

Praise for *The Traitor's Wife*

"I consider this to be the debut of a major writer of historical fiction."

—Mary Higgins Clark

"If you read one book this year, make it Allison Pataki's *The Traitor's Wife*. Few authors have taken on America's Revolutionary War so convincingly, and this story of Benedict Arnold's wife will appeal to lovers of historical fiction everywhere. Highly, highly recommended!"

—Michelle Moran, international bestselling author
of *Madame Tussaud*

"Allison Pataki's captivating debut novel examines history's most famous tale of treachery through a woman's eyes. Meticulously written and well-researched, this story will transport you back to the American Revolution and keep you turning pages with both its intrigue and love story. *The Traitor's Wife* is a well-told tale."

—Lee Woodruff, author, blogger, and television personality

"*The Traitor's Wife* is a gripping novel steeped in compelling historical detail. Pataki writes lyrically and succeeds in bringing to life, and humanizing, notorious characters from our nation's past. Ultimately a story about honor and heart, readers will have a hard time putting this book down."

—Aidan Donnelly, author of *Life After Yes*

"Allison Pataki has given us a great gift: a powerful story of love and betrayal, drawn straight from the swiftly beating heart of the American Revolution. Replete with compelling characters, richly realized settings, a sweeping plot, and a heroine who comes to feel like a dear, familiar friend, *The Traitor's Wife* is sure to delight readers of romance and lovers of history alike."

—Karen Halvorsen Schreck, author of *Sing For Me*

THE TRAITOR'S WIFE



A Novel

THE WOMAN BEHIND BENEDICT ARNOLD
AND THE PLAN TO BETRAY AMERICA



ALLISON PATAKI



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*“To beguile the time, look like the time;
Bear welcome in your eye, your hand, your tongue:
Look like the innocent flower,
But be the serpent under it.”*

—Lady Macbeth,
William Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*

*“Love to my country actuates my present conduct,
however it may appear inconsistent to the world,
who very seldom judge right of any man’s actions.”*

—Excerpt of a letter from Benedict Arnold to
George Washington, September 24, 1780

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PROLOGUE



“All Is Lost”

September 24, 1780

West Point Fort, New York

***T**HE TALL ONE, General George Washington, sent word that he would be late to breakfast. I wonder—is this the first fraying border of a carefully stitched plan about to unravel? Or, is it simply a straightforward message: The colonial commander is running behind schedule, have your cook and your lady plan accordingly. I thank the messenger, a dark-haired favorite of the general, a Mr. Alexander Hamilton, and return to the pantry. But this change to the schedule seems to portend a larger inevitability. My insides twist as the suspicion takes root, taunting me—my mistress is going to fail.*

“What’s he up to, postponing the whole breakfast?” Mrs. Quigley sulks under a cloud of flour but keeps kneading the dough. “Now the loaf will burn, the tea will oversteep, and the peaches will attract flies.”

“He’s the commander of the Continental Army. I suspect that General Washington has faced more formidable foes than a few flies in his peaches.” Mr. Quigley, my master’s butler, fidgets with the pewter buttons of his coat as he scrutinizes his reflection in the silver teapot.

“He’ll think us a bunch of uncivilized country bumpkins!” Mrs. Quigley snaps back at her husband. The white curls that escape her bun are now even lighter as wayward wisps of baking flour settle in them, like one of Mistress’s powdered wigs.

“There, there, Constance.” The old man pats a hand on her back. “All will be well. I’ll go inform Master Arnold of the delay.” Mr. Quigley exits the smoky kitchen, and I follow in his trail. I do not have it in me to tell the old man how wrong he is.

The disruption to the schedule does not upset my mistress, who awoke this morning in fine spirits.

“How could I be anything but cheery today?” She yawns as I draw the curtains aside, letting in the gentle sunlight of a warm September morning, ripe with the aroma of the swollen peaches that hang heavy in her orchard below. She and her husband, at last, are just days away from attaining their dreams. The prestige and wealth that have so long evaded them, dancing like a seductive mistress only to recede back behind her veil, are finally within reach. No, nothing will ruin my lady’s merry mood today.

