



*One*  
GLORIOUS  
AMBITION



*The*  
COMPASSIONATE  
CRUSADE  
of DOROTHEA DIX

A NOVEL

JANE  
KIRKPATRICK

AUTHOR OF *The Daughter's Walk*

*One*  
GLORIOUS  
AMBITION

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# One GLORIOUS AMBITION

A NOVEL

*The* COMPASSIONATE CRUSADE  
*of* DOROTHEA DIX



WATERBROOK  
P R E S S

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All Scripture quotations and paraphrases are taken from the King James Version.

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.

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*To Dr. Dean Brooks and his compassionate daughters:  
Ulista, India, and Dennie*



## Cast of Characters

<i>Dorothea Dix</i>	New England child of the 1800s
<i>Charles and Joseph Dix</i>	Dorothea's younger brothers
<i>Madam Dix</i>	Dorothea's grandmother
<i>Joseph and Mary Dix</i>	Dorothea's parents
<i>Sarah and Mary Fiske</i>	Dorothea's aunt and cousin
<i>Anne Heath and the Fesser Family</i>	Dorothea's friends
<i>William Ellery Channing</i>	pastor of Federal Street Church in Boston
<i>Elizabeth Channing</i>	Channing's wife, friend and supporter of Dorothea
<i>Sarah Gibbs</i>	Channing's sister-in-law, friend and supporter of Dorothea
<i>George Emerson</i>	educator and friend of Dorothea
<i>Horace Mann</i>	educator, legislator, supporter of Dorothea
<i>Samuel Howe</i>	director of the School for the Blind, legislator
<i>Elizabeth and William Rathbone</i>	Dorothea's English friends

<i>Thaddeus Harris</i>	Dorothea's uncle
<i>Marianna Davenport Dix Cutter</i>	Dorothea's cousin
<i>Grace Cutter</i>	Dorothea's cousin
<i>John and Jane Bell</i>	Tennessee senator and his wife
<i>James and Sarah Polk</i>	president and first lady
<i>John Adams Dix</i>	legislator during Dorothea's campaign
<i>Abram Simmons</i>	an incarcerated person relieved of his reason
<i>Millard Fillmore</i>	vice president and president of the United States, friend and supporter of Dorothea's work
<i>Abigail and Abby Fillmore</i>	first lady and daughter of Millard Fillmore
<i>Cyrus Butler</i>	industrialist and philanthropist
<i>*Madeleine</i>	a mentally ill woman cared for by her brother
<i>*Charles</i>	a child in need of mental health care in Scotland

\* representative of patients Dorothea encountered

*If I am cold, they are cold; if I am weary,  
they are distressed; if I am alone, they are  
abandoned.*

DOROTHEA DIX

*Give me one glorious ambition for my life  
To know and follow hard after You*

MARK ALTROGGE,  
“ONE PURE AND HOLY PASSION”

*As ye have done it unto one of the least of  
these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.*

MATTHEW 25:40

PART

*One*

*One*

## Like Orphans in the Chaos

*1814*

*I*'m going to take care of us, so please don't cry." Dorothea thumbed the tears from her brother's blue-gray eyes, eyes the color of her own. "I'll make it better." He nodded, uncertain, she could tell.

The cold air, as stinging as finger slaps, bit at Dorothea's face as she waved one last time at her four-year-old brother, Charles, then pushed the door closed behind her and entered the Massachusetts dawn.

After two hours of walking, hoping the rain would stop, she shivered and her teeth chattered. Maybe this wasn't such a good plan. It was forty miles to Orange Court, their grandmother's house. A blast of wind rattled the elm trees and jerked late-clinging weeds from their branches, a few jabbing her already numb face. The snow-speckled grass proved better for walking, so she paralleled the muddy cart trail whenever she could. Eight miles

passed before she came to a small village. No one asked about a child trudging along alone. No one noticed a lonely child. Not even the smith hammering at his forge raised his eyes as she halted briefly, warming her hands, smelling the hot metal as it singed and splattered in the water. Everyone tended to their own lives, not worrying over any wayward children.

She had eight more miles to go before reaching a stage that could take her the next thirty miles or so to Boston. She knew the way. She'd taken coins from her father while he slept, just enough to get her to the city. Her ankles ached, and her feet were as stiff as hammers. Outside the village, she slipped in the mud, her thin-soled shoes caked with greasy earth. She twisted to catch her balance and couldn't and landed hard on her bottom. The rain gained force and pelted down, turning to snow, the white flakes silent as death. Why should she get up? Would it be so bad to escape into the cold of nothingness, forget this challenge of being alive and rescuing her brother? The cold could simply rock her to sleep.

