THE PRESIDENT'S LADY

A Novel about
Rachel and Andrew Jackson

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Irving Stone's
GREAT LOVE STORY
The President's Lady

General Andrew Jackson was rugged and courageous as the young land for which he fought. Now men said he should be—must be—more than a hero: he must be President.

♥ ♥

But there was something darkening his brilliant future—a scandal which would not be buried. It concerned a beautiful woman named Rachel, whom some called an adulteress, whom Andrew Jackson loved with a passion even stronger than his desire for glory. That passion would change the course of America's destiny.

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"No writer of fiction could desire more fascinating and romantic characters than Mr. Stone draws from history." —*Books*

THE PRESIDENT'S LADY

A Novel about
Rachel and Andrew Jackson

by IRVING STONE

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THIS IS A BIOGRAPHICAL NOVEL; it differs from a historical novel in that it does not introduce fictional characters against a background of history, but instead tells the story through the actual people who lived it and helped make it happen. The history to be found within its pages is as authentic and documented as several years of intensive research, the generous assistance of the historians and librarians in the field, and literally thousands of books, magazines, pamphlets, newspapers, diaries, public records, correspondence and collections of unpublished memoirs and doctoral theses can make it. At the back of the book the interested reader will find a bibliography of some hundred and fifty volumes actually used in the construction of this novel.

The interpretations of character are of course my own; this is not only the novelist's prerogative but his obligation. Much of the dialogue had to be recreated, but every effort has been made to create it on the basis of individual character, personality, temperament, education, idiosyncrasy, as well as recorded conversations and dialogue, memoirs, diaries, letters and published accounts by relatives, friends, associates, even of detractors and enemies. The language of the day was more flowery and formal than our own; I have attempted to tell the story in a simpler English, but I have striven constantly to make

certain that the difference is one of words, and never of thought, feeling or meaning.

I wish to acknowledge the constant help afforded me by such Jackson and Tennessee historians as Marquis James, whose definitive and highly readable biography of Andrew Jackson is the authority in the field; Alfred Leland Crabb, who took countless hours away from his double task of teaching and writing to tackle difficult research problems; Gerald W. Johnson, for permission to quote from his life of Jackson; Allan Nevins, who helped guide my attitudes toward the characters in this story; Robert T. Quarles, Tennessee State Archivist, who made a special study for me on the early Tennessee militia; Dr. Dan M. Robison, Tennessee State Librarian, who helped with the research; and to Paul I. Wellman for stimulating my interest in the Jackson story. Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr.'s study of the older Jackson was a constant help.

In Tennessee I am indebted to Jordan Stokes III, who introduced me to the Cumberland Valley and looked up many obscure legal records; Stanley F. Horn sent me special material on the Hermitage; Mrs. John Trotwood Moore made available to me many of the Donelson family documents, as did Mary Hooper Donelson Jones. Louis D. Wallace sent me publications of the Tennessee State Department of Agriculture; the Ladies' Hermitage Association, Mrs. Robert F. Jackson, Regent, was helpful in detailing the personal possessions of the Jacksons at the Hermitage, in particular the library. In Los Angeles I am indebted to Dr. Emil J. Krahulik for material on obstetrics in the beginning of the nineteenth century; Dr. George McCollister afforded me information on animal husbandry; Louis M. Brown helped me with a study of the marriage, separation and divorce laws in America at the end of the eighteenth century. In Washington, D.C., Maurice Paris was indispensable in my work among the Jackson papers in the Library of Congress; Brigadier General Eustace M. Peixotto, U.S. Army, Ret., made a study for me at the Library

of Congress of the military books that would have been available to Andrew Jackson in 1792.

I am deeply indebted to the Library of Congress and the Carnegie Institute, both of Washington, D.C.; to the Library of the University of California at Los Angeles, which gathered old and rare books for me from all over America; and to the Joint University Library, Nashville, Tennessee; to the libraries of the Universities of Kentucky, Virginia, Minnesota, California, for their co-operation in lending me these books.

IRVING STONE

June 6, 1951

♥ *Book* ONE ♥

THEY EMERGED from the dark woods and were suddenly in the hot September sunshine. At the bottom of the hill their horses stopped to drink from the shallow stream.

"Would you like to rest for a spell, Rachel, and freshen? We'll be home by sundown."

"I'd rather push on, Samuel, if it's the same to you."

He seemed relieved. Why was her own brother so constrained with her? No matter how serious the charges, she had expected support from her family.

They crossed the bottom lands and made their way up the trail to a timbered knob. She paused for a moment to let the cool wind of the uplands blow through her abundant black hair, refreshing her. For the first time in the four days since they had left Harrodsburg she began to feel clearheaded.

It's strange, she thought, during the long week that it took for my husband's message to reach the Cumberland and for my brother to come for me, I was too wretched to worry about anybody but myself. Yet the moment we were on the trail for home I began to think about Samuel and how hard he has taken my misfortune. If I greet my mother and brothers and sisters with the same stricken face I showed to Samuel, I'll make them all as wretched as I was.

