
DOLLEY

*A Novel of Dolley Madison
in Love and War*

Rita Mae Brown



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DOLLEY

Books by Rita Mae Brown

THE HAND THAT CRADLES THE ROCK

SONGS TO A HANDSOME WOMAN

THE PLAIN BROWN RAPPER

RUBYFRUIT JUNGLE

IN HER DAY

SIX OF ONE

SOUTHERN DISCOMFORT

SUDDEN DEATH

HIGH HEARTS

STARTING FROM SCRATCH:

A DIFFERENT KIND OF WRITERS' MANUAL

BINGO

VENUS ENVY

DOLLEY

And with Sneaky Pie Brown

WISH YOU WERE HERE

REST IN PIECES

To
Lady Bird Johnson

Not all the soldiers were in Vietnam.

This one was in the White House.

Fearlessness is better than a faint-heart for any man who puts his nose out of doors. The length of my life and the day of my death were fated long ago.

Anonymous lines from *For Scirnis*

P R E F A C E

I first met Dolley Madison in 1949. I sat on her grave. I had no intention of being disrespectful to our most-loved First Lady, who at that time had been dead one hundred years.

Although not yet in grade school, I had been reading voraciously and loved history to such an extent that I was rapidly emptying the shelves of the public library. That summer Mother, who didn't give a fig for history, dragged me to Mount Vernon, Monticello, and Montpelier. I have always thought this journey was an especial demonstration of Mother's affection for me. On the other hand, our little trip provided her relief from her ever-critical mother-in-law. As I look back, it's fine with me if Mom killed two birds with one stone.

Back then Montpelier was owned by that marvelous horse-woman Marion duPont Scott. At any rate, the big house was not available to visitors but the little Madison family graveyard was. We disembarked at Montpelier Station and hiked to the cemetery some-ways distant. My little legs were tired and I plopped on the first cool, inviting spot.

"Get off that grave this instant!" Mother commanded.

That's how I met Dolley. As I brushed off my skirt, I worried that I'd sat on her head. Mother, as I have said, evidenced no interest in history but as we stood there, she rattled off about Dolley's being a Quaker and, of course, about her courage during the destruction of Washington by the British. Clearly, this was proof of Dolley's power. Even Julia Ellen Buckingham Brown knew about her.

Once I earned enough money to buy a farm in central Virginia,

• P R E F A C E •

twenty-five years after this visit, I became a regular visitor to the Madison graveyard. It's one of my favorite places to eat lunch, and while Montpelier was privately owned, it was blissfully quiet. Now that the buses come through, I have to time my lunches more carefully. Defiantly, I lean against Dolley's medium-sized marker. So far my mother's shade has not materialized to chastise me. No doubt she is in heaven discussing gardening with Dolley herself. Or giving orders.

The research for this novel, apart from Mother's lecture, began eight years ago. I won't wear out your patience with the miseries of trying to piece together the facts when most of the records had burned to ashes and when most survivors had been too exhausted to write down what they saw when they saw it. Of what did get recorded, well, there is always the problem of deciding how accurate or truthful the writer was. So many wrote after the events occurred, and they wrote with their eyes on political office. Others penned apologies for their behavior during the crisis and tried to pass it off as history. Even those who told the truth could discuss only what they had experienced. They didn't know what was happening over the next hill or around the next river bend. In short, our ancestors endured extraordinary devastation. If they couldn't collect themselves via writing in the aftermath, who can blame them?

Nonfiction is for the facts, fiction is for emotional truth. I have done my best to comply with the facts. You will, however, find much of the truth. Whatever errors and faults are within these pages are entirely my own and are no reflection on my assistants.

Someday, tomorrow perhaps, a curious child will open an old trunk in an attic and discover a treasure of letters and diaries from 1814 that will put my work and the work of historians upside down. So be it. Whatever the facts may yet turn out to be, I will ever believe that something of Dolley is captured here—or perhaps Dolley has captured me.

As always,
Rita Mae Brown
Nelson County, Virginia

MADISON'S CABINET 1814

VICE PRESIDENT

Elbridge Gerry

SECRETARY OF STATE

James Monroe

SECRETARY OF THE TREASURY

Albert Gallatin (in Europe as a peace commissioner)

William Jones (Secretary of the Navy), acting Secretary until Campbell's appointment

George Campbell, appointed February 9, 1814

Alexander J. Dallas, appointed October 6, 1814

SECRETARY OF WAR

John Armstrong, resigned September 3, 1814

James Monroe (Secretary of State), acting Secretary until following appointment

SECRETARY OF THE NAVY

William Jones

ATTORNEY GENERAL

William Pinkney, to February 1814

Richard Rush

• M A D I S O N ' S C A B I N E T •

SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE

Henry Clay (appointed to peace commission, resigns as Speaker
January 19, 1814)

Langdon Cheves, appointed January 19, 1814

CHIEF JUSTICE OF THE SUPREME COURT

John Marshall

Throughout his presidency, James Madison would experience difficulty with his Cabinet appointments. So many men trooped through his Cabinet over the eight-year span that to be appointed was more a cause for mourning than for celebration.

