



ABIGAIL'S DREAM



Cover design by Gerald Lee Monks
Cover design resources from iStockphoto.com
Inside design by Aaron Troia

Copyright © 2010 by Pacific Press® Publishing Association
Printed in the United States of America
All rights reserved

You can obtain additional copies of this book by calling toll-free
1-800-765-6955 or by visiting <http://www.adventistbookcenter.com>.

Author assumes full responsibility for the accuracy of all facts and
quotations as cited in this book.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data:

Rizzo, Kay D., 1943-
Abigail's dream / Kay D. Rizzo.
p. cm. — (The Serenity Inn; bk. 5)
ISBN 13: 978-0-8163-2422-4 (pbk.)
ISBN 10: 0-8163-2422-0 (pbk.)
1. Women pioneers. I. Title.
PS3568.I836A64 2010
813'.54—dc22

2010026544



CONTENTS



- 7 **Chapter One:** *Slip of the Tongue*
- 17 **Chapter Two:** *Preparing for a Journey*
- 29 **Chapter Three:** *The Great Adventure Begins*
- 40 **Chapter Four:** *On to Independence*
- 48 **Chapter Five:** *At the Inn*
- 55 **Chapter Six:** *Last-Minute Changes*
- 62 **Chapter Seven:** *Leaving Missouri*
- 72 **Chapter Eight:** *On the Trail*
- 89 **Chapter Nine:** *Life's Changing Tides*
- 100 **Chapter Ten:** *Too Many Changes*
- 109 **Chapter Eleven:** *On the Oregon Trail*
- 119 **Chapter Twelve:** *Narcissa's Children*
- 129 **Chapter Thirteen:** *Moonlight on the Prairie*

- 141 **Chapter Fourteen:** *More Than Quicksand*
- 150 **Chapter Fifteen:** *The Courting*
- 158 **Chapter Sixteen:** *Making Detours and Decisions*
- 167 **Chapter Seventeen:** *In the Hands of God*
- 178 **Chapter Eighteen:** *The Painful Truth*
- 189 **Chapter Nineteen:** *The Color of Regret*
- 200 **Chapter Twenty:** *What's in a Name?*
- 212 **Chapter Twenty-one:** *On Gossamer Wings*



CHAPTER ONE



SLIP OF THE TONGUE

MELTED BUTTER, EGGS, MILK, FLOUR . . . Abigail Sherwood whipped the ingredients for the mouthwatering Dutch babies with a fury that equaled the force of the miserably cold and wet summer storm forming outside the kitchen window.

Sleet whistled through the pines behind the three-story garrison house on Babington Boulevard in Chelsea, Massachusetts. Overhead, angry clouds swirled in a frenzy that only a New England nor'easter could generate.

Seething from the previous night's altercation with Ralph, her sister's husband, Abigail sputtered angry invectives as she poured the batter into a heated baking dish and placed it in the hot oven. She slammed the oven door with more force than necessary and straightened to her full five feet eight inch height. (Abigail carried herself like a general reviewing his troops, intimidating to men of diminutive proportions.)

She brushed the flour from her hands with satisfaction. In twenty to twenty-five minutes, the puffy and nicely browned Dutch babies would be ready to serve, when topped with powdered sugar and genuine Vermont maple syrup. She considered sautéing apple slices with cinnamon and sugar—Ralph's favorite.

"*Pshaw!* I should sauté prunes in blackstrap molasses for his topping!" The popular formula for laxatives brought a chuckle to her lips, only to be replaced by an intense scowl. The idea of tolerating Ralph's narrow-minded and ignorant opinions for the next forty years of her

ABIGAIL'S DREAM

life set her teeth on edge, which would be her fate, since she knew it was too late to find a man to marry. She had no other option than to be a nanny to her sister's children.

Ralph's rampage at the dinner table last night regarding women's rights to vote had infuriated Abigail to the point of rage. When the discussion began, Abigail wasn't sure what her opinion was on the sensitive suffrage issue. She had attended several meetings with her mother before they left England, but, for the most part, she had not bothered to take a position on the flammable topic—at least until Ralph blustered her into one over the previous night's New England pot roast and dandelion greens with hollandaise sauce.

