

SOMETHING  
WORTH DOING



*A Novel of an Early Suffragist*

JANE  
KIRKPATRICK

  
Revell

a division of Baker Publishing Group  
Grand Rapids, Michigan

© 2020 by Jane Kirkpatrick

Published by Revell  
a division of Baker Publishing Group  
PO Box 6287, Grand Rapids, MI 49516-6287  
www.revellbooks.com

Printed in the United States of America

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Kirkpatrick, Jane, 1946– author.

Title: Something worth doing : a novel of an early suffragist / Jane Kirkpatrick.

Description: Grand Rapids, Michigan : Revell, a division of Baker Publishing Group, [2020]

Identifiers: LCCN 2020004897 | ISBN 9780800736118 (paperback) | ISBN 9780800739249 (hardcover)

Subjects: GSAFD: Historical fiction. | Christian fiction.

Classification: LCC PS3561.I712 S66 2020 | DDC 813/.54—dc23

LC record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2020004897>

Scripture used in this book, whether quoted or paraphrased by the characters, is taken from the King James Version of the Bible.

This book is a work of historical fiction based closely on real people and events. Details that cannot be historically verified are purely products of the author's imagination.

Published in association with Joyce Hart of the Hartline Literary Agency, LLC.

20 21 22 23 24 25 26      7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Dedicated to the ever hopeful,  
especially Jerry

*A storm was coming  
But that's not what she felt.  
It was adventure on the wind  
And it shivered down her spine.*

*ATTICUS, THE POET*

# Character List

**Abigail Jane (Jenny) Scott Duniway**—daughter, wife, mother, farmer, teacher, milliner, novelist, owner/editor of *The New Northwest*, nationally known suffragist

**Benjamin Duniway**—husband of Abigail, horse trainer, farmer

## ABIGAIL'S SIBLINGS

**Mary Francis**—Fanny

**Margaret**—Maggie

**Harvey**

**Catherine**—Kate

**Harriet**

**John Henry**—Little Toot, Jerry

**Sarah Maria**—Maria

**Mary Gibson**—Ben's sister

\***Shirley Ellis**—friend of Abigail, wife, mother, divorcee, suffragist

**John Tucker Scott**—Patriarch of the Scott family

**Susan B. Anthony**—friend of Abigail, president of National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA)

## CHILDREN OF ABIGAIL AND BEN DUNIWAY

**Clara Belle**

**Willis**

**Hubert**

**Wilkie**

**Clyde**

**Ralph**

\***Harold Bunter**—suitor and nemesis of Abigail

\***Eloi Vasquez**—second husband of Shirley Ellis, California attorney

**Sarah Wallace**—member of Stephens-Murphy-Townsend wagon  
train and president of California suffragist association

\*fully imagined characters

# Prologue

**JUNE 1852**

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Her dreams of late had been of books with maps of unknown places. Jenny Scott wished she were dreaming now instead of sitting here beside the family wagon, a gushing stream to serenade them. They'd left Illinois two months previous—2 April 1852. She had written the date in the family journal she'd been assigned to keep as they crossed the continent. Since that first roll-out of wagons toward the west, Jenny traveled without maps. She needed them to help her reduce the fear and anxiety of the unknown; but she did not have them. Though only seventeen, she'd already learned that living required coming to terms with uncertainty—not that she did that well. She had lost another kind of map as well—the map of her mother.

A different kind of pain awaited this June afternoon.

“The agony will be worth it.” Jenny spoke with conviction as she eyed the fat needle her new friend blackened in the flame. Then, “Won't it?”

“It does have a sting,” Shirley Ellis said. “Fair warning.”

Jenny lifted the dark curls to hold them behind her ears. She

thought of her hair as unruly with its thickness and natural twists that made morning brushing a chore. She envied her brothers who kept their hair short, curls under control.

Kate, Jenny's twelve-year-old sister, patted Jenny's shoulder while Shirley continued. "Shakespeare had this done and even biblical Jacob gave a pair to Rachel way back when. The pain has to come before the glory."

"Ha," Jenny said.

"I'm here to comfort you," Kate said, "but I don't understand why you want to hurt yourself for fashion."

Ignoring her sister, Jenny took a deep breath. She sat on a three-legged stool they used to milk the cow. The stool did double duty as a seat for medical ministrations. Jenny squeezed her eyes shut. "Go ahead. Do it."

Kate pinched her sister's earlobe as hard as she could, then said to Shirley, "Now."

The pain of the needle seared. Her sister's pinching simply wasn't enough to dull the agony. But at least Jenny felt misery for something physical instead of the heartache she'd carried since the deaths. *Did I know that physical pain could distract from emotional hurting?*

She felt the blood trickle down her neck as Shirley pulled the needle out. "It's a good thing I have a strong stomach," Jenny said. Kate dabbed at Jenny's bleeding earlobe. They'd have to soak the handkerchief to rid it of the red. "Are you certain that Jacob gave Rachel a pair of earrings? What chapter and verse?"

