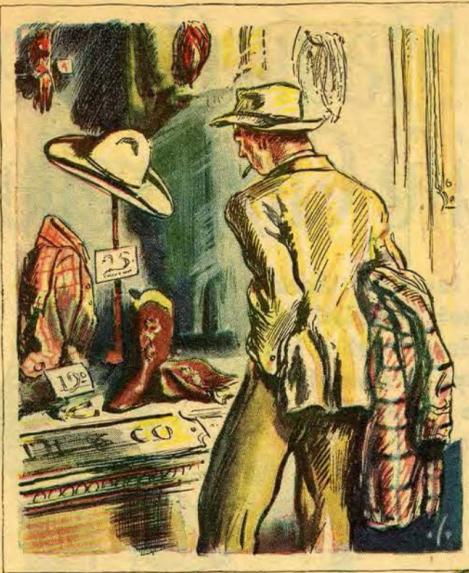


Out of This World—in Reno

Fantastic Story of Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Alimony in the Dizzy Divorce Capital Where Law and License Never Clash



A Look Around Reno Told the Eastern Lad That He Wasn't Properly Equipped for Prospecting.

By INEZ ROBB
CHAPTER VIII

RENO, Nev.

OUT here in the great open spaces where men are men and the wimmen aim to keep 'em that way, the colorful story of The Cowboy and the Lady is so familiar that legend and contempt is automatic.

That is, automatic in 99 cases out of 100. The hundredth case, which results in a happy and lasting marriage, breeds sheer amazement.

There are three possible endings to the inevitable, continuous and slightly seedy romances between the lady tenderfeet and the cowhands.

No. 1 is the rare happy ending indicated above. No. 2 is the passing of transitory marriage lasting from 24 hours to a year or so before the party of the first part gets fed up with the party in the flat Stetson hat, the tight-fittin' britches and the butterfly boots.

No. 3 results in either formal or informal marriage until such time as the innocent ol' country boy has mulcted the Lady, if such she be, of every penny in her possession, including the cattle or dude ranch she inevitably buys her lanky love along the banks of the Truckee or in the beautiful Washoe Valley.

Yes, sir, podner, the Truckee and the Washoe are strewn with ranches now owned by smart wranglers who cottoned up to lady dudes, roped 'em, hog tied 'em and trimmed 'em before deciding to kick 'em out on the seats of their fancy-cut hoss opera pants.

Yi-pee, Yi-Yi! This is the land of opportunity for that simple child of nature, the cowboy. All he has to do is hang around the Reno bars, and the divorcees do the rest. Usually the gals can't tell the drug store from the dogie type, and are equally happy or miserable with either one.

Sensing this fact, a graduate of the University of Virginia switched his act here several years ago and has never seen cause to rue the day.

A likely lad, he left the Jeffersonian halls of his Alma Mater on graduation and went directly to Lake Tahoe, that lovely, lofty lake in the Rockies 25 miles from Reno, to become a counselor at an expensive summer camp for boys.

He was innocent of the ways of Reno, but not ignorant of the way the world wags. Two trips to Reno and a round of its chic saloons convinced him he was in the wrong racket. He resigned his job as counselor, sold his Eagle Scout medals, came to Reno and invested his all in a cowboy outfit.

The ladies, Lor' love 'em, did the rest. Within six weeks, he was the happy bridegroom of a woman whose seniority was more than compensated for by her millions. She made him very happy for a few years until he saw the Main Chance again, divorced her, and obtained a whopping settlement. Then he promptly married an even older and richer doll.

Here, certainly, was a lad on whom a college education was not wasted.

The story of Joan Kaufman Biddle Wintersteen Polk Ladd, her romancin' and two marriages with Reno's whittlin' cowboy, Frank Polk, is worth repeating here not because it is exceptional, but because it is so terribly, terribly ordinary, so typical of such Reno romances—Believe It or Not.

Joan is the daughter of Mrs. Louis G. Kaufman of New York and Palm Beach. Her late father was one of Manhattan's most influential bankers. Only Morgenthau had more money and Joan and her family could walk up to Mrs. Vanderbilt and offer her a beer any time, any day.

Joan had lived all her life in the Ivy League and Main Line sets until she went west to divorce—at



Investing His All in a Cowboy Outfit, the Gold Seeker Hit the Reno Ranges With a Gusto and

Finesse That Brought Him Several Proposals of Marriage From Love-Hungry Divorcees. Naturally, He Accepted the Oldest and Richest.

separate intervals—a brace of extremely social husbands. The first was George Drexel Bidle of Philadelphia, and the second, Joseph M. Wintersteen. Her current husband is William F. Ladd, an American sometimes known as "The King of Nassau."

It was on her second business trip to Reno that Joan met Polk, a prominent member of local cowboy and artistic sets. A whittlin' virtuoso, Polk bowled Reno over with an exhibition of his art, including a remarkably accurate and artistic whittled reproduction of a ranch complete with fences, barns, buildings, house and requisite animals.

To make a long story shorter, Joan married the whittlin' cowboy on Jan. 31, 1941. But the spring thaw included Joan. She divorced him.