THE CHARACTERS

DOLLEY PAYNE MADISON Born and raised a Quaker, she was cast out of the Society of Friends when she married James Madison. She is forty-five years old in the first part of this novel (1814), turning forty-six on May 20, 1814.

JAMES MADISON At sixty-three he is shouldering the miserable task of waging a war he never wanted. He was neither a great orator nor a charismatic leader, but the force of his intellect and his calm manner pushed him to the forefront of American politics, a position relinquished only on his death.

HENRY CLAY Thirty-seven in 1814 and already Speaker of the House of Representatives, he is like a jungle bird of electrifying plumage; when Clay was around, one just couldn't look at anyone else. Henry played to win. He wanted the war with Britain and by God, he got it.

JOHN C. CALHOUN Muscular, tall, a man of ferocious intellect, he is thirty-two in 1814. He is at the beginning of a career that is perhaps one of the most tragic in American history.

DANIEL WEBSTER Thirty-two in 1814, darkly handsome, an orator of spellbinding, theatrical proportion, he, too, is at the beginning of a career that will dominate American politics for four decades. He is bitterly opposed to the war with Britain and contemptuous of James Madison. Webster, Clay, and Calhoun will be locked into alliances as well as rivalries for the span of their long lives.

• THE CHARACTERS •

ANNA PAYNE CUTTS Dolley's fair-haired younger sister has one thing that Dolley lacks: many children.

PAYNE TODD Dolley's surviving son from her first marriage to Quaker John Todd, who died of yellow fever in 1793, he is twenty-two in 1814. Since 1813 he has been in Europe and Russia with the peace commissioners, and although he does not appear in the pages of this novel, he is vital to Dolley's life.

LOUIS AND LISEL SERURIER The minister from France is handsome, observant, deeply admiring of Madison. He can't understand why the American people do not realize what a great man Madison is. A servant of Napoleon, Serurier watches the European drama unfold with a sense of impending doom. His wife, Lisel, beautiful and savvy, adores Dolley and understands that Dolley's true brilliance resides in her ability to hide her knowledge, something a European queen would never have done.

ADMIRAL SIR GEORGE COCKBURN Arrogant, ruthless, and intelligent, he ravages the Chesapeake Bay from 1813 to 1814. This British officer brags that he will capture Washington and James Madison with it.

BRIGADIER GENERAL WILLIAM WINDER The United States officer charged with the defense of Maryland, Washington, and northern Virginia, he is short of troops and short of brains but not short of a sense of responsibility.

JOHN ARMSTRONG A Secretary of War whose behavior bordered on the criminal, Armstrong wanted to be elected President in 1816. It didn't occur to him that if he failed at his appointed post, there might not be a United States and he would be President of nothing.

ELBRIDGE GERRY At seventy years of age, this ailing veteran of Massachusetts politics could spot a crook before anybody else could—after all, he learned his trade in the Bay State.

JAMES MONROE A young hero in the Revolutionary War, he is capable, dedicated, and not afraid of combat in the War of 1812. As Secretary of State, he is being groomed by the Republicans to succeed

James Madison as President in 1816. He detests Armstrong. It's mutual.

FRENCH JOHN (Jean Pierre Sioussat) He acts as Dolley's major-domo. After years as a sailor, with a body covered by tattoos, he jumped ship in Baltimore. It was a leap of faith and probably the best thing he ever did for himself.

SUKEY Young, voluptuous, and rebellious in her own way, Sukey is Dolley's personal servant. She is a slave to her passions as well as a slave to James Madison.

UNCLE WILLY This chatty, fabulously colored macaw is much adored by Dolley. Her son gave her the bird and Willy keeps her company while Payne is in Europe. Like his mistress, Uncle Willy does not like to be alone.

JOHN RANDOLPH A thrillingly brilliant man tormented by his own demons, he hates Jefferson and by extension Madison. He does not appear in the pages of this novel, but the threat of his mischief disquiets Dolley.

