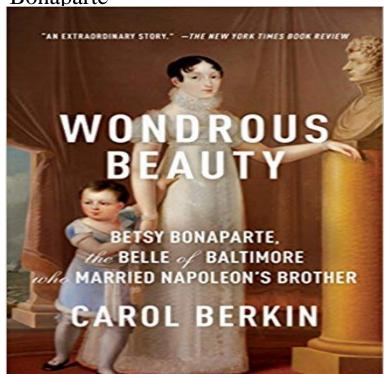
Wondrous Beauty: The Life and Adventures of Elizabeth Patterson Bonaparte



From the award-winning historian and author of Revolutionary Mothers (Incisive, thoughtful, spiced with vivid anecdotes. Dont miss it. Thomas Fleming) and Civil War Wives (Utterly fresh . . . Sensitive, poignant, thoroughly fascinating.Jay Winik), here is the remarkable life of Elizabeth Patterson Bonaparte, renowned beautiful woman the most nineteenth-century Baltimore. whose marriage in 1803 to Jerome Bonaparte, the youngest brother of Napoleon Bonaparte, became inextricably bound to diplomatic and political histories of the United States, France, and England.In Wondrous Beauty, Carol Berkin tells the story of this audacious, outsized life. We see how the news of the union infuriated Napoleon and resulted in his banning the then pregnant Betsy Bonaparte from disembarking in any European port, offering his brother the threat of remaining married to that American girl and forfeiting all wealth and poweror renouncing her, marrying a woman of Napoleons choice, and reaping the benefits. Jerome ended the marriage posthaste and was made king of Westphalia; Betsy fled to England, gave birth to her son and only child, Jeromes namesake, and was embraced by the English press, who boasted that their nation had opened its arms to the cruelly abandoned young wife. Berkin writes that this naive, headstrong American girl returned to Baltimore a wiser, independent woman, refusing to seek social redemption or a return to obscurity through a quiet marriage to a member of Baltimores merchant class. Instead she was courted by many, indifferent to all, and initiated a dangerous game of politicsa battle for a pension from Napoleonwhich she won: her pension from the French government arrived each month until Napoleons exile. Using Betsy Bonapartes extensive letters, the author makes clear that the belle of Baltimore disdained Americas obsession

with moneymaking, its growing ethos of democracy, and its rigid gender roles that confined women to the parlor and the nursery; that she sought instead a European society where women created salons devoted to intellectual lifewhere she was embraced by many who took into their confidence, such as Madame de Stael, Madame Recamier, the aging Marquise de Villette (goddaughter of Voltaire), among othersand where aristocracy, based on birth and breeding rather than commerce, dominated society. Wondrous Beauty is a riveting portrait of a woman torn between two worlds, unable to find peace in eitherone a provincial, convention-bound new America; the other a sophisticated, extravagant Old World Europe that embraced freedoms, a Europe ultimately swallowed up by decadence and idleness. A stunning revelation of an extraordinary age. From the Hardcover edition.

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