

JANE KIRKPATRICK

Author of *The Daughter's Walk*

A NOVEL

Where

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

Grateful acknowledgment is made to the Hulda Klager Lilac Gardens of Woodland, Washington, for the use of the photograph on page xi. Used by permission.

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READERS GUIDE

Based on a true story, Hulda Klager's life reminds us of both strength and generosity as she endured hardships in the midst of unique achievements. It's my hope that her life will inspire our own lives as we experience challenges and disappointments on our way to present joys.

1. What was Hulda Klager's first love? Family? Flowers? Faith? The challenges of crossbreeding? Hulda's father urges her to be faithful to her gift. Did Hulda have a gift or a calling, or were her interests and abilities merely passions that she pursued?
2. What do you think about Hulda's father's comment: "Some would say that meddling with nature isn't wise. Frank might agree—especially if the one meddling is a mother who should be content with looking after her family"? Was her father right? Was Hulda "meddling" with creation? Should a mother be content with raising her family?
3. On page xii, poet David Whyte is quoted: "I am thinking of faith now... / and what we feel we are / worthy of in this world." Do you have a passion or gift or calling that you have yet to pursue? What barriers stand in your way? Do the voices suggesting

that you are not worthy of that dream speak more loudly than you'd like? Was Hulda lonely in her pursuit? Did she feel she was worthy of the joy of accomplishment?

4. Hulda comments on the consequences of progress: The electric lighting at the exposition that faded the stars; her objection to indoor plumbing; the impact of steamships docking and ruining the riverbanks. Yet she sent her children away to pursue their education, celebrated the work of Luther Burbank making changes in food production, worked to have a crisper, bigger apple and 254 individual varieties of lilacs. How do you account for these contradictions in Hulda's character? Did they make her more human or more difficult to understand?
5. Suffering, and its consequences and causes, was a theme in this book. How did Hulda come to terms with the losses her family endured? Do you think that suffering can be a consequence of pursuing a dream? What role did Hulda's garden play in helping her deal with life's trials?
6. Barney Reed challenges Hulda's work and points out the tragedies in her life. She says, "It did trouble me that so powerful a God would let bad things happen. And I often did learn something when a tragedy struck. But did I have to suffer to learn the lesson?"

How would you answer Hulda's questioning? Does she eventually answer her own question? What did you think of her conclusions?

7. Do you agree with Hulda when she tells her sister, "Beauty matters.... God gave us flowers for a reason. I think so we'd pay attention to the details of creation and remember to trust Him in all things big or little, no matter what the challenge. Flowers remind us to put away fear, to stop our rushing and running and worrying about this and that, and for a moment have a piece of paradise right here on earth."
8. What role did the characters of Jasmine, Nelia, Ruth, Shelly, and Cornelia play in this story? Could Hulda's story have been told without them?
9. Where did Hulda draw her strength from to keep going after the deaths of so many in her life? after the flood? Where do you draw your strength from? Are there ways Hulda (and you) enhanced those tools to better face an uncertain future?
10. Dr. Karl Menninger once wrote that the single most important indicator of a person's mental health was generosity. Who was generous in this story? How did generosity bring healing to people of Hulda's world?
11. Did Hulda pay a price for her obsession? Would she say that the price was worth it? Do you think it was? Why or why not?

Huldie, don't deny the dreams. They're a gift given to make your life full. Accept them. Reach for them. We are not here just to endure hard times until we die. We are here to live, to serve, to trust, and to create out of our longings.



Jane often participates in book groups through speakerphone conversations. To have Jane “visit” your book group, contact her at www.jkbooks.com/Pages/contact.html, indicating the day and time, to see if Jane’s schedule permits her joining you. Please consider joining her *Story Sparks* newsletter for inspiration and the latest news of her writing and speaking events. Join at www.jkbooks.com.