



Arriving in Reno, Emma Allen alights from train along with dozens of other women in the city to get the "six-weeks cure," as local residents call divorce. During stay in Reno, she visited Negro casinos (below) and tried luck with dice. Game is run by seven-foot-tall Club Harlem owner William B. Bailey.

RENO DIVORCEE

Nuptial knot cut by 500 Negro wives annually in divorce city

AS DIVORCE CAPITAL of America with some 15,000 women shedding their mates annually, Reno has its share of Negro divorcees. At the Washoe County Courthouse which is famed around the world for its speed in turning out a "freed woman" every five minutes, some 500 colored women get divorced annually. In recent years they have included such celebrities as Mrs. Bill Robinson in 1944, Mrs. Adam Clayton Powell in 1946 and Mrs. Bill Kenny (Ink Spots) in 1949. But the majority of Negro women who patronize the Reno divorce courts are unpublicized West Coast wives who have found that a Reno separation can be had as economically, with less red tape and much quicker than in their home states.

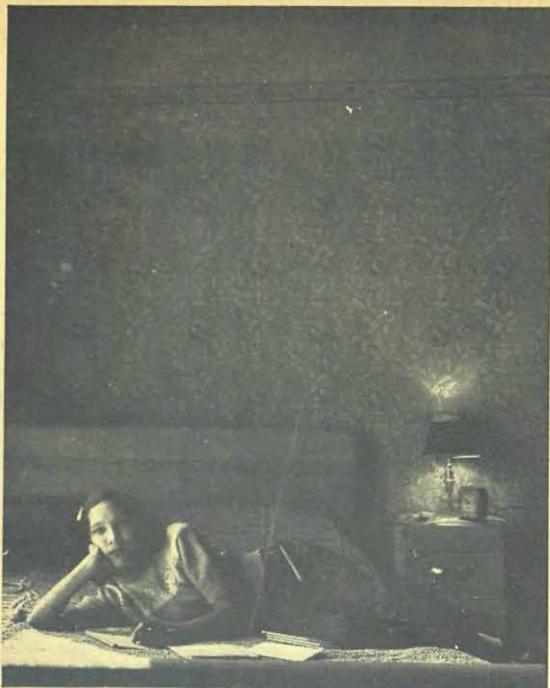
Although the average Reno divorce costs more than \$500 (and it is rumored that socialite Barbara Hutton spent \$150,000 for one of hers), the average Negro woman who comes to Reno for the "cure" gets by on much less. Barred from swank hotels, dude ranches and motor courts, they live at Negro-run room-

ing houses where rates are low. Even lawyer's fees are on a sliding basis and a poor woman can get counsel for \$150 or less. If she is careful and stays away from the gambling casinos, the total bill can be kept down to \$300.

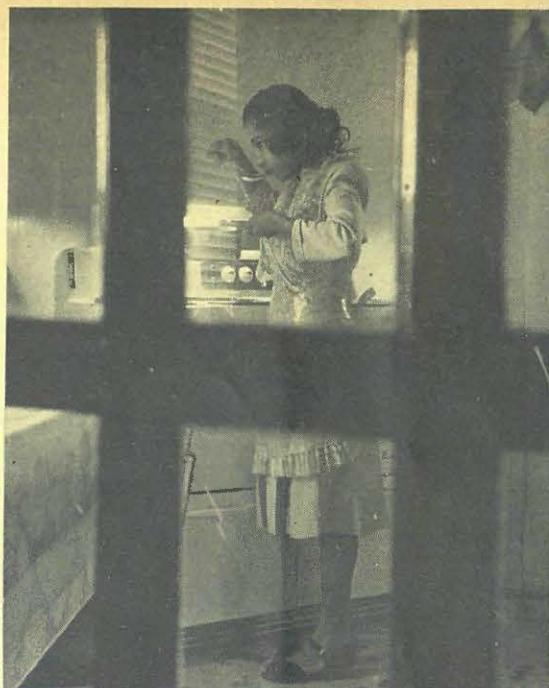
Typical of a quickie divorce obtained at a minimum rate is that of 23-year-old Emma Allen of Richmond, California, whose story is told on these pages. Separated from her ex-GI husband for almost four years, she decided on a quick divorce when she met a Ford worker, who fell in love with her and wanted to marry her. He agreed to pay for most of her expenses in Reno.

