

## All That Makes Life Bright: The Life and Love of Harriet Beecher Stowe

**Josi S. Kilpack**

Shadow Mountain Publishing

Audiobook

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*All That Makes Life Bright is a historical romance with contemporary relevance and broad appeal.*

This polished, warmly narrated audio recording of Josi Kilpack's *All That Makes Life Bright* is a true delight.

Kilpack's book is the fictionalized account of Harriet "Hattie" Beecher Stowe's journey from a new bride to a famous author and abolitionist, set against the vibrantly rendered backdrop of turbulent nineteenth-century struggles.

The story opens on the day of Hattie's wedding to Calvin Stowe. Hopes for her intellectual future are presumed dashed, though Hattie walks down the aisle confident that Calvin supports her endeavors. Her idealism is challenged when she finds herself entrenched in a housewife's duties. Hattie and Calvin try in earnest to build a partnership, though there is no contemporary template for their dynamic.

Kilpack gets at the heart of interpersonal relationships, and the story's main players feel very much alive. Since she's also a historical figure, Hattie's trajectory is already more or less known, but Kilpack so skilfully weaves the path between Hattie's introduction as an inward-looking young woman to the publication of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* that knowing the eventual outcome takes nothing whatsoever away from the journey.

The book's overarching theme is the relationship between societal expectations and individual will, and what happens when the two are deeply at odds—questions that still pervade both bedrooms and boardrooms today. Fascinating, too, is the still-relevant contrast between Hattie's struggle for personal freedom from the rigors of household work, and the environment in which she experiences this struggle—one in which African Americans remain in literal shackles.

*All That Makes Life Bright* is about making marriage work in the face of challenges like a desire for personal freedom. It is a romance with broad appeal.

SARAH STEWART (November/December 2017)

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