

# The Novels of Abigail Scott Duniway

By Debra Shein

in order of publication date

**Captain Gray's Company; or, Crossing the Plains and Living in Oregon.** Portland: S. J. McCormick, 1859. Serialized in the *New Northwest* 21 May 1875 – 29 Oct. 1875. This novel is a fictionalized recreation of the adventures of the Scott party on the trail to Oregon. In the story, the widow Goodwin and her three children — Effie, Herbert and Willie — go west along with the Grays and the Mansfields. On the trail disease strikes, and 17-year-old Ada Mansfield along with Maurice Stanton, the young doctor she is in love with, work to save the sufferers. But despite all efforts, Mrs. Goodwin dies, along with little Willie (as did Abigail's own mother and small brother), leaving Effie and Herbert orphaned, and others also die. In Oregon, Effie must work as a domestic and falls in love with her employer's son, but her boss speedily breaks up the romance. Years pass, Effie's fortune improves, and the parted lovers are reunited and married. In another strand of plot, Ada, who has married Maurice, starts a literary magazine. In the conclusion, it becomes apparent that Duniway's major goal in writing has been to promote the growth of literature in the new state of Oregon, and she has been so brave as to see her own contribution as a substantial beginning.

**Judith Reid, A Plain Story of a Plain Woman.** Serialized in the *New Northwest* 12 May 1871 – 22 Dec. 1871. As a young girl in Missouri, Judith marries a man who soon disappears. Shortly thereafter, her family moves to Oregon, where she works alongside her father in a sawmill, and after a time marries a neighbor, John Smith, who treats her badly and will not work. Fed up, she finally returns to Missouri. Luckily, Smith dies, her long-absent first husband finally reappears and explains all, and they enjoy a life together in which he backs her in her career as a writer and woman's rights advocate.

**Ellen Dowd, the Farmer's Wife.** Serialized in the *New Northwest*. Part one, 5 Jan. 1872 – 26 April 1872. Part two, 1 July 1873 – 26 Sept. 1873. When her grandfather tries to force her to marry her much-older tutor, a girl makes a runaway marriage with a younger suitor and eventually suffers the consequences. After emigrating to California, she finally dares to seek a divorce and becomes a wealthy equal rights activist.

**Amie and Henry Lee; or, The Spheres of the Sexes.** Serialized in the *New Northwest* 29 May 1874 – 13 Nov. 1874. After her parents die as the result of her father's abusive treatment of her mother, Amie is forced to take a job in a saloon to support her younger siblings. Although eventually she opens a millinery store, her reputation has been damaged, and her brother Henry, who has political aspirations, refuses to associate with her. However, in the end he realizes she has been unfairly treated and becomes an equal rights advocate. Amie goes on to become a successful writer.

**The Happy Home; or, The Husband's Triumph.** Serialized in the *New Northwest* 20 Nov. 1874 – 14 May 1875. Mattie returns from boarding school to find her father's mistreatment of her stepmother unbearable, as does the stepmother herself, who finally gets fed up and leaves. After this, the father, not interested in taking care of the remaining children, sells the family home to Mattie and takes off. Mattie then turns her family of siblings into a working democracy and achieves monetary success. In the conclusion, she finally marries her long-time suitor, believing that because she has achieved financial independence the marriage can be a real partnership, and she will not be in danger of having to assume a subservient role.

**One Woman's Sphere; or, The Mystery of Eagle Cove.** Serialized in the *New Northwest* 4 June 1875 – 3 Dec. 1875. After Josiah Carson, a sea pilot, is caught in an explosion off the Washington coast, his wife Abia helps to rescue him and a girl, Rosa Lee, who was a passenger on the ship that blew up. The Carsons take Rosa in and help her to open a store. Abia gives birth to a baby and townsfolk gossip because it seems it was conceived when Josiah was at sea, but we later learn it is actually Rosa's. In the conclusion we learn that Rosa

had married a man who was (unknown to her) already married to another, and she had fled and kept her pregnancy secret. But fortuitously, the man's wife passes away, and he and Rosa are reunited.