A crow *caw-cawed* above her. Charles loved to watch the crows. *For you, Charles. I'll keep going for you.* She dragged herself onward toward the goal, praying she walked the right path.



“What do you want?” The woman’s eyes searched behind Dorothea, then back to her. “We’ve no need of rags to buy. And if we did, that would happen at the kitchen.” She began to close the heavy mahogany door. Dusk hovered at the eaves. This was the

second day of Dorothea's escape, and she had walked the last few miles in the snow beneath a pewter sky.

Dorothea thought she remembered the woman as the housekeeper, but it had been a few years since her last visit. "Please. I'd like to see Madam Dix."

"Madam Dix has no time for urchins."

"My name is Dorothea Dix. I'm her granddaughter."

"What?" The woman squinted. Dorothea hoped she could see the same high forehead, the firm chin that her grandfather said she had gained from her grandmother. Perhaps her enunciation, clear and precise, would remind her of Madam Dix.

"Please. I've come all the way from Worcester. I've been here before, with my parents, Joseph and Mary Dix. I know where the library is, where the clock sits in the hall."

The woman frowned. "Clock's been moved."

"My chin. It's a Lynde chin, my grandmother's." She touched her dirty gloves to her face. "See?"

The woman pressed her lips together and scowled. "Go around to the kitchen. I'll see if Madam Dix is willing to receive you."

Dorothea pulled her cloak around her neck and walked to the side of the brick mansion, across the snow-covered lawn, past the marble statues that marked the entrance to the garden that harbored the Dix pear tree, her grandfather's pride and joy. Before her grandfather's death, her family had come here when they had no food or lacked money for wood or had burned their last candles.

They'd throw themselves on her grandfather's mercy, asking for assistance, insisting that this time would surely be the last. For a few days there would be comfort and hours in the library and warm food when one was hungry. But soon they'd be on their way to whatever temporary housing arrangement her grandparents could make for her father and his family.

Her father might have been successful once. He'd trained at Harvard. But he lacked "drive," she heard her grandmother tell her father, Dorothea's face hot from hearing her father chastised. He'd even swapped land in Vermont for books. "Land," her grandmother said in disgust when she heard this, "is where wealth is." It was only because her parents had imposed themselves on friends in Worcester that she was close enough to get to her grandmother's. Then last evening, when her parents failed to notice how the "friend" let his fat fingers linger hot on Dorothea's shoulder while he praised her "pretty face" or spoke of how "mature and graceful" she was for one merely twelve, his eyes like a wolf's, his smile a licked lip, she had made her decision.

The kitchen door opened and the cook, a smile on her face, introduced herself as "Mehtable Hathorne. Call me Cookie," and motioned her inside. Dorothea saw the back of the housekeeper and she said "thank you" loud enough for the departing woman to hear. At least she was inside. Whether she would be allowed to stay, whether she could convince her grandmother to send for her brother and parents, that would be up to Dorothea's persuasive ways. She was inside Orange Court! Half the battle won.

"Where are your parents?" Dorothea's grandmother stood before her, black cap tied beneath her chin, her hands over a hickory stick she used as a cane. She was not much taller than Dorothea. "And Charles?"

"In Worcester. With friends. It's...it's not good there, Grandmamma. Not good at home either. Papa's...consuming again, and Mother is...sleepy and when she wakes, she's...wild-eyed and unpredictable. Or she doesn't seem to know Charles and I are even there. I have to cook and clean the sheets and wash his clothes and—"

"Complaints are unbecoming." The older woman's jaw set hard like the flat irons on the shelf behind her. The scent of onions cooking at the kitchen hearth brought water to Dorothea's mouth. Cookie bent to her work as though she were alone in the room.

"Tis not a complaint, Grandmamma, but bold truth. You always told me to tell the truth."

Her grandmother tapped her hand on the cane. "Take off that wet cloak and cap, Dorothea." The girl complied and pulled a knot of her thick chestnut hair behind her ear. "How did you get here, anyway?"

"I walked. And took the stage partway."

"Indeed. Well, what would you have me do then? I'm an old woman with limited resources. I can't take you all on."

