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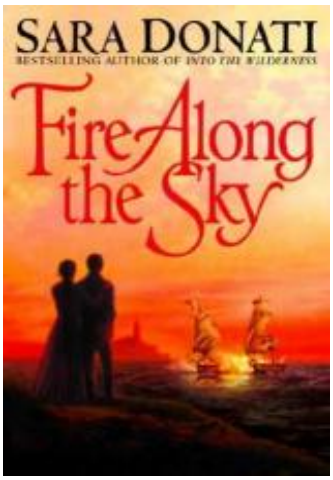
Fire Along the Sky

by Sara Donati



About the Book

With epic sweep and breathtaking adventure, Sara Donati's bestselling saga of an Early American family's struggle for survival in the Northeast wilderness continues with the story of an indomitable woman and an unforgettable journey of redemption across a young nation threatened by the flames of war.

The year is 1812 and Hannah Bonner has returned to her family's mountain cabin in Paradise. But Nathaniel and Elizabeth Bonner can see that Hannah is not the same woman as when she left. For their daughter has come home without her husband and without her son...and with a story of loss and tragedy that she can't bear to tell. Yet as Hannah resumes her duties as a gifted healer among the sick and needy, she finds that she is also slowly healing herself. Little does she realize that she is about to be called away to face her greatest challenge ever.

As autumn approaches, news of the latest conflict with Britain finds the young men of Paradise --- including eighteen-year-old Daniel Bonner --- eager to take up arms. Against their better judgment, Nathaniel and Elizabeth must let him go, just as they must let his twin sister Lily, a stubborn beauty, pursue her independence in Montreal. But on the eve of the War of 1812, an unexpected guest arrives from Scotland: It is the Bonners' distant cousin, the newly widowed Jennet Scott of Carryckcastle. Far from home, Lily and Jennet will each learn the price of pursuing their dreams and the possibility of true love.

But it's Hannah herself who must risk everything once more --- this time to save Daniel, who's been taken prisoner by the British. As the distant thunder of war threatens Paradise, Hannah may learn to live --- and maybe love --- again in one final act of courage, duty, and sacrifice.

A gifted writer, a master storyteller, and a first-rate historian, Sara Donati has written a powerful, poignant, and movingly romantic novel that chronicles the lives and adventures of a family as compelling and unforgettable as any in American fiction.

Discussion Guide

1. The arrival of Rev. Stiles causes an upheaval in Paradise. What did the author mean by making him visibly different?an albino?from the others in town? How did he embody some of the darker impulses, and prejudices, already present in this small enclave? How did he foment discord?

2. Discuss the importance of Dr. Richard Todd's life, and his painful death. How was his life shaped by his many losses? By his wealth? How is he both villain and hero? This duality in a character is found throughout American literature. Discuss other characters that embody both noble and vile impulses like Todd. Why is this tradition so strong in American literature?

3. How does Lily's artistic talent transcend both her education and her age/experience? What did she learn from Gabriel Oak? How is her talent both a gift and a burden for her in this time and place?

4. Discuss the significance of the War of 1812. A relatively short and little studied war it had major impact on land, resources, political control and the future of the settlers. Do you think this War was important enough to change the course of history? Why or why not? Discuss its importance to New York State and Canada. Why was this war so important to the English and French?

5. War factors in this novel, and fighting in the entire series. How does the need to conquer factor into the lives of these earlier Americans? What positive outcomes are there for the warriors or the country? What negative?

6. The northern and northwestern part of New York State was the nation's untamed frontier in the late 18th and early 19th Century, the era of the Wilderness series. How does this frontier experience differ from that of the traditional western or ?wagons west? description of America's wilder places? How is it the same? Why was the settlement of upper New York State significant to people in Canada? To England? To France? To Holland?

7. Why is settlement by Europeans significant to the Native Peoples?and how do settlers like the Bonner family and others in the town of Paradise both complement and conflict with them? What roles do the slaves and the freed slaves, serve?

8. Discuss the Freeman family's activities in aiding runaway slaves' flight to freedom. Do you think they helped these people, or contributed to setting the stage for continuing and future conflict for them? What role did the African Free School, and Manny Freeman's association with it, play in the abolition of slavery? Do you think the Gradual Manumission Act was devised in a fair manner?

9. Most of the characters in this book have dealt with loss. How have these losses shaped the characters' weaknesses and strengths?

10. Author Donati uses wonderful place and character names drawn from the Native Language. Discuss the symbolism of the characters' names (i.e. Walks-Ahead, Bone-in-Her-Back, Hawkeye, etc.). How do these names illuminate the characters themselves? Would you choose a descriptive name for yourself?and what would that be?

Author Bio

Sara Donati is the pen name of Rosina Lippi, a former academic and tenured university professor. Since 2000 she has been writing fiction full-time, haunting the intersection where history and storytelling meet, wallowing in 19th-century newspapers, magazines, street maps and academic historical research. She is the internationally bestselling author of the *Wilderness* series (INTO THE WILDERNESS, DAWN ON A DISTANT SHORE, LAKE IN THE CLOUDS, FIRE ALONG THE SKY, QUEEN OF SWORDS and THE ENDLESS FOREST), as well as THE GILDED HOUR, the first in a new series following the descendants of characters from the *Wilderness* series. She lives between the Cascades and Puget Sound with her husband, daughter, Jimmy Dean (a Havanese), and Max and Bella (the cats).

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Publication Date: August 31, 2004
Hardcover: 624 pages
Publisher: Bantam
ISBN-10: 0553801465
ISBN-13: 9780553801460