

The LUCKY LAWRENCES

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WNU Service

CHAPTER I
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THE Lawrence family, although in the best sense of the word pioneers, had not come to the Golden West by means of covered wagons. They had left their Boston moorings, like the gentlefolk of means and leisure that they were, in the year of our Lord 1849, and had sailed elegantly for Rio, for Buenos Aires, and around the Horn. They had loitered in Valparaiso and in Lima for some weeks, taking things easily, in a leisurely day, and had in due time come up the stormy coast of California, and had dropped anchor in the opalescent harbor of peaceful Yerba Buena.

For San Francisco had been still familiarly known as Yerba Buena, then, and the blue waters of the bay had lapped the strand at Montgomery street. The globe trotters, magnificent Phillip Lawrence and his frail, Indian-shawled, pretty wife, had remained on the ship for a few days, for the settlement on shore promised small comfort for tourists.

Early in their second week, however, they had been obliged to seek lodging ashore. This was for two reasons, one important, one ridiculous. The important reason was that an heir to the Lawrences was about to be born. The absurd reason was that some preposterous person had discovered gold, or had pretended to, at a place called Sutter Creek, and that every one in Yerba Buena had promptly lost his senses.

Phillip and Abigail Lawrence naturally did not lose their senses. They were rich anyway; they were above this undignified scramble for lucre. Phillip had an income of three thousand a year, and Abigail's father owned five sailing vessels, including this very Abby Baldwin in which they had made their wonderful honeymoon trip.

But the sailors, and indeed the officials of the Abby Baldwin, had felt differently. They were not above acquiring fortunes, and they had instantly deserted the ship and made for the gold region. The rumor of gold, spreading like prairie fire between breakfast and the noon dinner, had found the ship emptied by sunset. Phillip and Abigail had signaled a Chinese crab catcher, and in his little shallop with stained brown sails he had rowed them and their carpet bags ashore.

They had gone to "the Frenchwoman's," a quaint-looking adobe house on a hill, with an upper balcony and shutters. There were no windows, but there were tents of mosquito netting over the bed, and the bare floors were clean. Downstairs was merely a level of dim arcades, earthen-floored and smelling of spilled wine, where men lounged on benches, and where the Frenchwoman herself tended the bar. But the upstairs room had been comfortable enough and Abigail had eaten a shore meal of fish stew, dumplings, fresh soft black figs, sour bread, and thin wine, with some appetite.

This would do for the present, she had said. But one could not live quite like a savage, after all, and immediately after breakfast tomorrow Phillip must find a really nice place, and a nurse. If not, then they would have to go back to the ship.

Phillip had returned flushed, distressed, and annoyed from his search the next morning; he had returned flushed, distressed, and increasingly annoyed from the searches of the following days. The Frenchwoman's was not only the best, it appeared to be the only possible place for Abigail to stay, and to contemplate a confinement there, with the noise and drinking and the smell of wine below stairs, and with

nobody but whiskered old Madame Bouvier to attend her, was madness. Desperate, Phillip had rented a spanking team and a loose-wheeled buggy and had begun to drive about the adjoining country looking for shelter.

Abigail had covered passionate pages with the story of their adventures, and had put the letters into the canvas flap of her trunk, under the pasted picture of the little girl with the rope of roses. Some day they would get home again, Phillip, she, and the baby, and what a story they would have to tell!

Meanwhile, fifty miles southeast of foggy Yerba Buena, they had found refuge on a rancho. It was managed by a widow, one Senora Castellazo, who lived farther south in another hacienda, and was willing to rent this one to the strangers. It had contained no furnishings whatsoever when the Lawrences had moved in.

But many trips to the Abby Baldwin had pretty well transformed the dismal place. Phillip, breathlessly grateful that somehow, with the aid of a Mormon doctor from Benicia and the care of two stolid, wall-eyed Mexican women, Abigail had actually brought forth a first-born daughter, had made no complaints. He had had carted down wagon loads of chairs, carpets, china, bed linen, books—all the personal possessions of himself and his bride.

