

The LUCKY LAWRENCES

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SYNOPSIS

The luck that had brought the Boston Lawrences to California just at 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, is in the iron works. Sam and seventeen-year-old Ariel are in school. Gall in the public library and Edith in the book department of Clippersville's largest store. Young Van Murchison, scion of a wealthy family, returns from Yale. Dick Stebbins, Phil's best friend, has the run of the Lawrence house. Ariel is sneaking out of the house at night for joy rides. Gall, who would marry Van, feels she is making no progress in his affections, regretfully concluding she is not his "type of girl." Phil suggests inviting Lily Cass to supper. Gall and Edith feel she is not "respectable," and are in a quandary. Van asks Gall to go for a week-end at Los Gatos with the Chipps, his uncle and aunt. She is received coldly.

CHAPTER IV—Continued

"Oh, yes, instantly!" said Mary, running out of the cabin. She and Mrs. Billings, conferring, went rapidly down the path together. Gall swallowed once with a dry throat. Then she got up and began to saunter slowly after them.

She encountered the boy named Fred Hunter in the path, and fell upon him with all the boldness of desperation. She laughed with him, narrowed her blue eyes in their thick black lashes at him, and when he said somewhat nervously that he had been going up to the cabin to wake Van, whose aunt felt sure he had fallen asleep, Gall said gaily that she would go, too.

They awakened the drowsy, surprised Van and they all laughed together, and Gall, still holding firmly to the now manageable Fred, waited for Van on the porch of the men's cabin. She walked down to the house between the two of them, disposing of Van's good-natured attempts to shake young Mr. Hunter by a determined, if light, hold upon the latter's arm.

At dinner, which began immediately, she was between the two young men. So far so good.

But it was work. It was bitter, hard, endless work; all struggle, no relaxation anywhere. She was conscious of carrying a heavy hand-cap.

The girls were all against her. They ignored her; they looked bored when she spoke; they deliberately carried the conversation into channels where she must be ill at ease and unfamiliar.

Gall fought on. Her cheeks blazed, her blue eyes shone. She lost all consciousness of Van as the man for whom she was beginning to care, of the beauty of the place and the summer night, of the novelty of dining here with these fashionable folks. It was all a blur, through which she was determined to hold her own despite them all.

When Lenore, at the end of the long meal, during which they had all eaten, drunk, and smoked too much, said provocatively to Van something about needing him to conspire with her upon something that would surprise the others, Gall countered by saying that she and Mr. Hunter wanted to get up a charade.

"That's what they call it now, is it?" one of the boys said, and Gall joined in the loud laughter.

Suddenly they were all disputing as to whether they should play bridge or go down to Mockerson's. Mockerson's was a roadhouse over on the Halfmoon Bay road, sixty miles away.

"Come on, let's go dance at Mockerson's! Maybe the place'll be raided."

"Listen. Let's not, and say we did!"

"Well, I'll tell you a story!" Jim Speedwell said unexpectedly. He told it.

For a moment Gall could not see the point. Then it came upon her with sickening force, and she felt choked and a little nauseated. The men roared; the girls laughed briefly, and Lenore said, "Jim, don't be so revolting!"

"You low swine!" Lucia Tevis, who was eighteen years old, added affectionately.

"Well, what can you do?" Gall asked herself fiercely. She couldn't shame Van by getting up and walking away from the group. Her face burned wretchedly for half an hour. She would not give in. She slept, waked, breakfasted, went to luncheon at some club in whose chintzy dressing room the girls were notably rude to her, watched her first polo game. She would not give in.

Fight, fight, fight. She made herself pretty, she made herself amusing, she fought back the constant impulse to say, "Oh, Van, take me home!" No, no, no! This was her chance; she would not lose it.

Van saw nothing. He was in great spirits, rushing from one thing to another—cocktails, bridge, tennis, swimming, polo, golf—at breakneck speed. By Saturday night all these were exhausted, radio and victrola had done their worst, and it was decided that Mockerson's offered the only possible amusement.

This was at about nine o'clock. Into cars they all accordingly piled, and off into the night they went. A dreary dressing room, after the cold run, and the girls powdering their noses, reddening their lips again. Another bleak-looking table with a limp spotty cloth on it. They were all so tired they almost laid their heads on the cloth, and Gall was scared when she saw the hip flasks and the red wine again. Van had driven like a crazy man on those steep circuitous roads coming over; he certainly would not be in a condition to drive more carefully going back.

Funny to think of herself as home again tomorrow night, playing solitaire. Well, one thing was sure; if she ever married Van Murchison or anyone like him she would cure him of this sort of craziness.

