



# Sally Hemings

*Barbara Chase-Riboud*

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## **Sally Hemings** Barbara Chase-Riboud

The story, told in alternating time narratives, begins in 1831 when Sally is approximately sixty years old and is visited by a census taker called Nathan Langdon. With encouragement, Sally recounts her past to him. A past that begins when she passes into the ownership of her half-sister Martha Wyles who marries Thomas Jefferson. After Martha dies, Jefferson goes to Paris where he is joined by his two daughters. Elizabeth Hemings volunteers Sally as their maid, seeing it as Sally's chance for freedom as slavery has been abolished in France. Jefferson and Sally fall in love and she returns to America with him, on the promises that they will go back to France someday and that she will be the only mistress of his estate in Monticello. Both promises are broken when Jefferson accepts political office and allows his daughter to live at Monticello after her marriage breaks down. Sally realises that nothing has or ever will change for her. A fact borne out when Jefferson dies and his will does not free her, only her last two sons, from bondage. She has not only been held in bondage by the fact of slavery, but by love as well. She has been a possession of both and only she can free herself.

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