"Take in Charles and me, then. We could bring in wood for you...and cook." She glanced at the cook's back. "I'd look after Charles. He's a bright boy, interested in many things." A knot

worked in her throat as she thought of her parents and how quickly she had stopped pleading for them. “We’d be no trouble, really, we wouldn’t. And you’d have...companionship.” Her grandmother only snorted. “If you took us all in, maybe Papa could help fix the shutters and he could look after Mama—”

“Companionship you say? What need have I with the companionship of undisciplined children?”

“There’ll be a third.” Dorothea dropped her eyes as she spoke. “It’s imperative that you help us now.”

“Imperative!” the older woman grunted.

Dorothea wasn’t sure if it was the idea that she had spoken indirectly of a pregnancy that distressed her grandmother or if the thought of yet another mouth to worry over in her second son’s life caused the woman to now purse her lips. It was Dorothea’s strongest argument—the safe arrival of another Dix. They’d need the refuge of her grandmother’s large home in Boston if they were all going to survive, especially a baby. Couldn’t her grandmother see the logic in that?

Dorothea’s emotions swirled like leaves in a whirlpool in the continuing silence. She heard her heart beat faster at her temples. Snow outside accumulated on the sills of the wavy glass windows.

“You’re our only hope.” Her voice broke. *I must not cry*. She stiffened her narrow shoulders. She stood as rigid as wrought iron. She knew one thing for certain: if anyone ever pleaded with her for help as she now beseeched her grandmother, she would find a way to meet the depth of the request. “We suffer,” she said.

“Everyone suffers. Some more than others. There’s nothing to be done for it. The suffering will always be with you. Scripture states it. Time you learned the lesson.”

“The child will come right after Christmas, Grandmamma. Don’t let it struggle too. And Charles. He’s only a child!”

“Then your mother will need you much more than I will, Dorothea.” The woman’s voice softened into a sigh. “You must go back, girl. I simply can’t take you all in again. I’m sorry. Your father has made his bed and he must lie in it. Which apparently he does quite often.”

With that the woman turned away, the brim of her day cap fluttering with the brusqueness of the turn. As she pushed her wide hips through the narrow door she stopped.

*She’s changed her mind!* Dorothea thought.

Instead, the woman leaned toward the cook and spoke quietly, then she moved into the safety of the mansion, a small dog that Dorothea hadn’t noticed before following at her heels.

“It’ll take them a bit to bring the carriage around.” The cook turned to her. “You come warm yourself at this fire and have a bite to eat. I’ll fix you a basket to take with you. For your little brother and your parents.”

“Thank you, missus...” Dorothea dropped her eyes. She couldn’t remember the name of the woman, the one person who was at least going to give her stomach comfort before she was sent back into chaos.

“Cookie.” She motioned for Dorothea to sit at the table.

Dorothea removed her wet wrap to hang beside the hearth.

"Your shoes too, dearie. May as well get them a little drier while you sit."

Dorothea sank like a weary dog onto the chair, removed her soaked shoes, her ungloved fingers pulling at the wet leather laces and hooks while she watched Cookie gather a spatter of potatoes and onions from the hearth and a slice of dried beef from the larder. A butter round appeared with a loaf of bread.

"Eat now," she said.

Lifting the bread took all the strength Dorothea had. Cookie placed a piece of ham in a basket and added a round of cheese, and the girl saw her nestle dried pears in a small stone pot, then put a few more pieces of the fruit on the table for Dorothea.

"Don't be too hard on your grandmother." Cookie continued loading the basket with food, then tied the white cloth into a big bow of protection. "She's a good woman. Done much for this district ever since your grandfather's death. She's likely carried your parents across many a swollen stream."

Dorothea wiped her mouth with the back of her hand, breadcrumbs tumbling onto the bodice of her dress. "But we could assist her. I could."

"She might not say it, but I suspect she's proud you come to her for help. She just can't give it to you the way you're askin'. But that's what we're about, you know, we women. We find a way over troubled water, even if it has to be a boat bobbing in the currents rather than a bridge."

Dorothea ate slowly, savoring the food and warmth and tak-

ing in the wisdom of this ordinary woman. It was apparently all she would get from Orange Court. Who knew what trouble she would face when she was returned to Worcester. The outrage of her father for disappearing. Would her mother have noticed? She sighed. Her journey and her words had failed.