Mockerson's was as dull as ditch water tonight. There were parties in the curtained alcoves, shouting and singing, but the main room was empty.

"You're awful cute!" Van said affectionately, covering Gall's hand with his own.

A noisy party stumbled out of an alcove and scattered wearily toward dressing rooms for wraps.

"We ought to be going, too!" Lenore decided. "This is too awful!"

They stumbled up in their turn, staggered up the smelly, unpainted stairs to the odorous, damp, bleak dressing room. Its window, on this raw night, was wide open, the salty air blowing in deliciously cold and fresh.

"This won't do!" Gall said, going to close it. Standing beside it, both hands raised to the center sill, she looked down at a pool of bright light from the tavern doorway below.

"Come here, Duchess. That's the color hair I mean!" Lucia said suddenly, at Gall's elbow, also looking down. "Ash blond—and that's a real one, too. Look!"

Gall looked, too. Looked down at the bareheaded, loudly laughing girl a big raccoon-coated man was helping into a roadster. She recognized

the ash-blond hair, the curve of soft cheek.

It was Ariel!

CHAPTER V

GALL had a sick moment of vertigo, of terror. What she saw, what it signified, where she was and where Ariel was—everything rushed together in a complete demoralization of mind and senses.

After a while she turned and dazedly reached for her brown coat and buttoned its belt about her.

She was next to Van on the drive home. When they reached the top of the long rise, and the machines could run quietly, cautiously, through the enveloping thick mists, Gall spoke for the first time.

"Van, you saw those men and the two girls—the ones who were making so much noise?"

"Didn't notice 'em specially—why?" Van shouted.

"Oh, nothing!" Gall, actually writhing, saying the soundless words of prayers with trembling lips, added no more. But her soul was sick.

"Ariel! Oh, my G—d—not yet eighteen!"

It was like a horrible dream. She was miles—miles from home, from Phil and Edith, and security and goodness and help.

The need to be at home gnawed at her flesh like teeth; her face burned, she could not breathe.

"Van, how far are we from home?"

"From Los Gatos? Let's see—"

"No. From Clippersville."

"Oh, Clippersville? Oh—well, about seventy miles."

Seventy miles! They seemed to fall on her heart like so many separate blows. Was somebody driving Ariel seventy miles home tonight? What was she doing away from home? Where did Phil and Edith think she was? Perhaps Phil and Edith were dead. . . .

Perhaps they were scouring the town for Ariel, telephoning Dorothy, telephoning the Lovelaces! And she not there!

"Papa told us to take care of the children! And little Ariel, that Mother only stayed with four days—"

"And what does Ariel know about danger? Nothing. She's a baby. Men think she's pretty, and it amuses her. She never dreams. . . ."

"Oh, my G—d! Where is she now?"

It was impossible that 12 hours must pass before she could be home again and know the worst. Hours—hours! They proved to be the longest through which she had ever lived.

Vaguely, secondary things penetrated the flaming wall of thought that shut her in. She realized, alone in her comfortable cabin room, that she was not going to sleep.

Ariel! Ariel! Ariel!

She walked out under the redwoods just as dawn began to paint the western face of the canyon with streaks of vermilion.

Then she must have gone back and flung herself on her bed and fallen asleep, for she was awakened by the other girls' laughter and voices at ten, and roused herself, stiff and half sick, with heavy eyes and chilled wet feet. She crept down to the main cabin for breakfast only anxious to avoid notice, to secure the earliest possible escape for home.

They were all going up to San Mateo, for it appeared that Van was to take the place of a missing polo player; every one was very much excited about the game.

But she was in a fever to get home. Van's arguments, his pleading, fell on deaf ears. Ariel per-

haps murdered, Phil and Edith crushed with terror and doubt, and they wanted her to go to San Mateo and applaud the chuckers of a polo game!

In the end she had her way, and was established in the roomy empty back of a big closed car. Van saw her off reproachfully.

"You piker!"

"I know it." She smiled a sickly smile at the handsome boy.

"Why don't you stay and swim, anyway. It's noon; you'll cook—driving home through the valley!"

"I can't. I promised Ariel—"

"Oh, Ariel nothing! Listen, I got one good look at your little sister, and I want to tell you something! She can manage her own affairs."

Her face, already pale with heat and emotion, grew whiter.

"How d'you mean you—you saw Ariel?"

"Why—" He looked at her in puzzled surprise. "Why, she was at your house that Sunday night, two weeks ago."

He had not seen her at Mockerson's then! Gall sank back.

"Come on, have a change of heart, and let's swim! And then we'll go up to San Mateo."