"I don't really remember," Shirley said. She had thick, naturally arched eyebrows that framed her blue eyes. "It's too late for second thoughts, though if you don't put the pin through, it'll grow new flesh right over the hole." Shirley dabbed at Jenny's ear with a clean handkerchief, then wiped the needle, and now rolled it in the flame again until blackened.

"Ready," Jenny said.

She straightened her back. Kate pinched the other ear and Jenny

closed her eyes. The second piercing commenced. Her older sister Fanny, standing to the side, winced. It took a team.

“Finished. And you didn’t even faint,” Shirley said.

Kate dabbed at the blood on Jenny’s cheek, then held out the tourmaline-studded gold rings. “I’ll put them in for you.”

Jenny felt the metal push into her ears, surprised again at the sting and pain.

“You’ll have to twirl them a few times a day until they heal,” Shirley warned. “You don’t want the skin to attach itself to the rings.” She eyed the earrings now adorning Jenny’s ears. “They’re really pretty with that one gold gem in the middle of the disc. A good size too. Won’t draw too much attraction.”

“Isn’t attraction the point though?” Kate said.

“The point,” Jenny corrected, “is not adornment but memorializing. Momma loved these. She got them from Grandma who received them from her mother, and she left them to me.”

“I thought one of the stones like those we covered Momma’s grave with was your memorial keepsake. You insisted to Papa that you had to put that rock in the wagon.” Fanny dabbed Jenny’s other ear with a bit of whiskey kept only for medicinal purposes.

“You can’t have too many mementos, I say.” Shirley wiped the needle with the liquor, then put it back into her fabric sewing kit attached to her bodice.

“It’s more than a memento. Earrings and rocks and a cut of hair, they’re all ephemera, items of the historical record that are neither documents nor maps,” Jenny said. She touched her ear and winced.

“I’m sorry.” Kate leaned in.

“What’s a little smarting in memory of our momma who endured so much bringing us into the world, and then had to leave it so prematurely? She didn’t want to leave Illinois, you know. I heard her tell Papa that they’d always lived on a frontier, and now civilization was catching up to them so couldn’t they stay and enjoy it. Papa said no.” Tears welled in her eyes while her stomach clenched with anger. It wasn’t fair, it just wasn’t.

“Will you take some item for . . . your friend too?” Fanny asked. Her voice was gentle. A boy Jenny had met on the trail had drowned not long after their mother’s death.

“One earring for Momma and the other for him. And then no more.” She took the mirror Shirley handed her, turned her head from side to side to admire the earrings. “No more sadness. I’ve had enough.” She stood and with conviction declared, “I will control it.”

Their brother Harvey sauntered by as Jenny made her declaration of sending grief away. Harvey, with his good looks and opinions, walked backward away from them then, saying, “You can’t control anything, you females. Not a thing. Lucky for you us men protect you.”

“Ha!” Jenny shouted after him as he turned his back to them, striding off as though he owned the land, the stream—his future. “No one knows what they can accomplish until they undertake it.” Fanny, Shirley, and Kate nodded agreement.

And so Abigail Jane “Jenny” Scott set forth to do the best she could to prove her brother—and all men—wrong. Girls had power too. One day, she’d show them.

# PART 1

*The things nearby, not the things afar,  
Not what we seem, but what we are,  
These are the things that make or break,  
That give the heart its joy or ache.*

*INSCRIPTION IN AUTOGRAPH BOOKLET*



## ONE

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# Making Her Own Map

**APRIL 1853**

**WILLAMETTE VALLEY, OREGON TERRITORY**

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A spring rain pattered on the shake roof of the schoolhouse near the little settlement of Cincinnati, six miles south of Salem. To Jenny, it sounded like the clapping of children's gloved hands connecting in a steady, soothing rhythm. Jenny shook her thick curls of the mist she'd ridden through to get to the structure before her students arrived. Her first day of teaching had begun with fixing meals for boarders at her father's inn, then riding several miles warmed by the congratulations of her sisters. Despite less than a year of formal schooling back in Illinois, she'd passed the teacher's test and been hired. She'd board out with a district family who paid their child's fees by offering a bed and meals to the teacher during the week. She'd ride home on Friday to help again at the inn.

Her mother would be proud. It had been her mother's snippets of wisdom offered through the years while cornbread baked or she stitched a pantaloon that created Jenny's educational foundation. Either due to illness or her need to be home as the third oldest

child, Jenny had been less than a year inside an Illinois schoolhouse. It was her parents' love of reading, the many books and newspapers available to peruse, and her mother's conveying facts and figures through stories that had prepared Jenny for this day. Some of the newspapers, like the *Lily* that promoted women's issues or Horace Greeley's *New York Tribune* that railed against slavery, were considered unusual for their frontier family to acquire, but the Scott children had all been allowed to read them as soon as they were able.

