



DEAR AMERICA

*The Diary of  
Abigail Jane Stewart*



*The Winter of  
Red Snow*

KRISTIANA GREGORY

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While the events described and some of the characters in this book may be based on actual historical events and real people, Abigail Jane Stewart is a fictional character, created by the author, and her diary and its epilogue are works of fiction.  
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*For  
Tim, Catherine,  
and Matthew Walker*



that froze on the fence, but made mud in the road. Our guests arrived by noon: Mrs. Hewes, Mr. and Mrs. Walker and their three little ones, and a neighbour who had lost his wife last month. At the table Papa welcomed everyone while Elisabeth and I helped Mama set the bowls on, then he folded his hands for prayer.

“This day is for Thanksgiving and Praise,” he began, all heads bowed. I stood by his chair, one eye open to make sure Sally didn’t pick at the pies. He prayed that our Army would be able to keep the British away and he prayed for our health—I knew he was thinking about Johnny but wanted not to say it out loud. “Amen!” came the voices, and quickly the plates were passed around. Congress has set this day—December 18—as a new tradition for all patriots (that’s us) to give thanks to God for the many blessings He has given America.

*December 19, 1777, Friday*

I woke to sleet hitting the window and another sound I’d not heard before.

A drumbeat.

Papa came in from milking and said, “The soldiers are coming.”

Elisabeth, Sally, and I hurriedly ate our porridge, then wrapped ourselves in our cloaks and scarves. Mama watched from the window as we ran into the road. There on the wind from the south came the drumbeat, several drums now and the high trilling of fifes.

“I want to go see the soldiers,” Sally said. But Papa said we must stay by our fence.

“It’s too cold,” he said, as big flakes of snow began to fall. The fields were turning white and the road looked like frosting with chocolate showing through.

Twice we went inside to warm ourselves, for the wind cut through our clothes. Finally through the gray we saw them. Three officers on horseback led. We ran outside to cheer, but the men were quiet and thin. The sight of them took my breath away.

“They have no shoes,” Elisabeth whispered.

We watched for several minutes as they passed by. We were unable to speak.

Their footprints left blood in the snow.

As I write this upstairs, my candle low and our room cold, I think I shall never again complain. For many hours we watched the soldiers march single file into our valley. Hundreds and hundreds were

barefoot, the icy mud cutting their feet. Some had rags wrapped around their legs because they had no trousers . . . no trousers, imagine! Mama cried to see their misery. Without thinking, I ran up to a boy — he seemed to be Elisabeth’s age — whose arms were bare. I threw my cloak over his shoulders and the look of relief in his eyes is something I shall never forget.

Sally gave her mittens, and Papa wrapped his scarf around the neck of one poor boy playing a fife. As the soldiers passed I saw other families had done the same — if the Quakers had, I know not — but I recognized Mrs. Potter’s cloak, her blue one with red trim, and someone had draped a shawl over a small drummer boy. So many were coughing and had runny noses. Elisabeth said, “Can we not please bring some of them in to warm by our fire?”

When we saw the horseman riding back and forth among the men we knew him to be the Commander in Chief, George Washington. His cape fell below his saddle and his tricorn was white from snow. I shall remember him always. He called continually to his soldiers, words of encouragement, and he had a most dignified bearing.

Now as I look down from my window, I see their campfires among the trees, hundreds of tiny lights flickering through Valley Forge. The wind is howling and blowing snow. Those poor men, how shall they sleep in such cold with no shelter?

*December 20, 1777, Saturday*

It snowed last night.

Sally and I ran and slipped back and forth from the house to the barn to make a path. The snow is almost to my knees. In the barn while Papa milked, I plaited Brownie's tail so it would not swish into Papa's face. I asked Papa why so many soldiers have no shoes and why their clothes are tattered.

"They've been marching for several months, Abigail," he said. "Until the Redcoats return to England our Army shall have no rest."

Since I no longer have my cloak, I wrap myself in a blanket to go outside. Papa took us in the wagon to look across the valley. Some tents were up and there were smoky fires where men huddled. Paths between the tents were streaked red.

Bath night for all, even Johnny. Mama dipped him in the warm water and he let out a wail.

*December 21, 1777, Sunday*

Church. Mama stayed home to keep Johnny warm. It was dark and snowy out. We passed General Washington's large tent—a marquee, Papa called it. It was pitched under the bare branches of a black gum tree. We were surprised to hear a wonderful chorus of men singing a hymn.

Late afternoon, two officers came to our door and handed Papa a note. It was dated yesterday and signed "G. Washington." Papa read it, folded the paper carefully, and put it in his vest pocket. "I shall do what I can, Lieutenant."

When the men climbed into their saddles, Papa closed the door against the cold and turned to us. "The Commander in Chief needs our help," he said. "He is telling those who live within seventy miles of his Headquarters to thresh one half of our grain by the first day of February and the other half by the first day of March."

Papa looked into the fire, his hand on the mantel. "If we shant obey, the Army quartermaster will seize what we have and pay us only the value of straw, not grain."