RENO has long since given up trying to fathom the way of a cowboy with a divorcee, or vice versa. So it simply shrugged its collective shoulders when she remarried him the following day, April 12.

After Joan divorced her Frankie on April 11, her attorney put her on the eastbound plane for home and mother. But when Joan went to take her seat—surprise, surprise! The whittler was there!

Apparently Frank was as handy with gab as with a pocket knife and a piece of wood. For by the time the plane came down at Elko, Nev., for more fuel, Frank had persuaded his ex-wife to return to him. They were remarried at Elko.

But the second try was no more successful than the first. Joan finally divorced Frank once and for all on July 17, 1941.

At the time of the second divorce, Polk, discovered with friends at the Round-Up Bar, made a



It is even more poetically summed up in the madrigals of Jack Watt, now in the U. S. Army but formerly a mo'om picture star of horse opera and before that a dude wrangler at the Del Monte and the Tumbling DW, two of Reno's best dude ranches. In Hollywood he was known as Brad King, and played with Bill Boyd in the "Hopalong Cassidy" series.

ACK was a handy man with either a gue-e-etar, a hoss or a lady dude. A tall, handsome kid, he made some home recordings of his playin' and singin' for Dory and Emmy Wood, owners of the Tumbling DW, before he felt the call to picture acting in Hollywood.

One of his classics—and there is little doubt that it contains more truth than poetry—follows:

work on a dude ranch near Reno,
Givin' thrills to these divorce-seeking dames,
Every morning it's a splittin' headache,
Every night it's one or more flames.

One was a lady from Frisco,
One was a gal from Spok-kain,
One was the wife of a guy servin' life,
Another was a gay one from Maine.

guy young divorcee, she won me,
Seekin' love in the West for a change,
Now I'm a gigolo in spurs
And the fault was all hers;
Gosh, I wish I was back on the range!"

"Why in the world do rich women come out here and marry cowboys?" is the puzzled question that at least a thousand local citizens have asked me in recent weeks. I thought that question over.



Joan Kaufman Biddle Wintersteen Polk Ladd and Frank Polk, "Whittlin' Cowhand." She Divorced Twice.

seven months before she went to Reno to divorce her first husband, Russell Arthur Wallace. A few days after that decree was handed her, she married Cowboy Warren Holton, top hand of the Lazy A dude ranch.

Holton was an outstanding catch in cowhand circles. He was good-looking and robust and had made a reputation throughout the cow country as a rodeo rider and performer.

More than that, Holton was a cowboy who had the happy faculty of making real money.

But his sterling character failed to hold the lady. One month later she divorced him.

But in divorcing the lone cowhand, Jean did the unprecedented and gave Reno the shock of its life: She asked for alimony!

Never before, in the memory of Reno's oldest citizen, had an Eastern woman, in divorcing one of the Knights of the Sage, ever done anything so unethical as to ask for alimony!

Her action just busted wide open all accepted procedure in The Cowboy and the Lady tradition. Reno still reels under that blow.

There was more to Jean's story than her mere marriage to Holton, however. It was a typical Cowboy and the Lady story in that she had come west to divorce her first husband allegedly to marry Rusty (Rutherford) Hatch, grandson of the late Mrs. William K. Vanderbilt, Sr.

Rusty, whose wife—the former Shirley Davis—had obligingly divorced him in Reno, followed Jean to Reno. But his devotion was for naught, once Jean had met the Lazy A's top cowhand.

It is not at all unusual for a woman to come here, intent on divorcing one man to marry another back East, and to forget both in her enthusiasm for a cowhand.

That's the way this Reno atmosphere has affected so many of them.

THERE is one case on record in which a woman divorced her husband, married her cowhand that day and flew to San Francisco on a honeymoon. She was back in Reno by plane the following afternoon, filed suit for a second divorce—this time from the cowboy—and received it.

That night she took the plane east and married her New York yokel fiance, who to this day doesn't know of his wife's romantic interlude in hoss opera.

In next week's instalment, Miss Robb will tell of Reno gambling, with some of its colorful incidents that set Reno apart from other widely-heralded arenas of chance.



But His Career Didn't Begin Until He Shed Her in the Divorce Court and Plucked an Even Richer "Reno Widow."

It may confuse Nevadans to whom a cowhand is as familiar as a taxi jockey to a New Yorker. But I think I have the clue.

"Chum, you never lived exclusively with the Ivy League," I always began the explanation. "You have never been forced to associate exclusively, through birth and social station, with graduates of fair Harvard, Yale and Princeton. Doubtless your formative years were never spent with a crew hair-cut."

"Nor have you ever had to listen night after night after endless night to the light chit-chat of a tired Wall Street broker or customer's man whose disposition has not been improved by Dr. New Deal."

"If such had been your fate, you probably woulda stood in bed with a good book. So do not be too hard on illiterate little gals with finishing school educations who come here and are bowled over by men with muscles. Out here where men are men they not only have hair on their chest, but on their pants, which you Westerners call 'chaps.' But be that as it may, it is a mighty, mighty attractive combination to a feminine Ivy Leaguer."

True, the cowboy usually palls quicker than the Ivy Leaguer. One might well consider the case of Jean Bennett of New York, daughter of Composer Robert Russell Bennett, who was married a full