Although she expected her stay in Reno to be a trying, bitter experience, she discovered the Negro community of some 500 to be friendly and hospitable. She went to church socials, saw the sights in town and spent several nights looking at the gambling casinos. The six weeks went by much sooner than she expected and she was in a jubilant mood as she headed home with her divorce papers and towards a new trip to the altar.

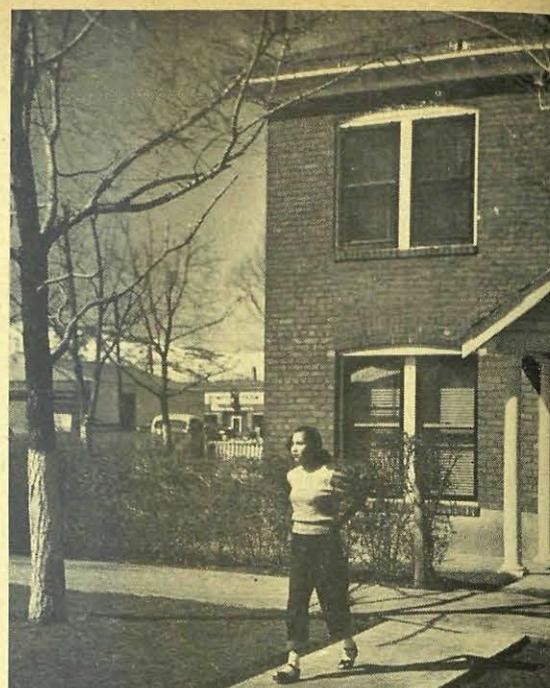




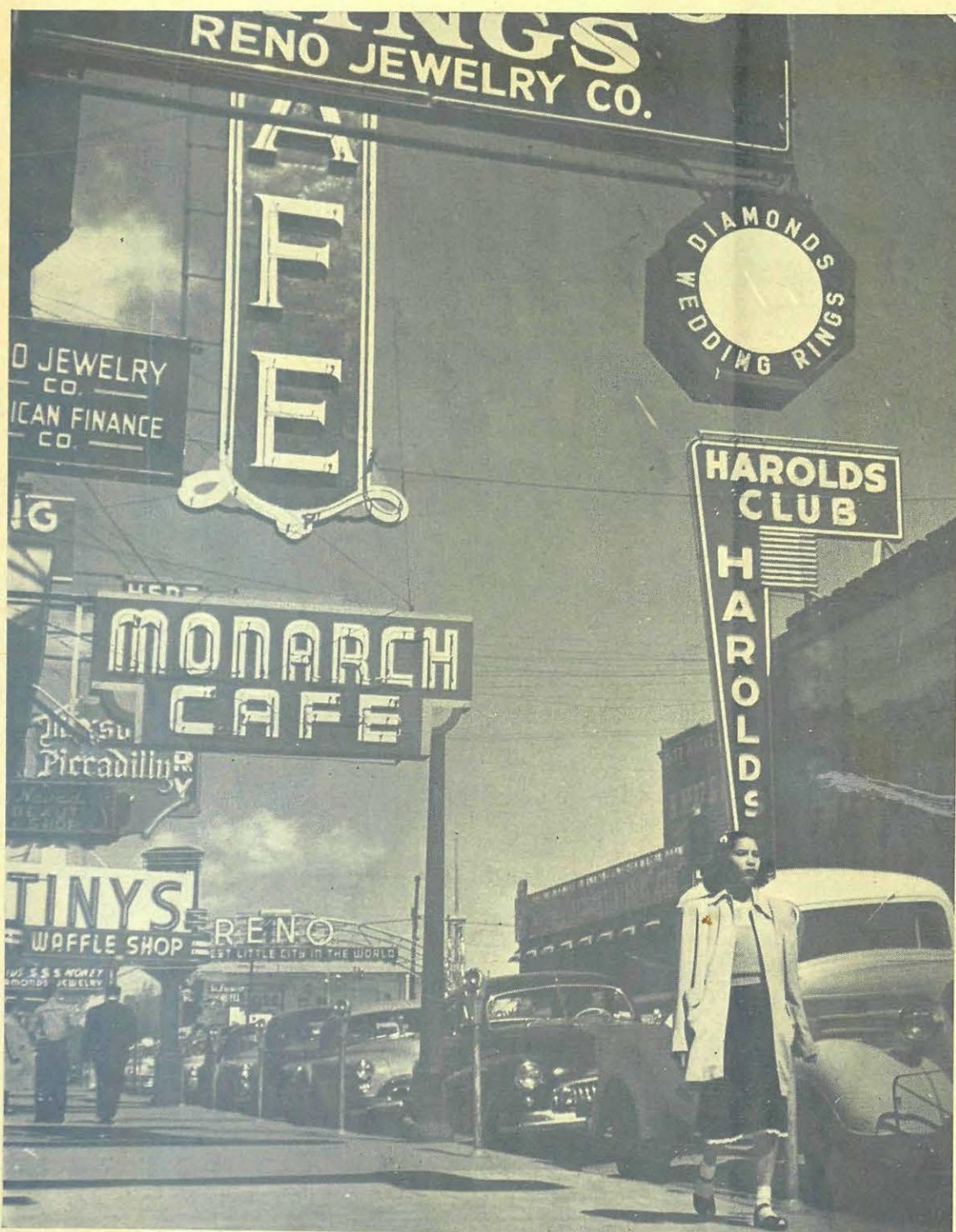
Low and lonely after arrival, Emma writes to friends during first days. She rented \$8 week room from woman who specializes in boarding divorcees.