When the second messenger arrives on horseback, Mistress hears the frenzied pace of the horse hooves, throbbing like the Native’s drumbeat, outside her open window.

“Another rider? Goodness, we must be the busiest home on the Hudson River this morning.” Mistress chuckles, tugging at the loose sleeves of her white linen nightdress. “Don’t they know we are set to receive Washington and his party for breakfast this morning? You’d think they could withhold these errands for at least one day.” She sighs, her features fresh from rest, beautiful beneath the frame of loose blond curls. “Better go see what they want.” She directs me with a nod and I leave her room, making my way down the narrow wooden staircase.

"Scoot, pup." I edge the dog aside from the door. From my perch on the front step, I shield my eyes and stare up the shaded post road. The rider emerges from the dappled cover of the thick trees into the stark early-morning light. My heart lurches involuntarily at the memory of another morning, when another rider had trotted up this trail. How that soldier had been here to see me. But I cannot allow myself to grow hazy in daydreaming, not today.

I notice that this man is not liveried in the General's crest, and therefore does not come from Washington's camp. He approaches the house at alarming speed, urging his weary horse forward with the ruthless spurs of his dusty boots. He halts just feet from me, his horse breathless, the rider looming over me like one of St. John's horsemen come to warn us of the end of the world. I straighten up to my full height as the man alights from the horse, landing in a cloud of churned-up dirt, uniform filthy, hair matted with sweat.

"Can I help you?" I stand, sentry-like, before the front door of the farmhouse.

"I need to speak with Major General Benedict Arnold." The man, still gasping for air, careens toward the house, dust surrounding him like a shroud. "Water my horse, miss. I must speak to the General!" The man hands me the bridle and staggers toward the front door without another word.

I hear the commotion in the front of the house as this lone rider calls out the master's name: "Where is General Benedict Arnold? Urgent message for Benedict Arnold from the south Hudson."

I tie this man's horse to the post out front and glide noiselessly back into the house, positioning myself out of sight at the top of the stairway. I hear my master approach the messenger in the drawing room. His telltale plodding on the wooden floor—lopsided, uneven—due to the war wound that has forever crippled him and

rendered his left leg useless. Muffled sounds as the master of the house greets the messenger, his voice like gravel as he chides his subordinate.

“What is your aim, man? Barging in on us like this on the morning we are to receive His Excellency George Washington, and with the lady of the house not yet arisen and dressed?”

The messenger answers through uneven breath. “I assure you, Major General, you will pardon my abruptness when you see the message I’m delivering. I was ordered to deliver it posthaste.”

“Good heavens, from where are you coming?” My master’s voice now betrays his alarm.

“North Castle Fort, down the Hudson. A full day’s ride, sir.”

“Give it here, then.” I hear papers being ruffled as they change hands. Silence follows, with just the sound of the morning birdsong to accompany the scene unfolding inside the farmhouse.

Then the master’s gait, again lopsided, but with an urgency I haven’t heard in years. He soon reaches the stairs, causing me to flee back into my mistress’s room.

“What is it?” Her eyes widen as I dash across the threshold of her sunlit chamber.

“Master’s coming!” is all I have time to say. We hear his rapid approach; using his impressive upper body strength, he’s pulling himself up the stairs. The floorboards groan beneath his boots as he climbs. I look to my lady, and her features are horror-struck as we understand each other. No words are needed between us after all these years.

“But surely it’s not . . . it can’t be?” Mrs. Arnold fidgets with the bed-covers, deliberating whether to rise or remain abed.

“Peggy.” Arnold bounds through the door, his hulking frame atremble in the doorway. Struggling to breathe, he gasps, “They’ve found us out! All is lost, all is lost. We’re unearthed.” His face tells me that he

struggles just as much as my lady does to make sense of the words, even as his lips utter them. And then, as quickly as he entered, General Arnold exits back out my lady's doorway. And I am left alone, in this room, with nothing but my lady and her shrill wails.

"BENEDICT!" she cries after him. "BENEDICT ARNOLD!"