**Madge Morrison, the Molalla Maid and Matron.** Serialized in the *New Northwest* 10 Dec. 1875 – 28 July 1876. After emigrating to Oregon from Indiana, young Madge Morrison assumes responsibility for building the family a cabin when her father dies following an accident. Her mother marries a widowed neighbor who succumbs to alcoholism, and Madge marries a man who immediately begins to abuse her. She leaves him, walks to Portland and takes a job as a waiter, disguised as a boy. Some time later, after her husband is missing and presumed dead, she goes back to her mother's home and gives birth to a child. But George appears alive and abducts their young daughter, after which the girl dies. Madge gets a divorce and enrolls in medical school.

**Edna and John, A Romance of Idaho Flat.** Serialized in the *New Northwest* 29 Sept. 1875 – 15 June 1877. Edna, a naïve young girl, falls for a thriftless young man named John. Unable to make a living in their native Missouri, they immigrate to Idaho and find themselves in the midst of a gold rush. John falls prey to the dual temptations of gambling and alcohol, while Edna, soon the mother of two, earns the family's living by opening a restaurant. Edna finally leaves John but finds that the laws are in his favor. As a wife, she has no right to her own children or her own earnings, which John wastes frivolously. When she tries to get a divorce she is denied by a judge who claims she has no grounds. In the conclusion, John commits suicide, after which Edna marries a lawyer, and together they devote themselves to the cause of equal rights.

**Martha Marblehead, The Maid and Matron of Chehalem.** Serialized in the *New Northwest* 29 June 1877 – 8 Feb. 1878. On the trail to Oregon, Martha's mother dies, after which her father marries a widow, and Martha marries the widow's son, Thomas, just to get away. When her old suitor (who she believed had spurned her) reappears, she is devastated. After Martha learns Thomas is having an affair, she sells their farm and moves to Portland, where she purchases a home, but Thomas sues to recover the farm and has Martha thrown out of the house. Finally, they are divorced, but Thomas gets custody of the children, and so she follows them to Montana, where she finds he is leading a dissipated life and has boarded them with a stranger. Martha falls ill, after which her old suitor appears once more and helps her recover the children. Martha and he are married.

**Her Lot; or, How She was Protected (later revised in manuscript form as "Ethel Graeme's Destiny").** Serialized in the *New Northwest* 1 Feb. 1878 – 19 Sept. 1878. This compelling story has an atypically dark conclusion. The tale begins in England, where Ethel is tricked into marriage with Gerald, a dashing sea captain, who takes her to Australia. Eventually, they travel to America, arriving at the dawn of California's 1849 Gold Rush with their children. Gerald disappears into the mines, leaving Ethel to make her way by managing a hotel. Gerald reappears and, through his alcoholism, brings Ethel to ruin. This leaving and returning, along with its consequent ill effects on Ethel and the children, repeats itself several times until the couple has lost two homesteads. Readers then find Ethel running an eastern Oregon boarding house, where Gerald is kept in a locked upstairs room after having made repeated attempts on her life.

**Fact, Fate and Fancy; or, More Ways of Living than One.** Serialized in the *New Northwest* 26 Sept. 1878 – 15 May 1879. Grace and Lillie Emerson are sisters who are opposite in every way. Grace is independent, and not eager to be married. Lillie, a romantic, would like to marry right away. But when two young men arrive at the Emersons' Oregon home, Grace falls in love with one and they marry, and Lillie marries the other. When it is revealed that Grace's husband had previously impregnated a girl and abandoned her, Grace contemplates divorce, but stays on the condition that they take in the child of his illicit union (the mother had died). But the wronged girl's father appears and kills him. Ironically, Grace lives a happy single life with her adopted daughter, but Lillie bears four children in five years, despairs, takes poison and dies.

**Mrs. Hardine's Will.** Serialized in the *New Northwest* 20 Nov. 1879 – 26 Aug. 1880. Eliza Hardine is in love with John, but a family feud separates them, and after Eliza's family emigrates to Oregon, she learns that John

has married another. She then marries Peter, not knowing that John's wife died soon after their marriage. Fifteen years pass. Eliza leads a rough life, and ends up keeping a boarding house in Portland after the lazy Peter is unable to support them. Finally, she leaves him. Her mother dies and leaves her a large bequest, but Peter steals a large sum from her account, her brother contests the will, and she loses the inheritance. After Peter dies, she writes a book exposing the judicial system's injustice to women, her lost love reappears, and they marry.