She knew she owed her sister's husband a lot for bringing her and her mother to America, and she truly tried to like the man. "Lord, please help me to be generous and gracious," she prayed in the early morning silence. The words had come automatically to her lips, since she prayed them so often. "What I should be praying is for the Lord to get me out of here!" Her words echoed off the high, tiled walls of the New England kitchen. "If I never had to see or speak to him again, I'd rejoice!"

The recipient of her ire was Ralph Oakley Porter. Ralph had emigrated from England to Revere, Massachusetts, with his bride and a slight knowledge of fabric manufacturing. A short, round, and balding man with a loud voice and a salty attitude, Ralph used his six months of experience working in a cotton mill in Birmingham, England, to buffalo and hoodwink his way into New England's flourishing fabric industry. In ten short years, with the help of his wife, he'd fathered four sons and one daughter, and he'd grown rich off the sweat of immigrants like himself.

After the first baby arrived and Rebecca was pregnant with the second, she begged her mother, Pamela, to immigrate to America. "We have a big house, large enough for you and Abigail to have your very own rooms. If you don't like it here, Ralph promises to pay for your return ticket to England as well."

For years, eighteen-year-old Abigail had dreamed of seeing the New World. When her father, a small-town pastor, died of consumption, she and her mother were forced from the parsonage into a cramped and dingy room in a boardinghouse outside London. After

Rebecca left England, Abigail watched her mother grow gaunt and sallow, receding into a crumpled shell of a woman.

When her sister's invitation arrived, Abigail accepted it immediately without consulting her mother. She determined she would drag her mother to America in a rowboat, if necessary, to save her life. Surprisingly, Abigail's mother, Pamela Sherwood, had reacted positively, even becoming enthusiastic about their travel plans.

The sea voyage, which Abigail feared would be difficult for her mother, perked the woman up enough to attract the amorous interest of the ship's captain, a bulky, jocular man whose deep brown eyes twinkled as if they held a delicious secret.

Moving into her sister's household was a trial at best for Abigail. If a young woman hadn't snagged a husband by her eighteenth birthday, what could she do other than become a nanny to a relative's offspring? Being the daughter of a rural parish minister, she hadn't had the money or the sponsorship into British society's marriage market. And caring for her ailing mother had kept her from any chance meeting she might have had with a less-moneyed eligible man. So Abigail accepted the role of spinster which nature had given her.

As the babies continued arriving at Rebecca and Ralph's home, both Abigail and her mother were kept busy caring for the energetic little boys. Between pregnancies, Rebecca played hostess to her friends, members of the burgeoning newly moneyed social class of New England's era of prosperity. This venture involved Abigail's talents as well.

Cooking had been one of Abigail's greatest pleasures while growing up—cooking and sketching. With her mother and older sister being the social butterflies of the community, the young Abigail often found herself alone, except for the friendship of the family's plump and jovial cook, Bessy.

A widow, the gray-haired peasant woman was a culinary genius, or so Abigail believed. Bessy's second talent was sketching. The woman used any extra money she received to buy paper, pencils, and charcoal sticks.

As the young Abigail watched Bessy make her mouthwatering dill pickles or draw a humorous sketch of a stable hand being thrown from his saddle, the girl pretended Bessy was her mother.

It was obvious to everyone, including her own parents, that Abigail

ABIGAIL'S DREAM

lacked the polish and congeniality of her mother and older sister. Nor did she inherit their sparkling effervescence and soft, English rose loveliness. Her hair was too brown and too straight; her nose was too narrow; her figure, too angular. Only her flashing green eyes betrayed the fiery nature and rapier wit she held tightly in check.

To be fair, Pamela Sherwood had tried to interest Abigail in developing the necessary skills of a cultured English lady. Pamela had been born to royalty before she married a member of the common clergy, one not of the Church of England. Abigail's grandfather had been seventy-fifth in line for the British throne, or so Abigail had been told many times.

While their mother instructed the two girls in the necessary social skills, their father insisted they both learn to read and to figure. Abigail had taken to reading much faster than her sister, since book learning was not a desirable skill for proper British ladies of the day. When Abigail's mathematical skills surpassed her father's, she began keeping the church's finances.