A bride! Poor Abigail had laughed forlornly on the first anniversary of her wedding day. It had found her weak and weary, stretched on a mattress on the floor of one of the cool rooms, with a burning August day hammering away at the spread level acres of the rancho outside. Beside her had been Annie Sarah.

They had brought her in hot dusty grapes, and hot dusty figs, and warm wine, and finally goat's milk, to solace her in her ordeal. Except for that, neither Mexican woman had volunteered anything. They had watched the frightened, doubtful, breathless struggle apathetically, until their oily brown hands had actually grasped Annie Sarah. After that they had seemed capable enough.

Anyway, it had been gotten over, somehow, and Abigail had been free to cry a little, thinking of her room at home in an orderly, shaded Massachusetts village, with Ma's lavender-scented linen on the smooth bed, roses in a green glass vase on the bureau, and the lace curtains blowing softly in and out of the opened upstairs windows. Lillacs, trembling grass, and Grandpa's grave in the graveyard, and doughnuts and currant jelly—oh, dear!

As soon as the baby and the mother were well upon the road to normal living, Phillip and Abigail had seriously discussed going home.

Then old Senora Castellazo had died, and her sons had wished to dispose of the Santa Clara hacienda. Four hundred acres for nine hundred dollars. Phillip had considered it a wise investment. There was fruit—some fruit—there already, there were sheep and cattle included in the sale price. If figs and grapes would grow there, why not other fruits—peaches and pears?

He would take his wife and daughter back to New England, he promised, on the first suitable ship; it would be a long hard trip for a woman with a baby, but the journey across the plains would be worse, and there was no further hope of the Abby Baldwin.

No, upon consideration it had seemed to Phillip that this sunshiny, sheltered flat region, well inland, was the coming district, and that by holding onto this property ten years, fifteen years, he and Abigail could not fail to be among the prosperous pioneers of the new world.

Phillip was one of the men who had shot dead the gold craze with an epigram: "a flash in the pan."

Meanwhile Fanny Lucy had been born.

"Look here, young lady, aren't there any boys where you came from?" Phillip had said, half serious, half teasing, as he held his second daughter in his arms. Abigail had looked at him anxiously. But he had not been really angry.

Only it had been rather trying that a fine ship had left for South America and eastern ports on the very next day. She had delayed so long in San Francisco harbor that Phillip and Abigail had really hoped to be able to sail on her. But Fanny Lucy had delayed, too, and had unconsciously affected her parents' destinies thereby.

For letters had gone to Boston on that ship, and letters, four months later, somehow had struggled overland in answer. The respective families of Abigail and Phillip had been perfectly delighted at their venture, and wrote that they were certainly envious of the dwellers in a country where there was no snow, no thunderstorms, and no poverty.

Abigail wrote glowing accounts of her new life to the family at home. She and Phillip were going to build a really nice frame house, with bay windows, a bathroom, and a cupola. Everything they touched prospered; people called them "the Lucky Lawrers."

And Abigail had eight daughters and one son, and the girls all married, during the last Sixties and early Seventies, in a land in which women were still rare and prized.

San Francisco grew like a mushroom, and Phillip might have opened a thousand doors to great wealth, had he been a man to see. But he closed one after the other with his own hand, and went blindly on in an infatuation of satisfaction with his rolling acres, his miles of fruit trees, the growing family over which he ruled supreme.

Some of the girls went east when they married, some lived in San Francisco or Stockton, some died. It was not a salubrious day for pioneer women, with one out of every seven dying in childbirth. Some were poor, opening boarding houses, scripping in lonely cross-road villages.

The one son, Patterson Lawrence, duly married, too, and lived in the house with which his parents had replaced the old adobe hacienda.

Abigail, and after her her daughter-in-law, in their fervor to encourage shade in that hot, dry country, planted everything upon which they could put their hands, close to the house. They did not foresee that the pampas grass and the verbena trees, the peppers and roses and evergreens, would grow closer, thicker, darker every year.

For thirty years the House of Lawrence had been in eclipse, and the garden showed it. Acre by acre old Phillip Lawrence and his son Patterson had watched their fortunes decline; the old pioneer of the Yerba Buena days lived to see the end of the century, and the end of his own prosperity, and died, leaving what remained in hands even less capable than his own.