## The Arrival

Dorothea's newest brother, Joseph, screamed into the world during a January storm. Snow drifted near the eaves of the Vermont cabin Dorothea's grandmother had arranged for them to rent just after Christmas. Dorothea imagined the conversations held between her grandmother, aunts, and uncles as they decided what was to be done about her father and his growing family. This latest settlement was a farm where a drafty lean-to served as a workshop for her father's floundering printing business. Now, a year later, Joseph's squalls could be heard even in the small shed where Dorothea sat at the bookbinding table. With each cut of the cloth, each swipe of the glue on the board cover, Dorothea's mind said, *Pick up Joseph! Pick up that child!*

"I should help Mama." She set her bookbinding tools on the bench and stood.

"Your mother must tend to a few of her duties." Her father, tall and some would say handsome, ordered her to sit down. "Finish what you've started."

Charles sat across from her at the table, his small hands un-

able to do much except offer her the brush when she put her palm out for it. The smell of the glue appeared to make him sleepy. She picked up the paper punch and sewing needle. The crunch of the punch through the paper reminded her of the sound of summer beetles squished when she walked. She tried to distract herself from the feel and the sound by remembering her grandfather's library, books full of facts and sprinkled with pictures of plants and faraway places hidden beneath thin protective pages. She drew the needle and thread through the latest hole, pulling it tight to hold the document.

Joseph's crying continued.

This work was as tedious as shelling walnuts, a task that left her fingers stained black for days but with more sustenance to show for it at the end of the day. If they made books for paying clients, there'd at least be some hope of coins. Instead, her father *bought* loose sheets and wrote about his newfound religion. He bound the tracts and then sold them to support his family, but it was never enough to cover even the cost of the paper. At least he hadn't commissioned Dorothea or Charles into selling the articles on street corners. Yet as soon as the snow melted, her father would head to the village in the late afternoons, tracts in hand to sell, and leave Dorothea to tend to her mother and brothers.

In the year they had been in Vermont, nothing much had changed except for Joseph's arrival. Dorothea's mother floated through the days often unaware that a child cried until Dorothea lifted Joseph, changed his napkin, and handed him to her mother for nursing. It was Dorothea who urged her mother to eat so she

could nurture the baby, and it was Dorothea who reminded her that it was time they heated water for washing the family's undergarments and nightclothes. Dorothea let the sheets go sometimes for a fortnight or more because the effort of heating and stirring the heavy cloth in hot water drained her, made her short of breath, and caused her to cough and feel sick. She could afford none of that. She had to be strong to care for the family.

But Dorothea also saw her mother gently hold her youngest, brushing his dark hair with her long fingers, repeating soft admonitions of "Shhh...Shhh." She didn't know what it was, but a strange, pulling feeling rose up her spine when she watched this display of affection, felt herself grow small as she observed her mother's kindness in tenderly stroking Joseph's fine brown hair. What was wrong with Dorothea that her mother could not give such warmth to Charles or her only daughter?

Still, one day when Dorothea complained about the binding work and her father's disappearance each afternoon, her mother defended him.

"You should be proud of your father. He works so hard to support us."

Didn't Grandmamma support them with her payment at the village store accounts and the rent for this farmhouse?

"But Papa has so little to show for his efforts." Dorothea set the steaming broth on the bedside table where her mother lay ailing, always ailing.

"This does not diminish his goodness. It's the work that matters and that his heart is in it."

Dorothea remembered the interchange as rare both for her mother's defense of her father and the kernel of wisdom that seeped out between her mother's sighs, her moments of wild-eyed rage, or endless sleepiness even when she was awake.

This past winter had been different because of heavy snows. Her father spent more time binding the books and less time selling. That kept him around the house more, but it meant even fewer pennies for candles or corn. He brewed the ale necessary in every household, teaching Dorothea the skill "that every wife needs to know."

"Dorothea!" Her father pounded the table with his fist as she worked in the bindery. "You've missed a length. Where's your mind? Stay with your task!"

"Yes, Papa." She'd been daydreaming more often, not certain why.

"And you!" He swiped Charles on the side of his head with the back of his hand. "Wake up! This is no time for sleep. Do that at night."

"We can't always." Dorothea raised her voice. "The baby—"

The switch stung across her knuckles. She hadn't even seen her father grab the willow he kept beneath his desk.

"Speak when you are spoken to, girl. You listen well to your betters. You hear me?"

She sat hunched over, shivering, awaiting the next blow.

"I spoke to you, girl!" She felt the wind of the switch slice the air. She shrank and waited. But it was Charles who wailed.

She opened her eyes. "Don't hurt him. I hear you, Papa. I hear."

