

SEVEN SEAS BOOKS

A Collection of Works by Authors in the English Language



LARS LAWRENCE · OUT OF THE DUST

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LARS LAWRENCE · OUT OF THE DUST

BY THE AUTHOR

Novels

The Edge of the Nest
The Gospel According to St. Luke's
Trilogy: The Seed
Vol. 1 Morning Noon and Night
Vol. 2 Out of the Dust
Vol. 3 The Hoax (*in preparation*)

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Counterattack
Declaration

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You Can't Change Human Nature
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What It Takes
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OUT OF THE DUST

A Novel by

LARS LAWRENCE

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With love to J

*"The Lord God formed man of the dust
of the ground, and breathed into his nos-
trils the breath of life; and man became
a living soul."*

..... Genesis, II, 7.

CONTENTS

PART I Bum's Rush

| | |
|---------------------------------|-----|
| 1. The American Way | 13 |
| 2. Wherewith It Shall Be Salted | 21 |
| 3. Liars | 32 |
| 4. The Line-Up | 43 |
| 5. Beautiful Witness | 47 |
| 6. Big News | 53 |
| 7. The Carpenter | 59 |
| 8. Yes But | 64 |
| 9. Near Miss | 67 |
| 10. The Free Press | 71 |
| 11. Theory and Practice | 82 |
| 12. Nor a Borrower Be | 102 |
| 13. Respite | 110 |
| 14. American Girl | 117 |
| 15. Leader of Men | 129 |
| 16. Mikey and Mike | 137 |

PART II Business as Usual

| | |
|-------------------------------|-----|
| 1. Atrocities | 147 |
| 2. Triangle | 150 |
| 3. The Renegade | 167 |
| 4. Mayor Harriman Has an Idea | 175 |
| 5. The Briefing | 181 |
| 6. Day Coach | 197 |
| 7. The Conspirator | 215 |
| 8. The Frayed Rope | 220 |
| 9. Stop Press | 235 |
| 10. The Scene of the Crime | 243 |
| 11. Mightier than the Pen | 248 |
| 12. Elena Contributes | 259 |
| 13. Buckshot | 266 |
| 14. Mignonne's Odyssey | 269 |

PART III From Scenes Like These

| | |
|-------------------------------------|-----|
| 1. The Rites of Saturday | 289 |
| 2. Colonel Wedemeyer Bends the Twig | 293 |
| 3. The Mayor Is Missing | 306 |
| 4. Surprise at El Greco's | 311 |
| 5. Evasive Action | 314 |
| 6. Brief Candle | 334 |
| 7. Cha-Cha Gets Her Man | 339 |
| 8. False Alarm | 349 |
| 9. The Hobo | 351 |

PART IV Faith of Our Fathers

| | |
|----------------------------------|-----|
| 1. The Sign of the Cross | 355 |
| 2. Temptation | 367 |
| 3. The Church Lawn | 374 |
| 4. Hegira, Inquisition, and Rout | 388 |
| 5. Mother and Son | 412 |
| 6. The Mouth of Hell | 424 |

PART V Play the Fife Lowly

| | |
|---------------------|-----|
| 1. Casanova | 431 |
| 2. The Storm | 446 |
| 3. Blade of Grass | 459 |
| 4. Out of the Dust | 464 |
| 5. Earth and Heaven | 471 |

| | |
|----------|-----|
| GLOSSARY | 483 |
|----------|-----|

PART I

Bum's Rush

"The law, in its majestic equality forbids the rich as well as the poor to sleep under the bridges, to beg in the streets, and to steal bread."

— ANATOLE FRANCE

I. THE AMERICAN WAY

TO THE INHABITANTS of the desert, dawn is a diurnal re-creation of the world. With the first bluish pallors in the east, energies recruited in sleep become manifest as a soft stirring, a patter of paws and moccasins, ample yawns and stretches, subdued clearing of throats and nostrils, murmured prayers, corn meal sprinkled to the four directions. Cattle snuffle dry alfalfa, infant mouths smack distended over breasts, shivering dogs leave the shelter of byres and doorways to await the sun, hens cackle a paean to the first egg. Axes bite at dry faggots, pots chime together, hobbled colts mince off in search of ditch water. Smoke ascends in pale straight strings from chimney pots and smoke holes and sheep-camp fires. The appearance of Sun Father is one of the day's climaxes, properly celebrated on house tops and hillocks by his sons and daughters deep in the heart, behind clouded eyes, with a minimum of visual ritual. The high-whining song floating from a distance could be a prayer or it could be an affirmation of life new-born in the night.