Preparing own meals, Emma saves money. She spent \$6 week on groceries. She ate out only once during first two weeks in Reno, spent \$2 for church dinner.



Donning sweater and jeans "just like all the women do in magazine stories and movies," Emma goes for her first stroll to see the sights in Reno.



Going downtown, Emma takes in city's "main drag," Virginia Street, where all gambling dens are located alongside hock shops. Harold's Club has no locks because doors never close.

HUSBAND LEFT HER FOR ARMY

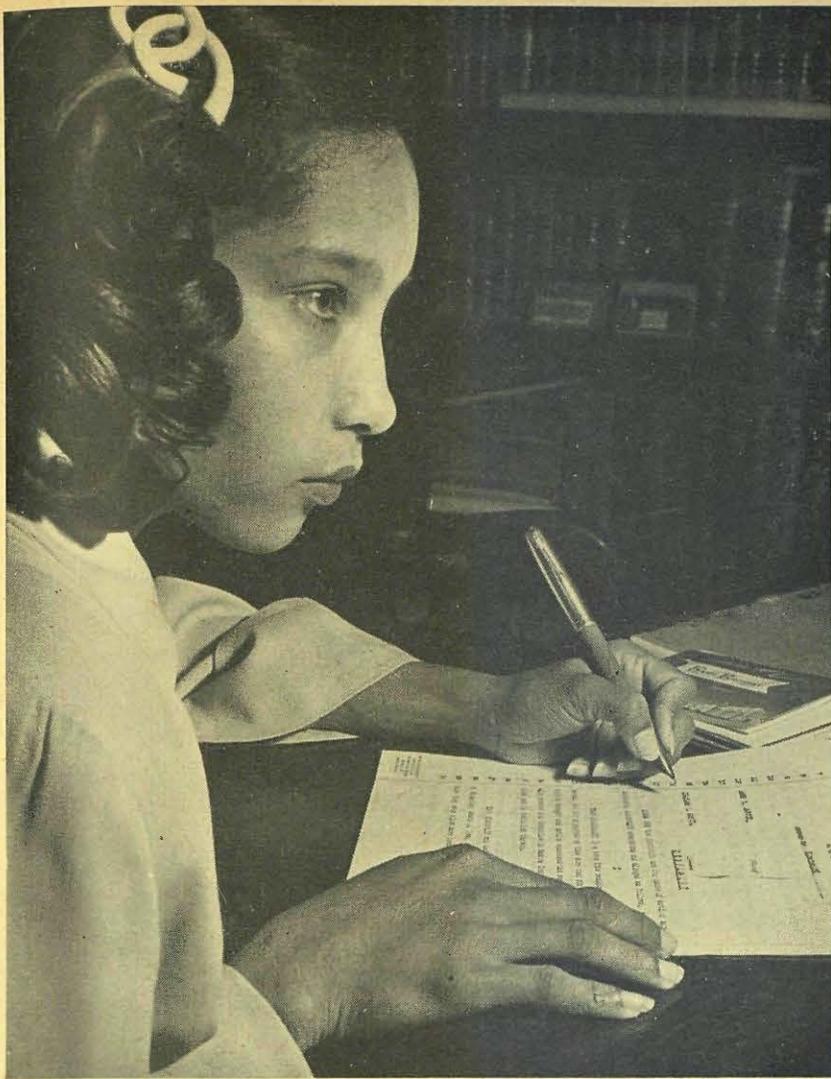
EMMA ALLEN'S marriage began breaking up several weeks after her wedding to army vet and high school sweetheart James Allen in Humboldt, Kansas, January 21, 1946. He re-enlisted in the army without telling his 19-year-old bride. A few months later he applied for service overseas and when he was assigned to Germany, refused to sign necessary papers to allow his wife to accompany him.