His laughter, the grip of his big brown hand, would have been irresistible twenty-four hours ago. But Gall was hardly conscious of them now. Absolutely, apologetically, she persisted, said her farewells.

The world that was all pleasure—swimming, bridge, polo, tennis,



"Ash Blond—and That's a Real One, Look!"

frocks, trips—closed behind her as a pool closes over a stone.

She would be home before three o'clock. She must be patient. She would be rushing into the old house—and what a haven of rest and coolness and ease it would be!—at three o'clock. She would find Phil there, haggard and wild, Edith stricken, Sam making frightful suggestions about dragging the river and notifying the police.

"We Lawrences can never hold up our heads after this again," she thought. Not that it mattered, if Ariel, frightened and sobered, were home, were safe!

Thirty miles more! Her face was burned by the hot wind, and her head splitting. Twenty miles—ten miles. Finally the swimming treetops of Clippersville.

Gall's heart was suffocating her. She said only incoherent farewells, as she descended from the back seat into the heavenly green shadiness of the old garden, and catching up her heavy suitcase ran for the side door.

On the threshold of the quiet, shaded kitchen she stopped short. Edith was sharing a light repast of artichokes and bread pudding with a book, "Martin Chuzzlewit." Ariel, dainty and cool, was sitting at the other end of the kitchen table, cleaning gloves in gasoline.

For a moment revulsion of feeling made Gall feel actually dizzy and weak. But if Ariel saw any-

thing amiss her smile of surprise and welcome gave no sign of it, and Edith's delight covered all other emotions for a space.

"Oh, Gall, we didn't expect you until suppertime! Oh, darling, did you have a good time? Was it fun? I've been thinking and thinking—but you've not had lunch!"

Edith was in her arms, was racing about the kitchen eagerly, mixing iced tea, taking rolls from the old black japanned bread box. Ariel got up from the table to come and bestow one of her strange kisses. Gall, seated, her hat pushed off her damp, pale forehead, felt that she was still in a dream, and that things had shifted themselves about on all sides, strangely, as they did in dreams.

"But tell us, tell us, tell us!" Edith pleaded.

"And what'd you do last night?" Gall could finally ask, when the swimming pool, the frocks, and the general excitement of Far Niente had been pretty generally reviewed.

"Ariel was with Dorothy Camp. So the boys and I had to console each other!"

Gall gave Ariel her big sisterly, sympathetic smile.

"Was that fun?" she asked, feeling that it was somebody else talking, that it was all a part in a play—in one of their Sunday night charades.

"Fun! They stayed at the Fairmont," said the eager Edith.

"Oh, did you, baby?"

"We went to a movie," Ariel supplied.

Then—then the girl at Mockerson's wasn't Ariel? Or else . . . Gall's first impulse to tell her sisters of her sickness and fright died away. She dared not risk that yet.

Peace and shadiness held the kitchen. Home. The infinite peacefulness of it! Gall, looking at Ariel, could not believe that her feverish, frightened suspicions of last night had any basis whatever. This was all reassuring, all soothing.

It was not believable that this innocent child of seventeen, in the blue organdy, had upon her mind any secret as disgraceful as a midnight escapade at Mockerson's.

But as soon as they had an opportunity to speak to each other alone, Gall went straight to the point.

"Ariel, did you ever hear of a roadhouse called Mockerson's?"

The blond head, with its drift of flyaway gold hair, came up like a flash. And Gall knew.

Ariel shrugged slightly, wary eyes on Gall's face.

"Yep," she admitted briefly.

Then there was a long silence. Ariel's eyes met her sister's.

"Some of us went over from the Chipp ranch," Gall said, returning the steady gaze. "What were you doing there, Ariel?"

"What—what you were, if you were there and saw me, I suppose!" Ariel blurted, in a tone that was meant to be bold and turned out merely trembling and frightened.

Gall took the shock without a sign, going on patiently.

"Who were you with, dear?"

"Oh, don't dear me!" protested Ariel, in sudden ugliness. "You know you think I'm a lost soul, and you're going to tell Phil, and stir up all sorts of trouble."

She stopped fiercely, as Gall merely sat, silent. From vague worry and apprehension about Ariel, suddenly the whole fearful danger had sprung upon her. This morning it had been no more than fear; now it was full knowledge.

"You weren't in San Francisco with the Camps, then?"

"Oh, yes, I was! We went down from there."

"Where was Mrs. Camp?"

"She had to go to San Rafael. She left us at the Fairmont."

"Just you two girls? Did she know you went out that night?"

"We didn't tell her—no."

There was a pause. Then Gall said, "Ariel, I can't believe it!"

"You were there," Ariel offered accusingly.

TO BE CONTINUED