The world contains much of good and also evil. There are good days and bad days, fat years and lean. But it is not an unreasonable world. Whether the day is good or bad, the year lean or fat, depends not on one's simple separate self, because there is no such thing as a simple separate self but only a morsel of the wholeness of the People. If the People do all together the things the

Ancient Ones have taught them, and if they say the words and perform the gestures the Ancient Ones spoke and gestured in the how-long-ago, and if therefore the People have good hearts, in tune with the way things are and with each other, then the day is good and the year is fat and there are many children and lusty, fat lambs and kids and colts and calves, much grass and corn and squashes and beans and melons, much pottery and very beautiful, and beautiful heavy silver and turquoise jewelry, and many sings and dances and much fun-making and gift-giving and feasting.

There is a right way to wake in the morning, just as there is a right way to go to sleep at night, a right way to begin eating and to finish eating, to enter a house and leave a house, a right way to pray, to smoke, to wash the hair, to mold and fire a pot, to kill a rabbit or a deer, to bring forth a child from the body of a woman or a loaf of bread from the breast-shaped oven, a right way to plant the corn-seed or the man-seed, above all a right way to command the he-rain to fertilize the fields and brim the ditches and replenish the reservoir - and this way is the way of beauty, which is a song the whole earth sings.

"In beauty it is finished" is the way so many of the old songs end because beauty is wholeness and completion and unity, one heart and one tongue; beauty is health, is freedom, is happiness: all these words are one word and one feeling, these things are really one thing, which is the good heart of the People.

And so it is that the beginning of a day is the promise of the possibility of beauty, if only the People's heart is good, and this it must be if they do their work in the right way and say the right words with the right gestures which are part of the work. Each day is like a dance with the whole People dancing, not each one dancing separately but all together dancing with one heart. It is not the dancing of any one but the dancing of all

together that makes the dance beautiful and whole and makes the happiness and health of the People. The dancing of all makes the heart of each good, and the good heart of each makes the good heart of the People, so that it is the togetherness that is the important thing. So one is very careful, from the moment of waking to the moment of sleep, to do all things right and say all things and gesture all things in such a way as to preserve the wholeness and goodness of the heart of the People and make a good day and a fat year inevitable.

To be sure, there is also evil in the world, and that is a mysterious thing. Not the good is mysterious, but the evil. Not till evil occurs can it always be known that somewhere a heart is bad and has destroyed the wholeness of the heart of the People. But then something can be done about it, something must be done about it, there are medicines very powerful and magics more powerful still and great ceremonial dances through which the medicines and magics work, and in these ceremonies all the People participate as one whole, and so the bad heart is purified and the wholeness of the heart of the People is restored, rain falls and the ditches brim, the wool of the flocks thickens and glosses, the male corn and the female corn ripen and children crow and prosper.

Only the evil that comes from the white man cannot always be exorcised, only the evil that comes from his laws and guns and priests and money and other sickness.

The People can live together in reciprocity with rabbits and eagles and moles; the bear and the buffalo and the mountain lion, the deer and the antelope and the cimarrón, are the brothers of the People and cooperate together with them; they willingly give their flesh and their spirit for the health and happiness of the People, and in return the People make great ceremonies and give gifts and prayer-plumes and medicines in honor of their animal brothers. Even rattlesnakes are brothers to

the People, the People are not afraid of them but hold them, take them up in their hands and hold them in their mouths and caress them with prayer-plumes, and if the heart of the People is good the rattlesnakes do not strike but go quietly away as messengers to command the he-rain and the she-rain to bring moisture to the corn fields and the ditches of the People.

Even the stones have life and power which they lend to the People if the heart is good. Only with the white man is no brotherhood possible, only against the evils of the white man is there no certain medicine, no inevitable magic.

It is bitterly known that the white man's weapons and laws and priests can penetrate even the most powerful magics, destroying the People's wholeness with money and whisky and the Jesus way. Against these evils there is no protection except avoidance and concealment, a stealthy withdrawing, a shrouding in stillness of the heart of the People; for the less the white man knows, the less he learns of the People's medicines and magics, the less can he exert his evils against the People. Thus the People cry to the white man, "Leave us alone!" — because only by insulating themselves from the white man can the People preserve a good heart, only by wrapping it in silence and dignity. And this the white man cannot penetrate, it baffles and defeats him because in him is no stillness and no dignity. He does not understand, he is afraid of it, and so he laughs very loud at the taciturn dignity of the People; but it is a defensive and defeated laughter, a mask for the frustration and rage in his heart. The white man speaks not to communicate his thoughts but to conceal them, so he asserts his superiority to the red man in order to hide his defeat, and generally, in the end, under cover of his unlaughing laughter, he goes away baffled. And so against the evils of the white man there is sometimes a defense and a remedy, and it is still possible for the