"He drank excessively," Emma says, "and gave every impression that he was dissatisfied with me and the marriage but he wouldn't say anything to me directly. I pleaded with him to tell me his feelings so that we could try to overcome this problem together but he just acted sullen and kept mum."

James went overseas and spent three years in Germany. "He sent me less than nine letters in all that time and they were cold and impersonal. He never sent a birthday card, greeting, gift, or any of those little things a woman loves," Emma says.

In April, 1949, when James was discharged from the army, he moved to Albany, California (few hours from Richmond) and made no attempt to see his wife. Emma decided a divorce was the only answer but for a year James refused to consent. He finally agreed and this Spring Emma bought a coach ticket (\$12.65 round trip) for Reno.

Emma arrived in Reno with only the names of a lawyer and landlady, knew no one in the town. Through a friend who had previously received a Reno divorce she knew something of what to expect but found her first day in Reno a lonesome and puzzling experience. She had started her six-weeks residence which would qualify her for her freedom and it looked as if it would be a long and trying period.



Filing her complaint was Emma's first legal step toward securing a divorce. Most women file on day of arrival so stay in Reno will be exact six weeks. Emma had white lawyer recommended by divorced friend. Reno has no Negro lawyers.



Playing slot machine after shopping for groceries, Emma tries luck at the jackpot. Reno has legalized "one-armed bandits" in every hamburger stand, cigar store, restaurant and market. Casinos reap huge profit from nickel to dollar machines.



Tossing wedding ring into famed Truckee river after securing divorce is tradition with women in Reno. Emma gazes down into river from which natives claim over \$5,000 worth of rings have been recovered in past 10 years. Courthouse is to right across the street from bridge. Emma would not say what she did with her ring.



Off for night tour of Reno, Emma and her escort, Tommie L. Walker, look at famous sign that proclaims Reno "The Biggest Little City In The World." Two Negro casinos are in Douglas Alley, original spot years ago of most gambling spots. Colored clubs offer same games and same odds as swank white casinos.



Behind dice table, Emma gets "inside" instructions from Elite Club owner Edward Jackson on how legalized crap table operates. Club grossed \$12,000 in six months period, half of total being clear profit. Jackson owns several homes.

OUTSIDERS SUPPORT NEGRO GAMBLING CASINOS IN RENO

EMMA ALLEN'S stay in Reno was a relatively quiet one with the exception of her one big date with Tommie L. Walker, ordnance worker from nearby Herlong, California, who also does commercial photography as a Reno sideline.

