

# The Lucky Lawrences

... By Kathleen Norris ...

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## SYNOPSIS

The luck that had brought the Boston Lawrences to California just as the beginning of the gold rush seems to have deserted the present generation. From a 4,000-acre ranch, their holdings have shrunk to a small farm and the old family home in Clippersville. Phil, twenty-five, was in the iron works. Sam and seventeen-year-old Ariel are in school. Gail in the public library and Edith in the book department of Clippersville's largest store.

## CHAPTER I—Continued

Phil worked in the Iron Works for eighty dollars a month. Gail was paid half that monthly for a seven-day week in the public library. Edith made thirty dollars a month as assistant in the book department of Muller's big store. Sammy was supplementing his school career at nineteen with eager labors as errand boy and general office help on the Challenge and Ariel was supposed to be in high school. Ariel was now a fairytale seventeen.

And Gail was twenty-three today. She had presents at the breakfast table in the good old Lawrence fashion. Nobody knew where they came from, or who paid for them, but the Lawrences always managed to give each other presents on anniversaries.

Then Gail and Edith rushed the breakfast paraphernalia into the sink. Ariel was off to school, Phil had disappeared; Sammy had gone first of all. The two girls scrambled through the necessary kitchen work with a speed born of long practice.

Then Gail and Edith went upstairs, passing the open front door on their way. They hesitated a minute, looking into the jungle of garden.

"Look at the pear tree, Gail!" "Doesn't it just take your breath away?"

They shut the door and went upstairs, Gail saying of the unmade beds, "Let's flap 'em."

Edith's face clouded a little. She hated compromise and slovenliness; she hated the hard conditions of her life that made some truce with them necessary. The clock on the landing struck once, for the half hour after eight; she was due at the department store, and Gail at the library, at nine.

"We'll have to," she conceded briefly, sighing.

"I shouldn't have worn my office dress to breakfast," the older sister observed, glancing at her cuffs. She got a bottle of some cleaning extract, and began to dab at spots.

"Egg!" she said disgustedly. Her glance approved of Edith. "That looks better on you than it ever did on Mary Tevis," she observed.

Edith studied herself in the mirror dispassionately.

"I never would have gotten it," she said. "I don't like dots. But it certainly has come in usefully."

"The worst of Mary Tevis is, she'll give you a bunch of things one time, and then forget you for seven years!" Gail, having made herself comparatively presentable, said briskly, "Now, when I'm rich, I shall have a list of girls—D—n such a shoe race!"

"Abigail, you ought not say that. You'll get Ariel saying it."

Gail mended her lace, looked up with a flushed face.

"Didn't you think Ariel was beautiful at breakfast, Ede?"

"Oh, yes, as really is."

"Do you think—this may all be my imagination—but do you think she's interested in boys, already?"

Their eyes flashed together consciously.

"Oh, yes, I know she is!" Edith answered unhesitatingly.

"She's only seventeen!"

"Well," said Edith, who combined a recluse's sensitiveness and tem-

perament with an occasional flash of daring, "I was fond of the boys at sixteen."

Edith, pretty as she was, had never had a beau, and Gail knew it. But it was the unwritten law of sisterhood not to say so.

Gail merely said perfunctorily, "Oh, well, yes, so was I! But, Edith, there seems to be something—different, in the way Ariel is."

The younger sister's quick keen gaze was lifted; Edith's serious look met Gail's consciously.

"Secretive," she offered. "Well! Well, yes," Gail answered on a nervous laugh.

"Ariel will get married before either one of us, because we happen to be a little more particular!" Edith pronounced, with her little air of old-maidish snobbery. When Edith said things like that it vaguely irritated Gail.

She left Edith at Montalvo boulevard, and turned up the Calle to the Plaza, where the library stood.

The day had begun. Gail unhasped the street door, and the usual waiting group of stragglers came in. Miss Foster clamped the newspapers into their holders; little Rose Cahill wheeled wire crates full of books to the different cases, and Gail took them from the barrows and filed them away in their places. The dim big rooms saw various noiseless activities afoot.

Gail thought of her youngest sister, as the dreamy dim hours in the library began to slip by. Ariel was less fitted than any of the other Lawrences for the struggle of life. She was only an innocent, bewildered child.

She wanted—in fact all of them wanted—leisure and beauty and luxury in life. Ariel seemed to want it more than the others, somehow, or in some indefinitely different way. She seemed made for beautiful gardens, beautiful porches, spacious, luxurious rooms. She pined, she drooped, in the atmosphere of poverty, griminess, dullness.

Thinking of all this, Gail abstractedly stamped and scribbled, and tossed the books about. When the whistles droned noon, and a sudden responsive pang of hunger stabbed her, she put on her blue hat and walked up the street to Muller's, to meet Edith.