THE CITY OF WASHINGTON Eight thousand inhabitants brave the pestilential summers and the raw, damp winters of this sorry little village. It is protected by a beggarly guard of five hundred Regulars and an untrained militia. The mayor, James Blake, mindful of his duty, tries to get provisions from Congress. The congressmen go home, glad to get out of the city. Blake and his militia face an army of British soldiers, well hardened by Wellington in the Napoleonic Wars. James Blake loves his city and does all a man can possibly do under the horrible circumstances.

THE FEDERALIST PARTY Tempting as it is to think of them as proto-Republicans, they were and they weren't. The Federalists, whose stronghold was New England, emphasized tradition and stability even at the expense of individual liberties. They believed in a strong central government and the rule of an intelligent, socially responsible oligarchy. Not that anyone quite put it that way—even Alexander Hamilton was prudent on that issue—but their party line was that the cream would rise to the top. They believed in leadership from above,

which would be passed down to the people, not the other way around. They worshiped at the shrine of private property. They especially thought that leaders should be free to make decisions without consulting the public. They disliked the concept of political parties because they felt partisan politics created bitter and unnecessary divisions. This would open the door to venal men who could appeal to the rude emotions of the multitudes. An interesting statement of their philosophy was printed in the *Connecticut Courant* on April 23, 1813: "Political problems do not primarily concern truth or falsehood. They relate to good or evil. What in the result is likely to prove evil, is politically false; that which is productive or good, politically is true."

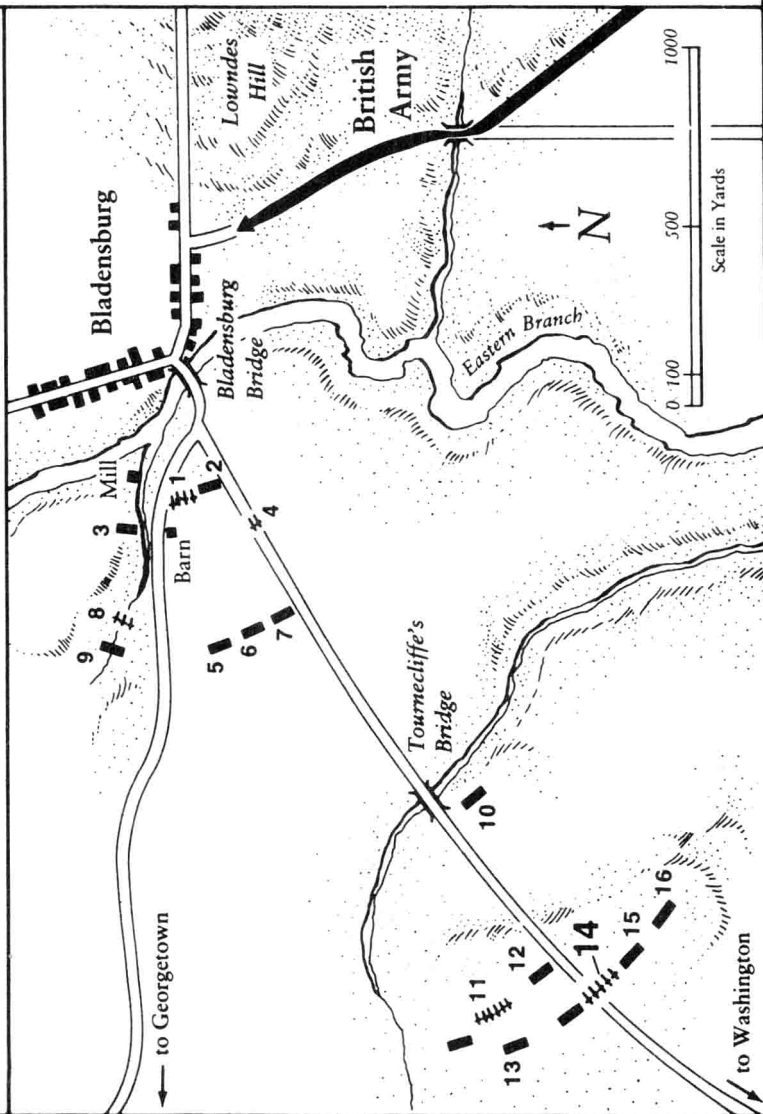
There were many gifted, compassionate, high-minded men in this party more than capable of leading the country. Their opposition to the war, an opposition grounded in short-term economic gain, led them to question the foundation of the Union.

