaded mule did, always on the verge of complaint.

The men would never have detected them, but some freak of the air bore Rollo's scent to the mules. A deafening bray shattered the dark, and the forest erupted in front of him with a clishmaclaver of crashing and startled shouts. Ian was already running when pistol shots crashed behind him.

"*A Dbia!*" Something struck him in the head and he fell headlong. Was he killed?

No. Rollo was pushing a worried wet nose into his ear. His head buzzed like a hive and he saw bright flashes of light before his eyes.

"*Run! Ruith!*" he gasped, pushing at the dog. "Run out! Go!" The dog hesitated, whining deep in his throat. He couldn't see, but felt the big body lunge and turn, turn back, undecided.

"*Ruith!*" He got himself up onto hands and knees, urging, and the dog at last obeyed, running as he had been trained.

There was no time to run himself, even could he have gained his feet. He fell facedown, thrust hands and feet deep into the leaf mold, and wriggled madly, burrowing in.

A foot struck between his shoulder blades, but the breath it drove out of him was muffled in wet leaves. It didn't matter, they were making so much noise. Whoever had stepped on him didn't notice; it was a glancing blow as the man ran over him in panic, doubtless thinking him a rotted log.

The shooting ceased. The shouting didn't, but he made no sense of it. He knew he was lying flat on his face, cold damp on his cheeks and the tang of dead leaves in his nose—but felt as though very drunk, the world revolving slowly round him. His head didn't hurt much, past the first burst of pain, but he didn't seem able to lift it.

He had the dim thought that if he died here, no one would know. His mother would mind, he thought, not knowing what had become of him.

The noises grew fainter, more orderly. Someone was still bellowing, but it had the sound of command. They were leaving. It occurred to him dimly that he might call out. If they knew he was white, they might help him. And they might not.

He kept quiet. Either he was dying or he wasn't. If he was, no help was possible. If he wasn't, none was needed.

*Well, I asked then, didn't I?* he thought, resuming his conversation with God, calm as though he lay still on the trunk of the tulip tree, looking up into the depths of heaven above. *A sign, I said. I didna quite expect Ye to be so prompt about it, though.*

## 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, I'd 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*? They're no scalped, but maybe—"

"No." Jamie laid the soot-smeared 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 the men 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 Fraser's Ridge had come, too; Kenny's brother Evan stood with Fergus and Ronnie Sinclair in a small knot under the trees, talking together in low-voiced Gaelic.

"D'ye 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 woman's long skirt stirred in the wind, lifting to show long, slender feet shod in leather clogs. A pair of long hands to match lay still at her sides. She had been tall—though not so tall as Brianna, I thought, and looked automatically for my daughter's bright hair, bobbing among the branches on the far side of the clearing.

I had turned the woman's apron up to cover her head and upper body. Her hands were red, rough-knuckled with work, and with callused palms, but from