Edith, neat, cool, and clean, lifted an ecstatic look to Gail as she decorously finished the sale of seven novels to a passing motorist. The girls idolized and idealized each other, and were proud of their friendship. All the passion of the younger sister's rather cold nature was in the look; this was one of her awaited moments every day, when her flushed, adored, tousled Gail came in and they went to lunch together.

They went in at the side door to the home kitchen, and let up the shade, and began their preparations for lunch. The kettle was boiling over a bead of gas, for Ariel always came in promptly at twelve, and had her lunch and was gone before the older girls arrived.

Edith sat wearily, luxuriously, over rolls, honey, and tea, her eyes absent, her hand idly stirring the cup.

"Gail, I was thinking that we ought to learn some more poetry, as we do the beds. Member how we used to rattle it off, when we were little girls?"

"We ought to do it again! It was lots of fun. I'd like to learn Noyes' 'Highwayman,' and some of Hodgson's poems 'Eve' and 'The Old Ball.'"

"Ede, do you suppose things'll ever be any easier for us? Do you suppose we'll have clothes and a car, some day, and belong to a country club?"

Edith pondered it.

"I—don't really—know," she said at last hesitatingly.

"I mean," Gail fumbled along wistfully, "poor people—people who have a hard start—do."

"Yes, I know they do!"

"Edith, I could stand anything for myself. But it worries me—about Phil and Ariel."

"I don't think Phil minds being poor so much—not since he's been going with Lily Cass," Edith offered.

"Well, I think I want him to mind! I don't think Phil is ambitious," Gail countered, with an anxious little laugh.

"Maybe we're foolish ourselves," Edith said, suddenly gloomy. "Maybe our luck's changed."

"Fooling ourselves?"

"Yes, do you think we are?"

"You mean," Gail said soberly, after a space, "that we aren't getting anywhere?"

"Well, are we? We are stuck in Clippersville," Edith summarized it. "Nobody knows we're alive. We're not in debt, because the doctors and dentists won't send us bills—but we ought to be. We haven't any clothes, any social standing—"

"Oh, we have that, Ede!"

"Well, if we have, if we are the Lucky Lawrences, if we were one of the most important families in California, once, what are we now? Who's going to marry us? Who is there here for us to marry, anyway? What's to prevent our living on and on here, old maids, scraping along as best we can—Phil marrying that horrible Mrs. Cass, Sam getting a job somewhere and going away, Ariel—committing suicide, I suppose—"

"Oh, Edith, Edith!" Gail protested horrified. "Don't talk like that! You're blue. You're just tired today, or it's spring, or something! Why, darling, nobody knows where changes are coming from, or when. We're having our hard times now instead of later, that's all! We'll have dresses and country clubs and trips and—and fun, theaters, I mean, and everything, one of these days!"

Edith's grave, intellectual face was doubtful.

"You're twenty-three," she suggested significantly.

"I don't think I mind for myself; I mind for you," Edith said as they walked back to work. "You ought to be having good times. You ought to be dancing, and going to little restaurants, and—and everything."

"And so ought you!" Gail answered cheerfully, although she felt a knife in her heart.

"Oh, I—!" Edith dismissed herself lightly, and immediately fell into that silly strain for which Gail could find no better expression than "old maids."

"I have a feeling," Edith went on complacently, "that I will meet my husband and be married to him all in a very short time. You know that fortune teller that was at Mabel's—"

"I wish she wouldn't talk that way!" Gail thought, suddenly hot, irritable, and discouraged.

She felt more weary and discouraged as she went on her way. The long afternoon in the library dragged. She felt bored. A sense of injustice oppressed her. Twenty-three—and she might just as well have been fifty-three.

## CHAPTER II

SHE walked home in languid twilight; all Clippersville was relaxed and jaded after the fierce, unexpected heat of the spring day. Gail thought that summer would be upon the world in no time now, the hot, dry, inland summer of California.

She looked at a dress in Muller's window, a blue organdy with thin orange ribbons hanging in a bunch from shoulder and waist.

Turning away from the window, she walked straight into the miracle.

"I beg your pardon!" she said, laughing. For she had really crashed into this man inexcusably.

"Gail Lawrence!" he said.

For a second she was bewildered, taken back. Then with her own peculiar graciousness she extended both hands, and her round face lighted, and her blue eyes.

"Van Murchison!"

"Well, hel—lo!" he said delightedly.

"But I didn't know you were in town!"

"But I wasn't!"

And they both laughed ecstatically.