I must think this thing through, come to some sort of understanding with myself before we reach home. Was I really guilty of misconduct? If so, how? If I wasn't guilty, then why has this happened to me? I've got to dig down to the root, no matter how bitter it may be to chew on.

She looked across at her brother, the change in her mood

communicating itself to him. She had a mirror in her saddlebag, but she had no need for one at this moment: she and Samuel, who was a year younger, were alike as twins. She saw his warm brown eyes, so quick to pain and hurt, proffering her a tiny tentative smile; the thin, curved black eyebrows; the small but immaculate white teeth, showing between the expressive lips; the thick black hair, worn over the ears, pulled back tight and tied low on the neck with a thong; his contour, inclined to exposed roundness, unprotected against the world. He had not been judging her; his confused and troubled expression had been but a true reflection of her own.

Though she had not seen her family for three years there had never been any question in her mind as to which one of her seven brothers would make the dangerous trip to fetch her. They were the youngest and gayest of the Donelson family; when her father was home he had taught her to read and write, but when he was away on surveying trips or treaty-making with the Indians, she and Samuel had studied together from the leather-bound handwritten arithmetic book in which they learned about division of decimals and the double rule of three. Samuel had been clever with books, and their father, who was an intensely religious man, had imagined that at long last he had a son who would follow in the footsteps of his great-grandfather, the clergyman who had helped to found the first Presbyterian church in America.

"Why has he done this to you, Rachel?" Samuel cried out, released at last to discuss their difficulty. "What was his provocation?"

"Provocation? Well, a letter. Sent from Virginia to Crab Orchard, to be delivered to me secretly. Lewis intercepted it."

"But what could be in such a letter?"

"I never saw it. According to Lewis, a proposal that I elope with Peyton Short to Spanish Territory. Also a credit for me to buy anything I might need for a trip down to New Orleans."

Samuel gazed at her in bewilderment.

"When did all this nonsense start?"

Tears came into her eyes. She said to herself, Samuel is right; perhaps if I could find my way back to the beginning of our troubles . . . When did they start?

Probably at the house-raising bee to which Lewis had taken her at Bardstown, when he had suddenly become enraged because she was laughing heartily at a story told by one of his friends, an amusing fellow who insisted upon keeping his lips close to his listener's ear. Lewis had come to her side, yanked her unceremoniously by the arm and taken her away from the party.

Before their marriage her husband had told her that he loved her for her bubbling good spirits, for the way she came into a room filled with people who were feeling dull or unhappy and by her very warmth and genuine liking for folks somehow made them come alive. Then why had he turned against her?

She shook her head angrily, provoked with herself for being unable to reach disciplined conclusions. But when in her twenty-one years had she needed to be logical and disciplined in her thinking?

It had not been very long after the abrupt withdrawal from the party at Bardstown that Lewis Robards began accusing her of being too friendly with the young men of the neighborhood and with those who frequented the Robards home. Had she smiled too warmly at greeting this one? Her husband had said so in unmistakable terms later that night. Had she danced with too much vivacity at her first anniversary party? Lewis's face had gone purple with rage when he locked the door of their bedroom and turned to accuse her. Had she listened too sympathetically to a newcomer's account of his difficulties in adjusting himself to the rude frontier life in Kentucky? But she had been interested in the young chap and the recounting of his hardships for he had come from within a few miles of the old Donelson home in Virginia.

After each quarrel she had lain awake saying to herself. If Lewis no longer likes me to be friendly, then I must be more reserved. If he doesn't want me to dance or sing, I will be quiet.

She would mind her resolution for a number of days, then forget herself and be gay with old friends, tell stories and let her laughter ring out . . . and Lewis would join in the funmaking, his arm fondly about her; until a day or a week later, when he would again seize upon some harmless incident to stage a humiliating scene in public.

But her real difficulties had not begun, she remembered, until there were a series of Indian attacks around Harrodsburg, with a half dozen killings. Lewis's mother, who had managed the plantation since her husband's death, decided they had better take in a few young men who were experienced in the ways of defending a stockade.

The first boarder was a plump, florid-faced lawyer from Virginia, impetuous, and with a rather loud voice. Peyton Short was a man who liked to talk, it didn't matter what the subject, and he had chosen Rachel as the object of his monologues. She had not thought him clever, but she understood that talking, even at random, eased his loneliness. On warm summer evenings the Robards family, which now in-

cluded Lewis's brother George and his wife, sat out on the front porch; Peyton Short usually managed to pull his chair up close to Rachel's to tell of the day's doings. Lewis became uneasy.

"Rachel, couldn't you avoid him? He's so confoundedly . . . present."

"Yes, I'll try."

But she found that Mr. Short was not the kind of man one could easily avoid. One evening Lewis came back from the slave quarters to find them alone on the dark porch; her mother-in-law had just gone inside, and Rachel was looking for an opening in the encircling ring of words. Accusing her of having a tête-à-tête, Lewis went straightway to his mother and demanded that Peyton Short be put out of the house. Mrs. Robards refused to listen to what she called his "patent foolishness." Nor did Lewis feel any need to keep his private affairs to himself; everyone in the neighborhood knew that he was jealous of Peyton Short.

