

Out of This World - in Reno

By INEZ ROBB
CHAPTER II

RENO, Nev.
YOU only have to be in Reno for a spell to believe that the craziest people is monkeys. And—it shouldn't happen to 'em! Preconceived ideas on Reno and its divorce causes are bound to prove excess and useless baggage if carried to this mountain citadel where every prospect pleases and only the paying customers are looney.

I arrived here convinced that Reno was Heartbreak House. In my innocence, I thought the town would be awash with tragedy and grief. I was prepared to do an up-to-date rewrite job on "An American Tragedy" with a new twist. My pockets were full of crying towels.

Years of legend and fiction, festooned on Reno, led me to expect innumerable dowdy, middle-aged women, pitiful and alone. These, in my mind's eye, were the hapless victims and loving helpmeets of husbands, who, panting after some younger and tastier dish, had dispatched Old Faithful to Reno for a divorce.

The husbands, of course, would be too busy earning money for the younger women to come and attend to the divorce in person. They should spend six weeks away even from monkey business!

It took the frank and distilled wisdom of Reno's plethora of experienced divorce lawyers to prove to me how wrong, how romantically wrong, I was. These sardonic, worldly-wise men, from the most ethical and elegant to the veriest shyster, agreed as in chorus that (1) sex is at the root of almost all divorces, and (2) that at least 75 per cent of their women clients plan to remarry before the ink is dry on their decrees.

Charges of cruelty, non-support, drunkenness and infidelity in nine cases out of ten really are only blinds for sex incompatibility.

Incidentally, no fewer than 404 divorces were granted here last February. This was a record for the shortest month of the year since the state's six weeks residence law became effective about 14 years ago.

If 75 per cent of their women clients plan to remarry at once and already have a Willin' Barkis staked out in the alley, then at least 98 per cent of their male clients marry immediately, the lawyers unanimously agree. And when lawyers agree, it's a miracle even here in Reno.

This mention of men and divorce leads to the smashing of another Reno legend. In all truth, the community cannot justly be called "Girls' Town." One divorce out of every four is granted to a male plaintiff, and the percentage is growing steadily, according to Elwood H. Beemer, clerk of the Washoe County Court since 1917, has seen the percentage of men grow from nothing to its present high of from 25 to 30 per cent of all divorce plaintiffs.

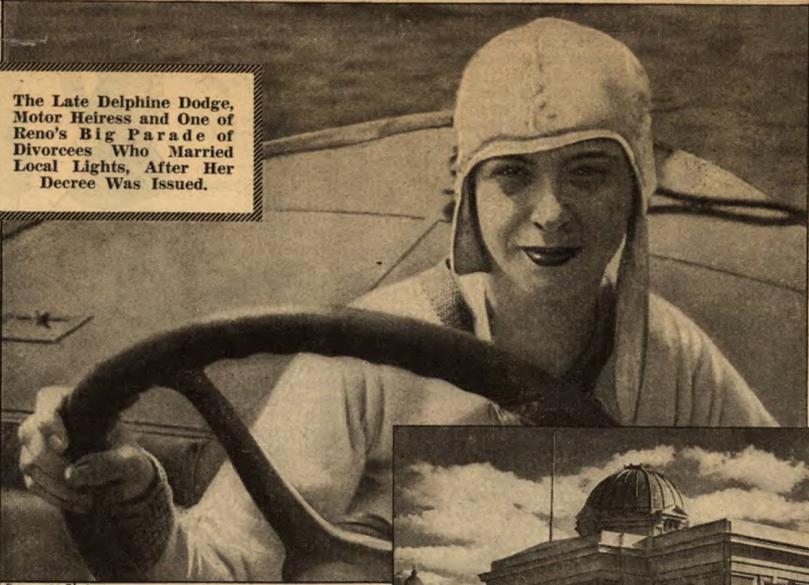
The universal contempt with which all Reno attorneys view their male clients is another amazing Reno facet.

"They're all damned old fools with ants in their pants," snorted an outspoken lawyer. "A woman may be dangerous at any age, but a man's dangerous age hits him between 40 and 50. And then God help him, because the old fool certainly won't help himself—except to a blonde half his years who'll stick with him while the money lasts. Or until she can get a nice, juicy settlement for herself and her younger boy friend."

(The names of none of the numerous Reno attorneys with whom I talked for weeks can be mentioned here. The Bar Association, to protect the

On the Stand
"Mama" Had Mild-Mannered "Papa" Looking Like a Wolf; But All the Time She Had a Willin' Barkis "Staked Out" in an Alley. And She Married Him at Once.

The Late Delphine Dodge, Motor Heiress and One of Reno's Big Parade of Divorcees Who Married Local Lights, After Her Decree Was Issued.



European Photo

rich divorce business, has stringent rules literally disbaring any lawyer who talks for publication on any subject save the weather and overtime parking as a community evil.)