**The Mystery of Castle Rock, a Story of the Pacific Northwest.** Serialized in the *New Northwest* 2 March 1882 – 7 Sept. 1882. In this very complicated story, which bears touches of both *The Tempest* and *Jane Eyre*, we find a mad son as well as a mad wife in residence in two separate attics. Imogen, daughter of Captain Norton, has been raised by surrogate parents on the Oregon coast after being found shipwrecked as an infant. Years pass and Marcus, a detective, arrives seeking Imogen, and returns her to her father. Eventually, she is taken to Norton's plantation in Cuba, where she convinces him to free his slaves, and while he goes to sea, assumes management during the transition. But she has fallen in love with Marcus, and returns to Oregon to find him. There she discovers that he was married to an insane gypsy woman, who finally committed suicide after being locked (for her safety) in an upstairs room. After giving Marcus a year to remake himself, they marry.

**Judge Dunson's Secret, An Oregon Story.** Serialized in the *New Northwest* 15 March 1883 – 6 Sept. 1883. The "Honorable" Judge Dunson murders his own young son by pulling out all his teeth when the boy complains of a toothache, which drives the mother insane, leading to her death. Dunson's youthful sweetheart, Zuleika Shannon (now a leading feminist), arrives hoping to bring him to repentance. She does so in her own person, by exposing him to the ideas presented at a woman's rights convention, in the guise of an Irish housekeeper, and masquerading as the ghost of the dead wife — haunting Dunson in nocturnal hours, rattling a bag containing the dead son's teeth. Finally, Dunson confronts his dark secret, is won over to the woman's movement, and marries Zuleika.

**Laban McShane, A Frontier Story.** Serialized in the *New Northwest* 13 Sept. 1883 – 6 March 1884. Twins Edith and Hal live with their father, Laban McShane, in rural Washington. Their mother, who had left years ago because of Laban's abuse, is believed dead. Hal, although the poorer student, is sent to college (but flunks out and takes to drink), while Edith is compelled to stay home because of her sex. When a "Mrs. Susan Brown" arrives and take on the job of housekeeper, she encourages Edith to demand her rights, and cures Hal of his alcoholism. Finally, after getting Laban to agree to send Edith to medical school, Susan reveals herself as the long-lost Anna McShane, explaining that after she left she had graduated medical school herself, and had gone to California, where she established a lucrative practice.

**Dux, A Maiden Who Dared.** Serialized in the *New Northwest* 11 Sept. 1884 – 5 March 1885. When Judge Lofty objects to the man that his daughter, Dux, plans to marry, she pretends to run away to spite him. But instead of leaving, she hides in her own home disguised as "Nathan Ducks," supposed brother of their nanny. Judge Lofty takes on "Nathan" as an office boy and legal trainee, and they debate women's rights issues in their discussions. We later find that Dux's mother, Madeline, who had left the Judge years before because of his abuse (and who he believed to be dead) has also joined the household incognito to teach him a lesson, in the guise of Susan, the housekeeper. At last Dux and her mother both reveal themselves, the Loftys are reunited, and Dux goes on to become a lawyer.

**The De Launcy Curse; or, The Law of Heredity—A Tale of Three Generations.** Serialized in the *New Northwest* 10 Sept. 1885 – 4 March 1886. Margaret Emerson, living outside of "Nondescript," Oregon, runs away to marry Professor Sunderland Schoolcraft, but he decides not to go through with it when her mother, Emily DeLauncy Emerson, arrives and informs him of "the DeLauncy curse," which has condemned members of the family to make runaway marriages and go insane. Finally, after many complicated turns of plot in which psychic insights figure prominently and the credibility of spiritualist doctrine is debated, it is discovered that the curse will be removed from the family when a DeLauncy descendant marries a Schoolcraft. Free at last to follow their hearts, the lovers are united.