"No, but seriously, Van," Gail presently began, in a delicious flutter but with a sensible and businesslike air, "seriously, when did you come and why, and how long are you going to be here, and what about Yale?"

"Seriously," he answered dutifully, although still visibly abrim with laughter and excitement—"seriously— But are you walking home?"

"I am. My honest working day is done."

Laughter. Van put his hand with delightful familiarity under her elbow. They turned toward the Lawrence house, some three or four blocks away.

"And are you all still living in Racketty-packetty house?"

"Oh, that's what you used to call it!"

"That's what you called it."

"Yes, we're all there."

"Gee, Gail," Van said with sim-



"Listen, Are You Engaged?" the Man Demanded Suddenly.

ple fervor, "It makes a difference to me, having you here!"

"But tell me—you haven't told me—" She turned her face to him, the sunset behind her aureoling her head with gold. "Tell me what you're doing here, Van!"

"Well, I went back to coll. after Christmas, see?"

"I see."

"Well, and I got a bug. Coughed, and pitted up, and was awful!"

Their joyous laughter, suddenly ringing out, was anything but suitable.

"You mean—lungs?"

"A pulmonary congestion. So now I have to lie in bed, drink milk, and rest."

"Dropped out of college?" She was horrified.

"My dear Gail," Van said reprovingly, "I darn near dropped out of life!"

"You do look thin," Gail mused, studying him.

"I'm fattening now."

"And where are you staying?"

"At my Aunt Martha's—Mrs. Arthur Chipp, you know. It's all been arranged. She's to watch me, and I'm to report to the doctor every week, and he's to keep in touch with the dear old guy at home, and Mother's to come out in June to inspect me."

Gail, shabby, gay, and friendly, looking up from under the shadow of his high shoulder, gave him a smile of infinite friendliness.

"I'm terribly glad you're here!" she said simply.

"Listen, are you engaged?" the man demanded suddenly.

"Engaged?"

"Yep. To be married."

"Oh heavens! As if I'd tell you if I were!"

Van's handsome face assumed a pleading expression, his voice was reproachful.

"Come on, now; give me the low-down!"

"There is no low-down!" Gail's face was aglow, her eyes dancing.

"Aunt Martha said she thought you liked Dick Stebbins."

"Dick Stebbins!" Gail was conscious of not wanting to forget a word of all this; she had a premonition that she would want to turn under her tongue the tid-bit of his having already discussed her possible love affairs with his aunt.

"Don't like him?"

"Of course I like him. His mother rents our Stanislaus place, and I see him on business now and then."

"Aunt Martha wasn't talking about business, you low prevaricator."

They both laughed again. They were at the gate now; the last beams of the sun struck flame from the windows of the shabby old house hidden behind him.

Gail's heart did not falter. It was not the hour—it was indeed not the place into which to introduce a Yale college man, whose father owned a chain of flour mills. But hospitality, deep-rooted and instinctive, blotted out all lesser considerations.

"You're coming in, Van?"

"No, honest, I can't! You know how things are at the Chipps'. People coming to dinner—a lot of fuss."

"Soon, then."

"Soon! But when can I see you?"

"At the library—any time."

"At the library. And say, listen, we'll go to dinner. We'll go off places, and eat a da spaghetti—what?"

"Oh, grand!"

Then he was gone. And Gail turned in at the gate, her heart singing. Oh, what a spring night, and what a thing it was to be twenty-three and to live in adorable, romantic Clippersville!

Edith was in the kitchen. Phil had not yet come home.

"Gail," said Edith, "Vance Murchison's back! He's got consumption, and he's up at the Chipps'."

"Yes, I know. I met him!"

"Does he look awful?"

"No," Gail answered with a wholesome laugh, "he looks perfectly fine."

"Gail, they want me to be Lady Teazle," Ariel announced.

"What! The lead?"

"That's what Miss Potter said. I'll be rotten," Ariel predicted gloomily.

"Oh, Ariel, I think that'll be simply grand!" Gail exclaimed enthusiastically. "Ede, did you hear that? Ariel's going to be Lady Teazle!"

Phil came in before dinner was quite ready, grinned at his sisters, and went upstairs. He came down in a few minutes, to sit in the kitchen and wearily, kindly join in the general conversation. Phil was the quietest member of the family, as befitted its head, and the man upon whose shoulders heavy responsibility had fallen in boyhood, and who saw life through sober, sensible eyes.

"Gail, you look awfully pretty to night," he said, watching her.

"In this old rag?"

"Perhaps Van Murchison's return has something to do with Gail's appearance," Edith suggested archly. "I met him in the Calle," Gail said rendered absolutely apathetic by Edith's merri-ly sympathetic manner.

"If there's a new beau in town—"

Edith continued railyingly.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

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