Emma lived in home of Mrs. Doris Needham, who operates rooming house for Negro divorcees. "There's so few decent places for Negro women to stay in Reno that we decided to open our home to them. We keep a neat, clean house and we don't tolerate any monkey business. Women are not allowed to bring any male guests home," says Mrs. Needham.

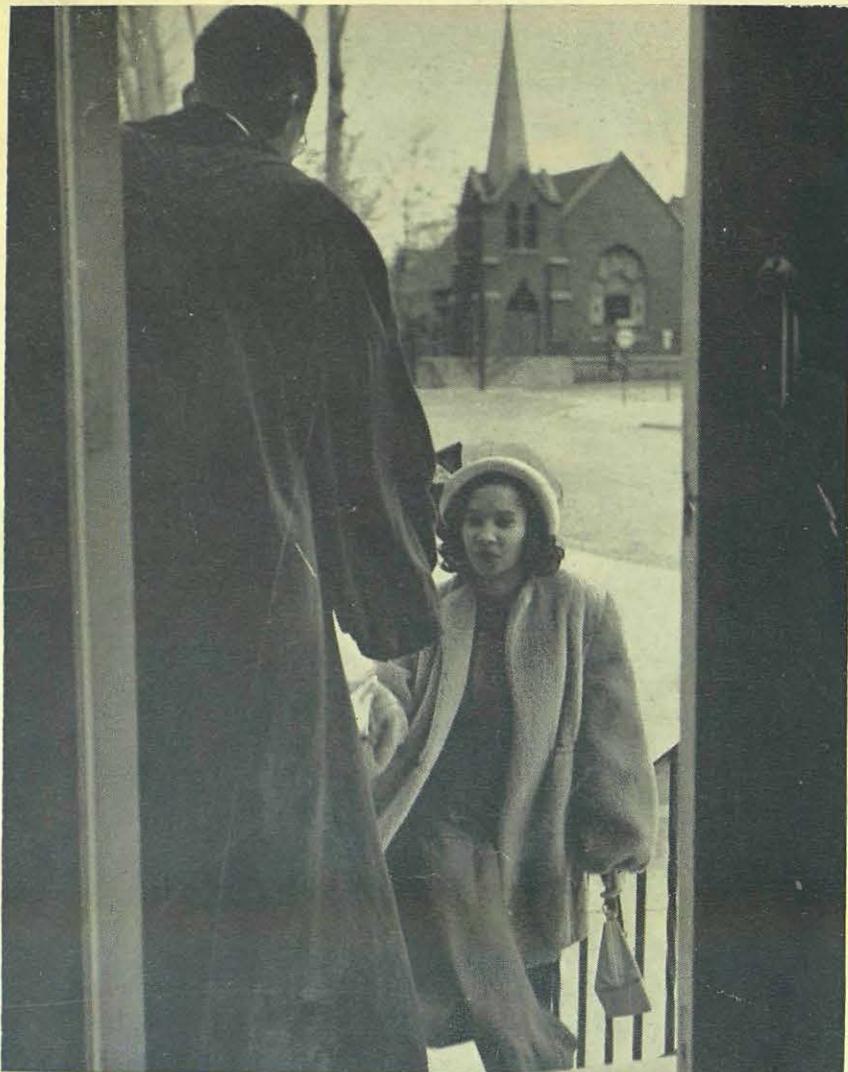
Through the Needhams, quiet, friendly Emma met leading Negroes of Reno including owners of both Negro casinos, the president of the NAACP and the pastor of the only non-store front Negro church.

Gambling is an accepted, legitimate business in Reno and casino owners are among its top citizens. Both William B. Bailey, owner of Club Harlem, and Edward Jackson of the Elite Club are strong church supporters and leaders in Negro community. Strangely, Reno natives do only a minimum of gambling; outsiders support the casinos.