On cold, rainy days, Abigail would disappear to her room with a classic narrative while her sister sat by the fire with her mother and her mother's friends, nibbling on Bessy's bonbons and the latest tidbits of gossip. Abigail's intuition told her that the women didn't really want her company.

Abigail shook the painful memories from her mind and set her jaw, as her mama would say, to the problem at hand—breakfast. One, two, three, four, five, six—she cracked the eggs against the side of the stoneware mixing bowl. Scrambling the half dozen eggs in a bowl, she added salt and cream and poured the mixture into a grease-spitting frying pan.

She glanced toward the ceiling at the sound of bed ropes groaning above her head, followed by the scramble of several feet thudding on hard oak floors. The family would be down any minute, hungry as bears. The family—though not her family. The truth be known, Abigail would prefer spinsterhood if her only choice of husbands was a man like Ralph Oakley Porter.

It had been ten years since she and her mother arrived in Massachusetts and seven years since Abigail's mother announced that she and her sea captain were getting married and moving to Tortola, an island in the Caribbean.

SLIP OF THE TONGUE

With her mother's departure, Abigail picked up the slack in the Porter household staff. She'd become nanny, nursemaid, chief cook, and bread maker. But she was lonely. Elsa, the chambermaid; Rachel, the laundress; and Chester, the family butler and all-around handyman, thought of Abigail as a member of the Porter family, while her brother-in-law treated her like a servant. She didn't belong with either, or so it seemed to her.

Abigail's only joy was slipping off to her room to work on her pet project. Years previous, she'd purchased a fine, brown, leather-bound journal. In it, she'd recorded all of Bessy's favorite recipes, along with helpful hints the woman had shared with her over the years. By accident more than design, the doodles she drew in the margins grew into sketches depicting the good times she and Bessy had shared.

In the evening, after Abigail tucked the youngest child into bed and kissed him good night, and after she'd scrubbed the last copper-bottomed pot and returned it to the iron rack above the stove, she would slip away to her tiny attic room beneath the eaves of her sister's three-story home to continue working on her project of love.

Abigail seldom dwelt on the bleakness of her future. When she contemplated the possibility of living countless years under Ralph's roof, like she had after retiring to her room the previous night, she prayed for the strength to deal with him. "And Lord, if You can't change him, change me, or my situation."

* * * * *

The thought of leaving her sister's employ, of branching out on her own never entered the young woman's mind until two days later during the garden luncheon her sister hosted for a young missionary returning from the Oregon Territory. As she replenished the hors d'oeuvre tray with sweet potato balls and cod cakes, she paused to listen to the intense young man tell of the land of tall trees, rushing rivers, and rich farmland available for the asking. He told of Indian tribes who'd never heard the name of God.

"We Christians must spread God's Word from sea to sea. To do that, we must populate the Willamette Valley before more British come in or the Russians sweep down from the Far North and take it

over. Your contributions will help me put together a wagon train, a caravan of Americans seeking their destiny and the glorious destiny of our beloved country.”

His challenge captured her imagination. She restacked the lady-fingers on her sister's imported crystal platter and wondered what it would be like to be a part of such a magnificent event.

When the presentation ended, the guests swarmed the young missionary. As Abigail watched, she decided that she had to meet him; she had to hear more about his exotic adventures in the incredible Northwest.

Picking up a silver tray of cut vegetables, she angled toward the gazebo where the man stood talking to his eager listeners. As she passed, several women helped themselves to the food on the tray. Abigail had almost penetrated the crowd of women when Mrs. Clarissa Darlington announced, “I'd surely go with you to Oregon, Mr. Farnsworth, if I had a lady's companion to care for my needs.” She fluttered her hands and coyly tipped her head, shamelessly batting her eyelashes at the lean young man. Recently widowed, she had to be ten years Mr. Farnsworth's senior.

The gracious young man grinned and tipped his head toward the middle-aged dowager. “And you would be most welcome, ma'am.”

Abigail didn't know what came over her, but without warning she said, “Mrs. Darlington, I would be willing to go with you to Oregon as your traveling companion.”