**Blanche Le Clerq, A Tale of the Mountain Mines.** Serialized in the *New Northwest* 2 Sept. 1886 – 24 Feb. 1887. Jack La Fontaine, owner of a wealthy gold mine in Idaho's Wood River District, falls in love with Blanche LeClerq, the protégé of actress Madam LaFontaine, but she will not marry him until he accepts her career and changes his beliefs about the "proper sphere" for women. As events proceed, we find out that Madam La Fontaine is actually Jack's mother. She had given birth to him after being victimized by a fraudulent marriage, and had left him to be raised by another so that her doubtful reputation would not affect his chances for future success. In the end, she also becomes a mining magnate, and Blanche is married to Jack.

**Shack-Locks: A Story of the Times.** Serialized in *The Pacific Empire* 3 Oct. 1895 – 26 March 1896. When John Standish leaves on a journey and does not return, his wife, Mollie, is faced with losing their property (a homestead and sawmill in Oregon's Willamette Valley) due to John's gambling debts. She works out a deal to take over management of the sawmill, which she makes profitable, but finds she can't get title in her own name because she is married. To gain control of the property, she gets a divorce. In the end, John returns and Mollie decides to give him a second chance — after he agrees that they will be equal partners.

**'Bijah's Surprises (revised 1914 in manuscript form as "Margaret Rudson, A Pioneer Story").** Serialized in *The Pacific Empire*. Book one, 2 April 1896 – 26 Sept. 1896. Book two, 1 Oct. 1896 – 31 Dec. 1896. This is a feminist utopia significant because it preserves the unfulfilled aspirations of its author. It is set on the acreage once owned by Duniway in Idaho's Lost River Valley, which she for a short time called home, and dreamed would be the site of an idealistic venture built along the lines of those depicted in this narrative. Although by 1896, Duniway had given up hope for ever carrying out her plans, she still dreamed. She imagined a cooperative community formed of emigrants from the crowded cities of the east who, aided by the backing of a wealthy philanthropist, would combine forces to share responsibilities in all areas, including housekeeping and child-rearing, for the betterment of all. The "New Woman," freed from the conventions of the past, came into being in the 1890s. Margaret was just such a creature. A wealthy heiress, doctor, inventor, philanthropist and entrepreneur, she would not even consider marrying her business partner, Silas, until laws were passed enfranchising women and ensuring that, by marriage, she would not lose her rights. Utterly smitten, Silas goes out on the campaign trail, stumping for woman's suffrage, to bring this about, and when they are married, they both take the hyphenated surname, Rudson-Horner, to set an example for other couples in the Utopian community they've established.

**The Old and the New.** Serialized in *The Pacific Empire* 7 Jan. 1897 – 30 Dec. 1897. Tired of the malarial outbreaks on their farms in Illinois, a group of families move to Oregon. Sixteen-year-old Liza Barton is in love with the attractive Dr. Stockwell, but while they are on the trail he is taken by Indians wanting a doctor to help with a measles epidemic, and does not return. After arriving in Oregon, she marries 'Liab Jones. Life is hard. Thirty years later, on his deathbed, he confesses that he knew that Stockwell had been released shortly before their marriage, but did not tell her. After 'Liab dies, Stockwell, who has built a successful practice in California, returns to marry Liza.

**From the West to the West.** Chicago: McClurg, 1905. The last retelling of Duniway's 1852 journey to Oregon, a greatly altered revision of *Captain Gray's Company* starring a heroic teenage spitfire, Jean Ranger, whose family is an idealized version of Abigail's own. The Ranger family, headed for Oregon, is joined by Sally, escaping an abusive husband, and her children (who had been awarded to their father's custody). Along the way, they pick up a mother and daughter, Mrs. Benson and Mrs. Daphne McAlpin. Daphne has left her husband, and is also fleeing to the west, to seek a divorce. After Jean's mother dies en route, John Ranger marries Sally, whose estranged husband has fortuitously committed suicide. Daphne's husband, Donald, also shows up and agrees to let her go — after facing up to the fact that he had actually been in love with the mother, not the daughter, all along! After the divorce, defying convention, Donald marries his ex-wife's mother, and they leave for Europe to escape the gossip that such a switch was bound to provoke. Jean is united with handsome mountain man Ashton Ashleigh, who she had met during the journey west.