Bailey and Jackson were once partners when they bought the old Pea Vine Club from the Jones Brothers back in 1946 and renamed it Club Harlem. A year ago Jackson started out on his own by opening the Elite Club right next door.

Negroes live all over Reno and can shop in any store, including fancy fashion shops which carry latest New York and Hollywood exclusives, but find it rough when they want to dine out. Only the Club Harlem, Woolworth's and a small Chinese restaurant will serve Negroes.

"Reno is really in the dark ages when you compare it with San Francisco and the Bay area where my home is," noted Emma. "In Frisco I go practically every place and feel comfortable. It'll be pleasant when I get back."



Greeted to church by Rev. R. F. Thompson, Emma Allen attends worship at Bethel AME Zion on first Sunday in Reno. Her landlord is elder at Bethel, invites all house guests to attend Sunday services. Most of them do.



At church social, Emma eats her best dinner in Reno. Bethel AME, proud of its Reno location, calls itself the "Biggest Little Church In The World." Rev. Thompson welcomes strangers with: "Are you here for the cure?"

MOST DIVORCEES GET WARM WELCOME FROM TOWNSPEOPLE

DURING her stay in Reno, Emma Allen lived very modestly and stayed away from the pitfalls of many wives who come for divorces: gambling and gigilos. A number of women try to drown their sorrows at bars and gaming tables and wind up losing all their money. They have to take jobs as maids or waitresses in order to pay their bills. Others fall for Reno men who make a career out of would-be divorcees who display their money too easily.

Emma, however, found a warm welcome from Reno and enjoyed her stay despite the unpleasant task she had. She faced no rebuffs because of her divorcee status and was glad that most local people joke about the divorce situation. "I guess they're so used to it, they've developed a sense of humor," she noted.

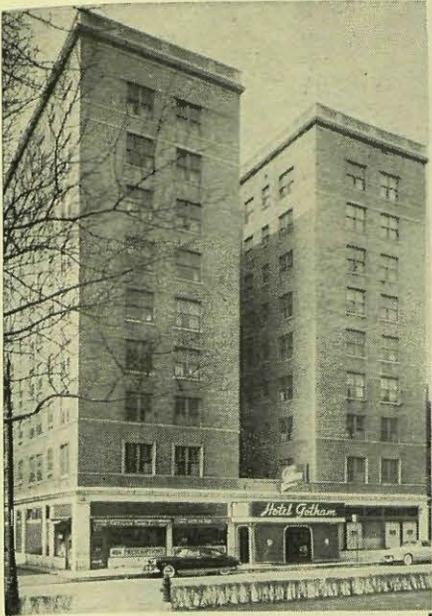
She found many local Negroes have taken on the rah-rah attitude of the general population. A genuine Reno supporter is gambling man William Bailey, whose policy is being hospitable to all visitors. "It serves two purposes," he says. "First, we help lonely people enjoy what Reno has to offer and secondly it's good public relations."



At NAACP meeting, Emma chats with its local leader Fred Fry, who works for ranch owner. Most Reno Negroes are domestics who work for wealthy whites, although 130 of them own their own property and homes.



On social visit to Mrs. Annie Jackson, wife of Elite Club owner, Emma enjoys glass of burgundy. Jackson reputedly won largest poker game in Negro casino—a \$2,500 pot in the early hours of the morning.