Mr. Farnsworth's eyebrows shot into his hairline. Mrs. Darlington's mouth dropped open in surprise. Someone had called her bluff. Rebecca Porter stared in disbelief at her suddenly impulsive younger sister.

“Abigail!” Rebecca hissed. “What are you saying?”

The missionary picked up the on the dynamics of the moment. He took Abigail's free hand in his. “What a brave gesture, miss, er, have I met you yet?”

“No, sir, I'm Abigail Sherwood. My sister, Rebecca Porter, is your hostess this afternoon.”

He turned to the astonished women. “It's this kind of brave and patriotic woman who will make a difference in Oregon. Well, Mrs. Darlington?” The missionary's smile broadened slowly.

Not to be outdone by a servant girl, even if she was her hostess's sister, Mrs. Darlington slipped her arm into the missionary's. "My, my, this is an interesting turn of events. I would have preferred to give this endeavor more thought, but a Darlington woman always keeps her word. Perhaps, Mr. Farnsworth, you and I can slip away for a few minutes where you can give me more details on the journey it seems I am about to make."

The man released Abigail's hand and turned his attention to the woman at his other side. Abigail and her sister's guests watched the couple stroll across the lawn to a wooden glider swing beneath the branches of a mighty elm tree. With the enigmatic Mr. Farnsworth trapped in the clutches of Clarissa Darlington, Rebecca's other guests prepared to leave the party.

After the final guests departed, including the giggly and blushing Mrs. Darlington and the suave, silver-tongued missionary, Rebecca snapped, "What were you thinking? To say you'd move to Oregon! How ridiculous! How could you even consider leaving me and the children?"

Abigail brushed the last crumbs off a white linen tablecloth and gathered it into her arms. "Don't worry, Rebecca. I'm not going anywhere. You know Mrs. Darlington. She'll never leave Boston. Can you see her battling flies and mosquitoes in a covered wagon on the prairie?"

Rebecca chuckled aloud and then saddened. "You're right, of course. But why would you even suggest that you might want to leave? Are you so unhappy with us?"

"Becky, I love you dearly and I love your children, but if I had a chance to do something exciting like Mr. Farnsworth talked about, I'd seriously consider doing it. Raising your children and catering your parties is not the life I would choose for myself. Would you?" She took a deep breath. "But alas, it's neither here nor there. Mrs. Darlington will lose interest in her big adventure in a day or two. But Rebecca, you should know that sooner or later, I hope to strike out on my own."

Rebecca looked stricken. "I don't understand. Ralph and I adore you."

"I know you love me, Rebecca dear," Abigail smiled and shook her

head. "But you must admit that I am a thorn in your husband's side, a burr under his saddle."

"What will Mama say when she learns of your folly?" Rebecca's lower lip extended into a practiced pout.

"First of all, I'm not going anywhere right away. As to Mama, I think she'd be delighted for me—she and her sea captain." The more Abigail thought about her brash remarks to the young missionary, the more the idea appealed to her.

Rebecca dabbed at her eyes with her lace-edged handkerchief. "But the children, they love you. What would they do without their auntie Abigail?"

"Sooner or later, they'll grow up and no longer need an auntie for a governess. Then where will I be? A tottering old aunt shaping crab cakes in the kitchen? Living off your husband's largess?" The thought of Ralph being generous to anyone, family included, made her chuckle.

"Abigail! Stop being so impudent. What's gotten into you?" Rebecca threw her hands in the air and strode into the house. "I don't understand. You try to do something nice for someone and what do you get in return? You are being very selfish, Abigail Sherwood!"

"Maybe so." Abigail followed her sister into the kitchen. "But I will keep my word, Rebecca. I will go to Oregon with Mrs. Darlington if she goes."

Rebecca clicked her tongue in anger. "And if she doesn't?"

Abigail frowned, "I don't know . . . yet."

She watched her sister flounce down the hallway toward the parlor. Taking advantage of the blessed reprieve, Abigail prepared the evening meal and fed the children before Ralph returned home from work.

By the glares Abigail received from both Rebecca and Ralph, she knew he had heard all about it by the time she served the appetizer and main course. Despite the icy atmosphere, Abigail maintained her calm demeanor.