For Jenny, education was critical for boys and girls to grow to make good choices and be wise citizens too. This schoolhouse was her arena to awaken minds to the possibilities of their lives even when others appeared to control their destiny. She controlled what would happen here, the minds she'd affect, yes, but personally, this job granted her a chance to draw her own independent map. It gave her a level of freedom she never saw her mother have. Anne Scott had birthed twelve children, lived to bury two, and once told Jenny she was sorry she had brought girls into the world, as their lot was harder than the boys and would always be. It had been a warning. As a respected teacher, Jennie would chart her own course. It was one of the few professions allowed a woman outside of the home. Operating a boardinghouse or a millinery made up the only other two. That *Lily* editor had risked more than her design of the bloomer costume by running a newspaper. Jenny was grateful her father let that broadsheet into their house, or perhaps he didn't realize a woman was at its head. But her mother did and she'd made sure Jenny knew it. Another snippet of sagacity perhaps.

A chill in the air moved Jenny to set the kindling to fire in the little stove. She was grateful that someone had not only chopped and stacked wood outside but had tented dry sticks over bits of pine needles and forest duff so the flame took without effort. Part of her teaching contract was that from now on, she would split the wood and stack it, start the fires, and remove the ashes as well as

maintain the inside and the surrounding grounds outside, sweeping pine needles from the stairs and even the roof if necessary. Cobwebs drifted from the corners, and she grabbed the straw broom and swept them and the floors. As she worked, she remembered the interview with the board of education. She'd kept her tongue when one of the farmers asked her if she had a beau or was using this opportunity to find a husband—as though that were the only goal of a woman's life.

*None of your business*, she'd wanted to say but smiled instead. "With one woman for every one hundred men in this Territory, I doubt I'd need a schoolhouse full of other men's—and women's—children to attract a husband. No, I'm delighted to teach little minds and to have a few coins to call my own." She thought her mother would be proud of her for controlling her sometimes in-temperate tongue. Truth was, she was torn about marriage. She liked the idea of falling in love, being swept away, but only wished to marry a man who saw value in a partner and not just be a "hand" in the drudgery of women's work that took so many women's lives at such a young age. Her parents had loved each other, she felt sure—but she'd wished her father had paid more attention to her mother's needs and waited a little longer before remarrying after her death. But he ruled the roost, as her mother often said. And because she'd let him, she accepted their journey west and it had taken her life.

Marriage could wait. Jenny had brushed off a few offers already, determined that they were more land-based than promising love. If an Oregon man married within a year of reaching the territory, his new wife could bring 160 acres into the marriage in her own name. Of course, as soon as she married, the control of it became her husband's. But it did expand the spouse's holdings. She made light of most of the proposals, encouraging them to seek a less willful mate. She didn't want to offend, but she certainly wasn't interested in expanding a man's wealth without at least a little love to go with it.

Dawn pushed its way into darkness, announcing she had time yet to scan the lessons she'd prepared using the one primer she'd snuck along on the journey west. Her father had restricted what the women could bring—including books and dishes—and never knew until they arrived that her sister's beau had bought their auctioned dishes—a set of Spode—and given them back to Fanny before they left. With tears, Fanny, her oldest sister, had sewed the butter plates, dishes, and cups into a feather bed so their father never knew that he slept on them. Jenny's book had survived, buried in the barrel of corn meal. A woman needed a little piece of home. At least their father hadn't broken the dishes when he discovered they'd defied his orders, as she'd heard some men had. He hadn't complained about the schoolbook, either.

Jenny rubbed her hands to warm them at the flame, reset the combs in her hair to control the curls. She counted the slates piled on the crude table that served as her desk. There were six, so if all the children attended, they'd have to share. With her first paycheck she'd buy two more. She'd have the students work on writing their names today so she could learn who they were and assess their skills. She planned to tell them stories and weave the lessons into them to hold their attention. It worked for her siblings. It had worked for her.

The sound of stomping boots on the pine stairs took her from the primer. *Must be an older student.* She straightened her back, ignoring the pain that lived in her spine.

She expected twelve students. At least that's what the board had told her she'd be responsible for, though she remembered one man's caveat. "Some days you might have more, if they bring a little brother or sister usually too young, but maybe their ma is sick and there's no one to look after them at home. Can you adapt?"

"I've six younger siblings—no, only five now." She swallowed. Willie had died in the Blue Mountains the year before. "Like any good western woman, I can corral them without a rope."

Today she'd see if that was true. If students arrived this early, she'd have to rise at 4:00 a.m. to stay ahead of them in their lessons.

"Welcome," she said as the door opened. Now she'd see what a day in her domain would hold and what kind of a creative map she could draw.