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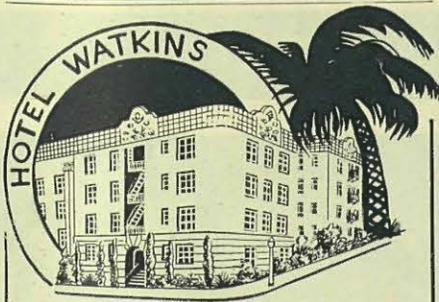
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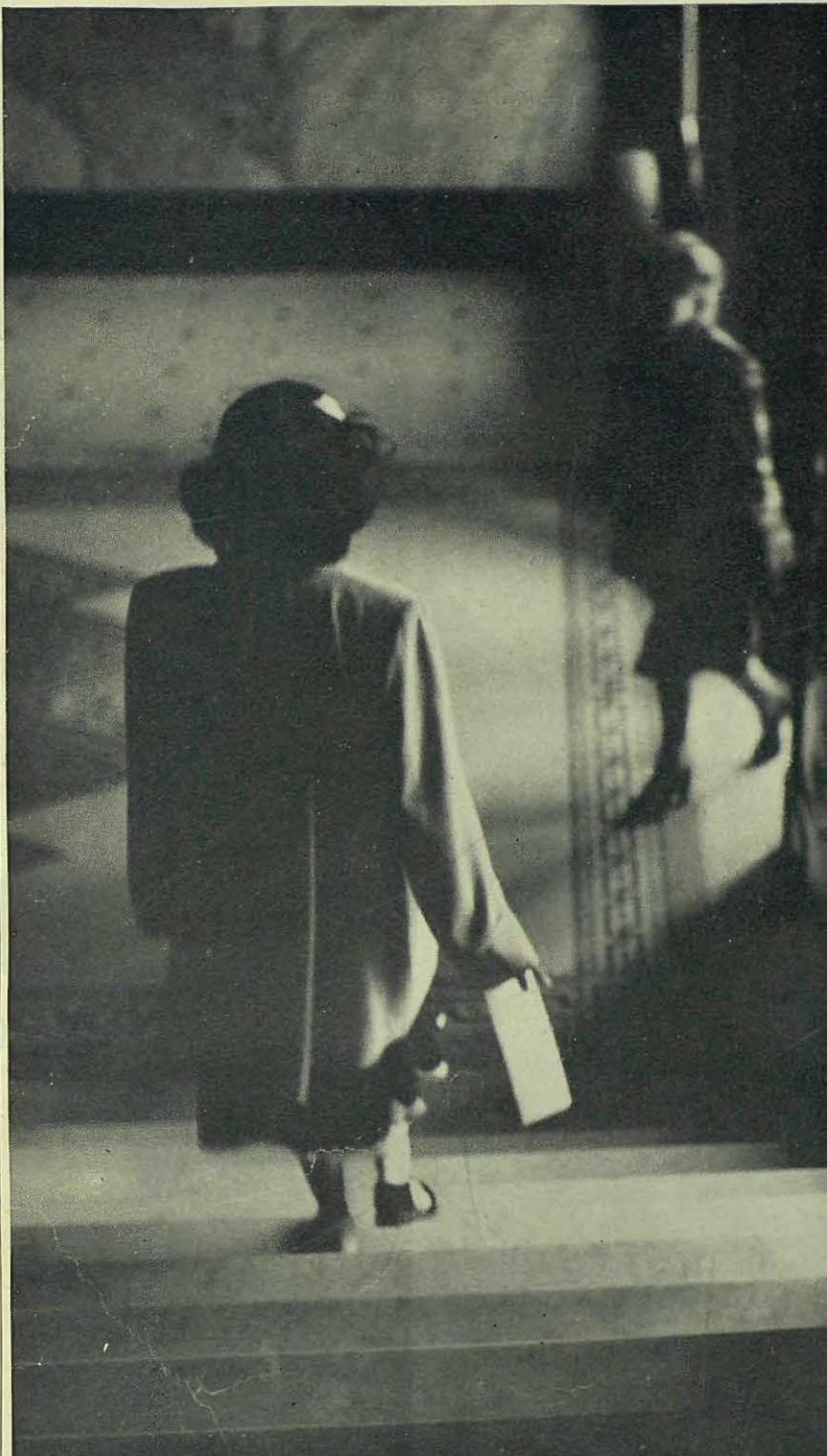
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With final decree in hand, Emma walks down steps of Washoe County Courthouse. Emma is alone for her lawyer remains in court to "argue" another cut-and-dried case. Woman entering courthouse will leave five minutes later with her divorce.



With "cure" complete, Emma waits for her train surrounded by new-found friends. William B. Bailey (owner of Club Harlem), Reverend Thompson and the Jacksons all took time off to bid her good-bye and wish her the best of luck.

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