After collecting the dinner plates and serving the Norwegian lace cookies left over from the garden party, she excused herself. "I'm not very hungry tonight. I think I'll go right up to settle the children for sleep."

"Abigail, before you go," Ralph leaned back against the upholstered dining chair and stared down his bulbous nose at her, "please

tell me that my dear wife is mistaken, that you aren't really considering traveling to Oregon with Mrs. Darlington."

Abigail dipped her head and reddened slightly. "To tell the truth, I don't know what came over me. I was caught up in the moment, I guess. Besides, can you see Mrs. Darlington leaving her comforts behind for the wilds of Oregon?"

Ralph grinned and nodded approvingly toward his wife. "See, my love, there is no cause for vapors. Your sister has a good head on her shoulder. She's too sensible for this sudden flight of fancy. She knows her place."

"My place?" She arched one eyebrow.

"Yes, of course, you are hardly the kind of woman to turn your back on your responsibility, and yes, even your calling, for some outrageous adventure."

"My responsibility? Excuse me? Just what is my responsibility and my calling, Mr. Porter?"

"Now don't get your dander up." Ralph rolled his eyes toward the ceiling. "I didn't mean anything personal, but it's not as though you have many options such as marriage and the like." He gave a low disapproving growl and sent a sidewise glance at his wife. "I should have said, the children depend on you. We, your sister and I, depend on you."

"Yes, dear, we truly do." Rebecca reached out for Abigail's hand.

Abigail snatched it away.

"Oh, don't be touchy, love."

"Touchy? I beg your pardon? My responsibility in life is to raise your children? They're your children and your responsibility." She straightened to her full five feet eight inches, "I may never have a brood of my own, but if I ever do, I hope I'll love them enough to enjoy spending time with them."

"Abigail, what do you mean? We love our children dearly!" Rebecca scolded, her eyes brimming with tears.

"I know you do, dear, but you're missing so much by not spending time with them. Do you know how much Jefferson craves his daddy's attention? He stands at his bedroom window every evening, watching for your carriage, Ralph. That's why he acts up with his tutor. He knows that when you find out, you'll give him some attention, even if it's a scolding or another punishment.

ABIGAIL'S DREAM

“And William, did you know he loves birds? He can name every bird in the neighborhood and tell you incredible details about each species. He’s put together a sketchbook of his favorites. He’s becoming quite a little artist, in fact. And little Harry has run away from home three times this month alone. He has a serious problem obeying people in authority. While he never back talks like his older brother, there’s a lot going on behind those stormy blue eyes.

“Oh, and Ralph Junior. He’s in love—his first crush, Miss Pringle, his piano teacher. He would swim to Cape Cod and back to please her. And Baby Lucille has an invisible friend named Jenny, who steals cookies from the kitchen and entices her to wander into the woods behind the estate, a definite no-no.”

Abigail couldn’t believe her candor or her passion. Seeing the stunned expression on Rebecca’s face, Abigail regretted the force with which she’d spoken. Then she regretted her regret when she saw the anger on Ralph’s face.

“I beg your pardon!” He shot to his feet and threw his linen napkin on the table. Rounding the table, he stared up into Abigail’s face, shaking his index finger for emphasis, “I will not have you, a subordinate, talk to me in such a manner!”

“Subordinate? Is that what I am to you? You think I’m in your service?” Abigail’s green eyes flashed with renewed fury. She heard Rebecca sniffle behind her, but Abigail hardened her heart against her sister’s tears.

Abigail took a deep breath to regain her self-control. “Ralph, Rebecca, perhaps the best thing I could do is leave and force the two of you to stop playing high society and spend time getting to know your children.”

“Why—” Ralph sputtered.

“The sad part is that our airing of the family’s dirty linen has probably been in vain as far as Mrs. Darlington is concerned. I doubt she’ll actually go. However, knowing how you both feel about me, the poor ugly stepsister . . .” She balled and unballled her fingers, “I do not want your pity! I will find employment elsewhere as soon as it can be arranged. If you’ll excuse me.” She tipped her head graciously toward Rebecca, curled her lip at Ralph, and glided from the room.