As a proof of their contention that sex is at the base of most divorce actions, Reno attorneys love to tell the story of the late District Judge W. H. A. Pike, who granted thousands of divorces in his day. The judge employed a colored cook named Sarah who had worked for him for years. Sarah was married to a colored gardener named Jim, and for a



Gallop Photo

This Is It—the Reno Divorce Mill, Geared for New High Speeds, Where 404 Marriages Were Dissolved Last February, an All-Time Record for That Popular Month.

say he is," Sarah declared after hesitating a bit, "but I jes' done lost mah taste fo' him!" There, in a cryptic capsule—"Ah, jes' done lost mah taste fo' him (or her)"—is the cause of 95 per cent of the divorces granted in Reno, according

long time the marriage had seemed blissfully happy. So the judge was astounded one day when Sarah asked him to get a divorce for her.

"But, Sarah, I thought you and Jim were happy!" expostulated the judge.

"Yas'm, we mostly was," she readily agreed.

"Does Jim beat you?"

"Lawsy, jedge, I'd like to see that man raise his hand to me just once!"

"Then maybe he doesn't give you any money?" the judge then inquired.

"No'm, Jim brings his pay check home every Saturday night," Sarah said positively.

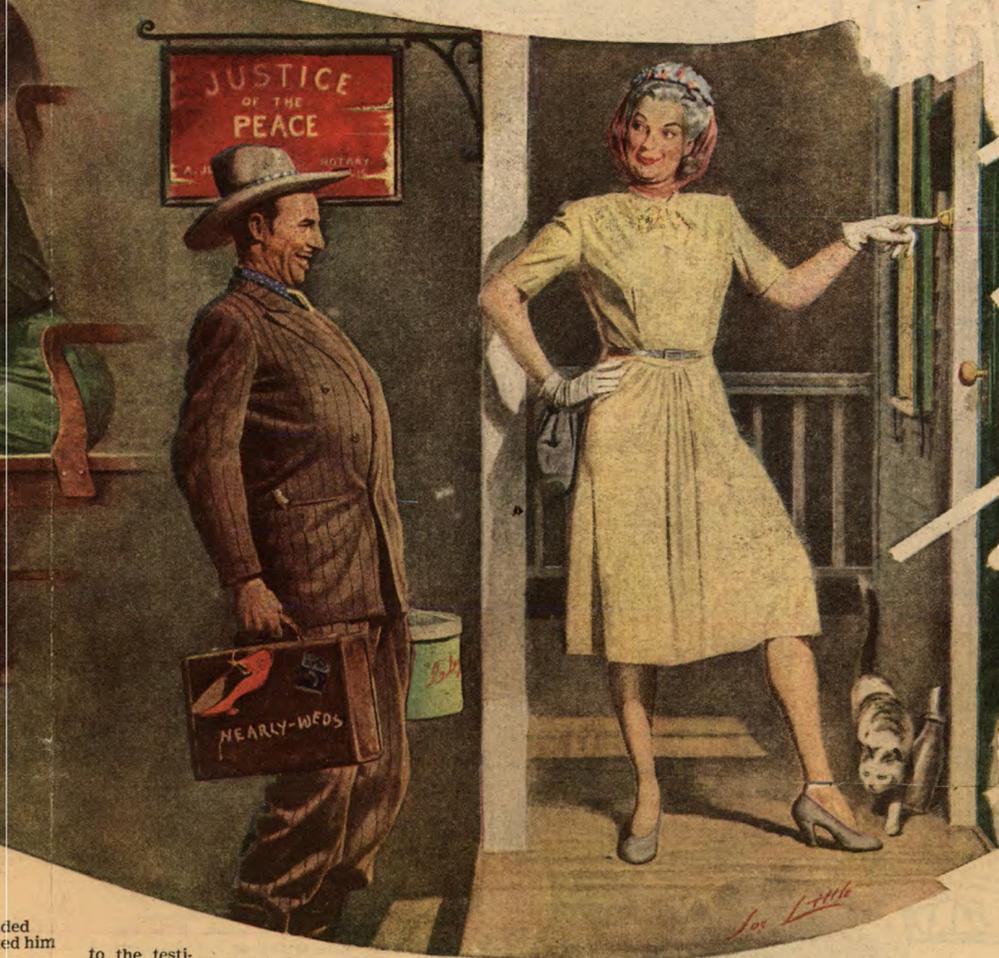
"Perhaps he runs around with other women?" Judge Pike suggested.

"Jedge, he do that and there won't be cat's meat left of that man!"

"Well, then why in heaven's name do you want a divorce? It sounds to me like he's been a good husband to you!"

"Jedge, I'll say he is," Sarah declared after hesitating a bit, "but I jes' done lost mah taste fo' him!"

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



It's an Old Reno Custom—a Divorcee's Joyous Salute to the Washoe County Courthouse in Gratitude for Her New Freedom.

with far more to save a home from breaking up than will a woman. Any number of them also agree that a man is far more concerned over the welfare of whatever children there may be than is the divorcing wife.

This may be sex loyalty on the lawyers' part, but case records put up a strong argument in their favor.