THE REPUBLICAN PARTY Actually, they were called Republicans or Democratic-Republicans. During 1814 they were usually referred to as Republicans, but they were far closer to our present-day Democratic Party, which is keen to claim them as ancestors since Thomas Jefferson was their leading light. They distrusted a strong central government. "That government governs best which governs least." They believed that leadership should be cultivated in all the classes. They presented themselves as the party of the masses, but there were few poor men as leaders in the Republican Party. Then, as now, politics is a rich man's vice. John Randolph always claimed that the real source of his hatred for Jefferson, and by extension Madison (whom he regarded as Jefferson's pygmy shadow), was that when Jefferson became President, he abandoned his principles and sought power for himself.

In manners and dress the Republicans tended to be less formal than their Federalist counterparts. They also cut their hair short.

In one of those sidelights of history, the Federalists wore their hair in queues and a proper gentleman needed to have his hair dressed every day. Consequently, most barbers were Federalists. This new-fangled notion of short hair cost them business.

THE BATTLE OF BLADENSBURG



ARMY POSITIONS

- 1 Baltimore artillery
- 2 Pinkney's riflemen
- 3 Doughty's riflemen
- 4 Wadsworth's guns
- 5 Sterett's 5th Regiment
- 6 Schurz's Regiment
- 7 Ragan's Regiment
- 8 Burch's guns
- 9 Laval's cavalry
- 10 Kramer's militia
- 11 Peter's guns
- 12 Scott's regulars
- 13 District militia
- 14 **BARNEY'S GUNS**
- 15 Marines & flotillamen
- 16 Beall's Regiment

PROLOGUE

4 June 1781

*I*t's curious how the color red jumps right out at you. The wing of a darting cardinal carries the eye aloft until it disappears into the trees. Odd then that the disciplined line of red-coated British soldiers marching through Hanover County, Virginia, went undetected on that hot summer day. Maybe they weren't undetected. Maybe the residents spied them and ran like hell. Or perhaps the hardworking farmers figured if they kept to their business, the British would keep to theirs. Why fire on farmers? No doubt, too, a few shrewd entrepreneurs traded with the enemy at night, far from prying eyes. It could be that some of those Hanover citizens sounded the alarm and protected one another. What is certain is that no one galloped ahead of the advancing column to warn John and Molly Payne.

The Paynes were Quakers and opposed the war. They opposed all war, even one as justified as an exhausting struggle for independence from Great Britain. Wearing plain clothes and using "thee" and "thou" when they spoke set them apart as much as did their determined insistence that no human being had the right to take another's life. The Quakers deserved what might befall them. At least, that's what the neighbors said. After all, if this grinding war was won, wouldn't the Quakers benefit from freedom from the British Empire just as much as those who bled for it?

Molly Payne's cousin, Patrick Henry, considered a bigmouth by some Virginians and a hero by others, owned the house she and her husband rented near Scotchtown.

Now that General Charles Cornwallis had plunged into Virginia after his depredations in the Carolinas, and Colonel Banastre Tarleton was raiding and burning along the James River, Patrick Henry was conveniently elsewhere. Just like a politician, his enemies said.

Molly Payne ignored the insults that were hurled at her firebrand cousin Patrick, whom she loved, and at her Quaker household. She performed the endless chores of farm life and of raising six children despite the threats and insults of neighbors, some of whom would ride into the fields to bait and torment John and her two eldest sons, Walter and Temple, who worked with their father.

Henry had said, “. . . give me liberty or give me death!” And on this clear, early summer day, death was moving toward the Paynes.

Dolley Payne, at thirteen, was stuck in the house helping her mother air out the bedding. She resented Walter and Temple for being out in the fields with their father. Anything was better than being stuck in the house. Isaac, eleven, adored his older sister, so she put that adoration to work. Coughing, he ended up shaking most of the bedspreads out the window.

Mother Amy, robust and smart as a whip, called from downstairs in her deep African contralto. “How you doin’, chile?”

“Fine,” Dolley replied as she watched Isaac choke on dust.

Dolley heard Mother Amy’s footsteps retreat from the stairs. She also heard the whinings of Lucy, aged three, and Anna, aged two. Children were such a bother, Dolley vowed never to have them. She wasn’t going to get married either and she did not keep this opinion to herself. Mother Amy rolled her eyes when Dolley protested her many views. Molly Payne, like most mothers, couldn’t resist being drawn into battle by her oldest daughter. The more she lectured Dolley on the appropriate goals of a young woman, a member of the Society of Friends, the more Dolley disagreed with her. Her father didn’t even try to argue with his determined offspring.

Mother Amy walked back to the stairs. “It’s awfully quiet up there.”

Dolley appeared at the top of the stairs with pillowcases draped over her arms. “We don’t want to give Mother a headache.”

Mother Amy put her hands on her hips when the black-haired,