For Patterson Lawrence was a poet, who lived merely to gather worthless old books about him, to dream over the painstaking penning of insignificant essays, which were rarely printed and for which he was never paid.

At forty he married a poet's daughter, who had been precariously existing for all her sixteen years upon bread, water, and the "Sonnets from the Portuguese," in a shanty on Rincon hill. Editha, before her early death, brought to the House of Lawrence two sons and three daughters. Sixteen when she married, ten years later, when Ariel was born, she quietly, happily expired, to music, as it were.

For Patterson had been reading poetry to her, the four older children, by some miracle, quiet and occupied down by the creek, and Ariel in her mother's arms taking a fourth-day view of life, when death came.

"She looks as if she were listening, Pat! She's going to be a great poet, and make all our fortunes!" Editha had said. And one minute later she had slipped away, leaving the prophecy to gild little Ariel's childhood.

The widowed elderly father did the best he could for them all until his oldest son was nearly eighteen and Gail a capable, bustling house manager two years younger. Then the big guns began to boom across the water, the service flags flashed in answer upon many a quiet flag pole in Clippersville, and Patterson Lawrence, fifty-eight years old, put a copy of Keats in one pocket and a copy of Shelley in the other and hurried off to die of flu in overcrowded Washington, just as sure as his loyal children were sure that he was helping his country and doing the patriotic thing.

Then Phil and Gail had to shoulder the burden. Gail Lawrence was supremely the girl for the job. She was squarely built, womanly at sixteen, brimming with interests, activities, ambitions, and enthusiasms.

By this time the once lucky Lawrences had almost no money. Phil had all but finished high school, and all the friends, relatives, and neighbors said that certainly a bright, fine boy like that

ought to complete his course. But as Phil and Gail quite simply agreed, meals were more important than education. So Phil stopped his schooling and went to work at the Iron Works, and Gail, upon being offered a job in the public library, accepted it gratefully.

They scrambled along in the disreputable old house very happily; They were always laughing, singing, going on picnics; they were passionately devoted to each other, and everyone was sure that they would get along splendidly. Were they not the last of the Lucky Lawrences?

Surest of all was Gail, the resolute, undaunted, optimistic mother and sister, cook, nurse and lawmaker in one. Life had been a story to Gail, for a few years, and she had turned a fresh page eagerly every day. She and Editha were going to marry delightful men, and Phil should marry, too. And Sammy should live in Editha's house and Ariel in Gail's, and Ariel should write wonderful poetry. There would be plenty of money for everything, as there always had been . . . soon.

But somehow it had not worked out that way. Gail had grown a little more sober, a little thinner, as the years had slipped by; they had all grown shabbier. Even to her, poverty began to seem a serious matter.

Phil, to her concern, had never quite seen the joke of being poor and being orphaned. He had always been brief, worried, and unresponsive when Gail had tried to drag him into her dreams. And Editha hated poverty, too; it hurt her pride. She had grown quieter, bookish, intellectual, something of a recluse.

Sammy had done nothing except slide through his shoes and get "D minus" marks in his studies. And Ariel was completely spoiled. They had all haled her as a poet before she could fairly write. She did write poetry, and that was enough



He Had Rowed Them and Their Carpet Bags Ashore.

for Clippersville. Clippersville was not critical. The Challenge published everything Ariel wrote. And Ariel was discontented, proud, and unmanageable.

Her twenty-third birthday found Gail a quick-witted, eager, capable girl, secretly a little bit scared and doubtful, but outwardly gay, irresponsible, and pleasant to look at—like all the Lawrences. Even the boys never seemed to go through lumpy or spotty phases, but were clean-skinned and bright-eyed through boyhood as through babyhood. The older four had tawny hair, which had tumbled all over their heads as children, but which on occasions could be made to take more fitting positions.

Ariel was different: frail, pink-cheeked, and cream-skinned, with frightened big hazel eyes and a small mouth. Ariel's hair was cornsilk gold.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

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