When a woman decides upon a divorce, it is almost invariably because she hopes to better herself, most lawyers agree. She wants to better herself financially or emotionally. Divorce, with the majority of women, is simply a matter of advancement or gain in one or both of these situations. She is hard-boiled and realistic about the matter, and very few tears enter into the business of changing mates.

This is pretty disillusioning stuff to discover and not very pretty to set down on paper. But it is the distilled essence of the wisdom of the one group of men who are experts and who know.

I'VE HAD a little experience myself. There was a more than middle-aged dumpy little woman in my hotel. She aroused the sympathy and pity of everyone in the place. All of her children were grown and her youngest daughter was married, she told us, so she had at last come to Reno to divorce what she declared had become an intolerably cruel husband.

One day he was kindness itself, she explained, and the next day he tossed her downstairs. Naturally, she objected to the days on which he did the tossing. She was sweet, gentle and oldish, and we all wept over her. Finally, her aging husband arrived. To our surprise, he looked to be very mild and self-effacing.

"But then, you never can tell," we all agreed. He begged her to return to him, but she was adamant in her refusal, and we all backed her up in her tearful determination. When he finally left, to return East, he told the hotel management that "mama" was to wait for nothing. He would guarantee any and all bills. This seemed to be very sweet of him, but then—we remembered those alternate days on which she said he threw her down the stairs of their home.

It was not until three days before her decree was granted that we learned that "mama"—yes, that dumpy little mama—was supporting a "spare" in a rooming house just a little way down the street. She married her young gigolo ten minutes after her divorce decree was granted by the court.

In Reno, they're never, never too young or too old!

Next week Miss Robb will tell how one woman divorced two men in two days, and married a third the following day, all within the State of Nevada.

to the testimony of the five top-flight attorneys who have told me this story at various times since I came to Reno.

The numbers of men and women equipped with a "spare" who come here to spend the legal six weeks are large indeed, if not actually in the majority. A "spare" is the euphemistic name given the man or woman with whom the plaintiff is living at the moment and whom he or she intends to marry when the decree is granted.

This explains the reason there are no house detectives in Reno. And don't think I'm fooling! A conscientious house dick in a Reno hotel would either cause a revolution or break the institution with his overtime.

And I don't mean just the auto courts and the cheap boarding houses. I especially mean some of the best Reno hotels catering to the swank divorce trade from both coasts. What you do in Reno is your business as long as it's not in public.

Although even that scarcely holds true. The most embarrassing episode I have ever seen any place was in a swanky cocktail lounge, just off the lobby of a fashionable hotel. I am no school girl, but the behavior of the couple was so flagrant that at the end of five minutes I fled. The fact that I fled is not significant, but the fact that neither the management nor the other customers found anything unusual in the erotic scene this couple put on, is—for it was a scene that would have caused any New York dive to toss the couple out bodily or call the police in a hurry.

Considering the reaction of the natives, I sneaked back to my suite feeling like a combination of Mrs. Grundy and the late Queen Victoria!

BUT despite all this, there is tragedy in Reno, certainly there is heartbreak. Bitter, scalding heartbreak, and tears shed by women and men, too, whose marriages have gone to pieces through no fault of their own. They are in Reno to dissolve a bad marital bargain and an intolerably cruel situation as well.

It would be callous to deny that there are women here whose busy, successful husbands have tired of them and brow-beaten them to Reno while they

chase a Size Twelve Rainbow in black-market nylons and false eyelashes.

But the percentage of such plaintiffs is surprisingly small when all the returns are in. Contrary to all the legends, the vast majority of men and women are here to divorce one spouse and marry another as quickly as possible.

When the former Barbara Hutton, now Mrs. Cary Grant, dissolved her first marriage here to the late Prince Alexis Mdivani, she was at once married to her second husband, Count Haugwitz-Reventlow.

The former Fifi Widener shed Milton Holden one moment and the next married her present husband, Alex Wichfeld. When the late Delphine Dodge, the motor car heiress, divorced James H. R. Cromwell (whose second wife, the former Doris Duke, divorced him, also in Reno, last December), she immediately married the late Ray Baker, who once was warden of the Nevada State penitentiary and later Comptroller of the United States Treasury.

WELL, what the nation's social and financial leaders do, Ruthie Roe and Dottie Doe can do, too. And they do it. The thousands of unknown, middle-class and lower case women who come here for divorces almost always plan to remarry at once—or are about to close an early matrimonial deal with some likely prospect.

"A woman doesn't want to give up what she's got in the way of a meal-ticket until she's certain she's got something else at least as good and usually better," Reno's sardonic lawyers agree.

Women have left not one shred of illusion about themselves in the minds of attorneys whose offices they turn into a confessional. By the time a woman reaches Reno and her lawyer's office, he cannot stem the confessional flood of talk that she turns loose on him.

Wittingly or unwittingly, she tells all. If their male clients fill them with contempt, their women clients fill Reno's legal lights with general despair and distrust of the whole female sex.

Many of this wise corps are convinced that a husband—not the ants-in-pants client—will put up