They had little peace until John Overton came to live with them. He was a distant cousin of the Robards, homely in a winsome fashion, a little fellow with straw-colored hair and a pale skin, possessor of a dry sense of humor which for a fair time served as an anodyne to the distressed household.

Then, for Rachel, a new element entered into Lewis's jealousy: now his outbursts seemed to bear no relationship to the immediate goings-on: his most violent attacks came when she had not exchanged ten words with Peyton Short in as many days. Once Short stopped her, when her eyes were red, and said:

"You'll never find happiness with a man like Lewis Robards. He has neither the sense to love you nor the pride to protect you. But not all men are such fools, Mrs. Robards."

She had not understood his words; in truth she had not listened. But a few weeks later, after Peyton Short had gone home to Virginia, Lewis had burst in upon her, thrusting the crumpled Peyton Short letter into her face.

She reined in her horse, feeling ill, as though she were back in her room at the Robards house at the beginning of those days of waiting, waiting for any one of the paralyzing eventualities: news from Virginia that her husband had been killed in the duel to which he had challenged Short; word that her family had received her husband's letter requesting that someone be sent to fetch her, but had decided not to interfere; that she would have to remain unwanted in a house where her husband had renounced her; or that one of her brothers would arrive and take her away, to . . . what?

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Samuel helped her off the horse. She sat down at the base of a big tree, leaning her head against it. Her brother kneeled in front of her, wiping the perspiration from her brow with his unbleached cotton handkerchief.

"Are you taken bad, Rachel?"

"Just give me a few moments to rest, Samuel."

"Is there something I can do for you? A drink of water, maybe?"

"I'll be all right."

They were now only a few miles from the Donelson stockade. She understood why Samuel had been unable to ask questions or offer sympathy: separation of husband and wife had never happened in their part of the country. On a frontier where all relationships were based on confidence, where men were of necessity away for months at a time and the hospitality of their homes often meant survival to settlers moving westward on the trails, she had been judged unworthy of this basic trust.

Everyone on the Cumberland would know that she had been repudiated. How badly had she injured her family? What would be her position among her friends and neighbors? Would she be an outcast?

She could see these uncertainties reflected in Samuel's eyes as he leaned over and smoothed her hair back from her forehead. She simply could not reach home in this state; yet there were just a few more miles before they started climbing down the rim into the Cumberland basin.

Often in the past four days she had imagined that she was thinking her way through to the core of the problem, but it always eluded her. No matter how severe she might be in her self-judgment, blaming herself for each of Peyton Short's poor jokes at which she had laughed, she still could find nothing in her attitude that logically should have led to her present predicament. It almost seemed as though this was something that had happened to her from the outside, and to which she was not a party.

Very well then, if the original cause did not lie in herself, where did it lie? In Peyton Short, surely, for having written such a foolish letter; but hadn't there been two years of intermittent quarrels before Short arrived at the Robards house?

Forcing her mind backward torturously, she compelled herself to remember the times her husband's jealous outbreaks

had come when the family had seen no outsiders; how at such times Lewis had simply refetched old accusations. She had wondered why he had brought up these largely forgotten matters; once she had asked him this question specifically. He had not answered.

Now fragments began to fit together, broken bits of action and explanation, basic uneasinesses. One of her husband's characteristics was to go away for a night, giving an offhand reason or excuse. But all along she had had an inkling of the handsome young mulatto who had been a house servant during the years before their marriage; at intervals she had surprised a fleeting smile on the girl's face, had caught something intangible between them as Lewis issued an order and the girl silently accepted it. She realized now she had sensed the bitter truth . . . even though she had rejected the evidence. By the same token, couldn't that be the reason for Lewis's conduct? She relived the scene in her upstairs bedroom, with Lewis shouting, "I've written your mother to send someone to get you out of my house. And I'm leaving tonight for Virginia to kill Peyton Short!"

Mrs. Robards had taken Rachel in her arms and turned to her son with blazing eyes to tell him that he had gone stark mad. Lewis's older sister insisted that Rachel had never given Peyton Short anything but hospitable courtesy. Jack Jouitt, her husband, had tried to calm Lewis by telling him that he was the only one in all Kentucky ludicrous enough to believe that Rachel Donelson Robards could be guilty of any part of this clandestine affair. John Overton had said in his shy manner: "Lewis, I could write you a letter tonight inviting you to join me in horse stealing and murder, but that would hardly make you a horse thief or a murderer." But it was Mrs. George Robards who had said coldly to Lewis, "All this arises from your own improper conduct."

Rachel rose, walked unevenly to where the horses were drinking, and stood with one hand grasping her saddle, the other clenched tight as there rushed into her mind the formerly unrelated evidence: her husband had left her side, sometimes even their bed, to go out to the slave quarters; inevitably when he had returned he had accused her of a crime against their love and marriage . . . transferring to his wife his own capacity for betrayal.

Her hand fell from the saddle and she stood with her head lowered. After a time a feeling of relief came over her: if she could not live with her husband, she could at least live with herself; she could face her family and her neighbors and friends. Her husband had hurt her, hurt her severely, but she