"You're a curse. All of you." He stomped from the lean-to into the house where Joseph cried a hiccup cry, and she heard her father shout at her mother. "Pick up the brat."

Dorothea motioned to Charles. "Let me see your back."

Her brother stood and lifted his thin shirt, his spine as bony as a carcass forgotten on the forest floor. He shivered.

"I'll get salve. It didn't break the skin this time. Just very red."

"It stings." He shook.

"I know it does. I know. I'm sorry. I'm the one that upset Papa." She wrapped her arms around him, careful not to press against this latest wound. She looked into his blue-gray eyes, the color of her own. "Better now?" She must not daydream. She must concentrate. She must be the mother hen with Charles her chick. Joseph too. She prayed she would be forgiven for causing her brother to suffer.



On April 6, 1816, two days after Dorothea's forgotten fourteenth birthday, when the roads were clear and the spring melt ran in rivulets down the hillsides, a wagon arrived at the farmhouse. Orange Court's faded crest was printed on its side.

"Is there meat in there?" It had been months since Dorothea had tasted good meat. Her father was a poor hunter. So rabbit more often than venison filled the family's watery stews.

"Whatever does my mother want now?" Her father stood at the lean-to door, arms folded over his chest. He rubbed his back against the door. The milder weather with ferns spearing through

forest floor might have softened him. He hadn't struck either of his children this week. He'd begun making sales again. He'd even allowed Dorothea to feed a stray cat after she argued that the animal would keep the mice population down. Field mice wreaked havoc on paper and books.

"Maybe she's sent food."

He pushed Dorothea to the side. "Is she sending us even farther into the provinces to rid us from her sight?"

The driver smiled at Dorothea and tugged on his beard. "She sent letters ahead. Said you'd be ready."

"We've had no mail for weeks," her father said.

Dorothea pushed her way around and approached the wagon. She stood on tiptoes to look over the high sidepiece, her hands resting on the smooth wood. There were baskets inside! She could smell the smoked hams. Charles pushed against her skirts. She dropped her hand to his shoulder, holding him to her, patting him in comfort. "Grandmamma sent food."

"Yes, miss. She sent hams, potatoes. Sacks of wheat." He cleared his throat, glanced at her father, then said to Dorothea. "And you're to return with me."

"We are?" She smiled, squeezed Charles's shoulder. Her heart felt light as a feather.

"Just you, miss. Her granddaughter, she said."

"Just me?"

"Take her where?"

"To Worcester, sir. To your sister's, I should think." He handed her father a letter sealed with Orange Court wax.

“My mother thinks she can get whatever she wants.”

Would her father fight to keep her, insist that her work was essential for his success? Who would do the laundry? make the candles and soap? plant the vegetables in the garden this spring? Her mother wouldn't, couldn't. Her father removed something from the letter, folded it into his blouse, then read out loud beside the wagon. “You're to live with my sister, your aunt Sarah, and her dear doctor husband. You'll have a fine time of it.” His lip curled and he spat.

“We're not going to Orange Court? But that's what I asked for.”

“You're responsible for this?” He struck her, the slap like a tree branch, quick and stinging. “About time you learned the lesson that my mother serves her own master.” He began to unload the wagon, tossing a sack of grain over his wiry shoulders and carrying it into the barn.

“May I...go?” She rubbed her cheek. What of Charles? Who would look after her mother and Joseph? Her thoughts bounced around like rocks in a wagon. Her letters had gotten through to her grandmother, but her pleas were only partially heeded. She wasn't going to be living at Orange Court. She would live with the Fiskes in Worcester. She barely remembered them. This wasn't what she had prayed for. She squeezed Charles's shoulder as he looked up at her, those blue-gray eyes they shared wearing confusion. If she went, she'd be saved from gluing the last headband onto a book board, saved from having to punch another hole. But as she looked into her brother's eyes, the reprieve was like the last

note of a funeral dirge. The mournful song was over. She'd chosen: a future of loneliness without Charles and baby Joseph.



“Don’t forget to feed the cat,” Dorothea whispered to Charles as she pushed her satchel up to the driver. “It will keep Papa happy. And know that I’ll send for you. I will. I just don’t know when.”

Charles nodded and lifted his slender hand. He was the only member of the family to wave good-bye.



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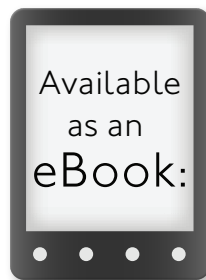
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