

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

By **INEZ ROBB**
CHAPTER III



Lady Luck's Old Spinning Wheel, Operating 24 Hours a Day, Provides Temporary Citizens With An Exciting But Expensive Escape From Tedium.

WHEN sex takes a holiday in other parts of the nation, she can usually be found sunning her provocative self on the steps of the Washoe County courthouse, in the center of Reno, waiting to tell her troubles to a sympathetic judge. And behaving, too, just like any other American Joe on holiday a hundred miles away from home and his home ties. And you know how that is. The screwballs who come here to dissolve the messes they've made of their marriages shouldn't happen even to Reno, except that the community long ago asked for 'em.

The many marital mix-ups brought to this town for solution are past belief. At least they're past belief to normal customers like you and me who lead placid lives with only occasional domestic tempests to add spice to double harness.

It takes genius—and don't tell me that isn't the right word—to establish residence in Reno to get two divorces simultaneously.

Six months ago Reno sheltered a babe—and don't tell me that isn't the right word, either—who, at the end of her six weeks residential period obtained a divorce decree one day and on the following day drove 25 miles to Carson City, the capital of Nevada, where she obtained a second decree from a second man.

I forbear to call No. 2 a second "husband" as it seems to me—despite my dearth of legal knowledge—that bigamy must enter into this picture somewhere along the way. For, without benefit of divorce, this doll had married No. 2, a rich old codger, after love in a cottage with her original husband, a poor but honest Elmer, had palled.

She was at least partially within her legal rights in going to Carson City, in another county than Reno's Washoe, for the second divorce. Once she had met Nevada's six weeks residential requirement, it was her privilege to get a divorce in any part of the state.

Our heroine thus shucked two husbands, or reasonable facsimiles thereof, within 48 hours. Apparently this cleaned the slate and saved her conscience, which had obviously taken no part in the conversation up to that time. Anyway, little Rosebud returned to Reno on the third day and married a third husband.

Now this third husband was an obvious fancy-pants gigolo. With the practiced eye of experience, Reno looked him over and judged the course. Knowing that he was marrying Tootsie solely for the large cash settlement made by her second husband, Reno bet six, two and even that the marriage would last only from three to six months.

But she was crazy in love with the gig, and married him. And was Reno right! Babe is back in Reno today, divorcing her third husband. But she is minus that handsome financial settlement. Number three has every penny except a few paltry thousands to see her through her third divorce and buy her a suitable set of hunting togs to aid in tracking down another rich sucker.

The longer I linger here, the more I am convinced that Boccaccio was born six centuries too soon. Boccaccio is the boy to do journalistic justice to this national hangout and hangover of sex unvarnished and unabashed.

Boccaccio, with Scheherazade and Bret Hart on the rewrite desk, could turn out an immortal best seller on the situation. Scheherazade would give the woman's angle to this opus and Hart the essential horse opera atmosphere that pervades Nevada.

There is no blinking the fact that a certain percentage of divorcees do come here and behave like alley cats. It's not a large percentage, but it is enough to have put the divorce colony in bad odor. These are women with neither morals nor manners, and the pity of it is that so often they have the money and the family name to make them conspicuous not only in Reno but anywhere in the nation's headlines.

Nor can Reno deny that there is still in this town, despite the national manpower drainage incident to the war, a group of despicable, no-good males who prey on divorcees who have plenty of

money. They haunt every bar and saloon where divorcees are apt to congregate, and it's an even money bet whether the wolves or the wolverines will make the first pass.

These men are conspicuous in Reno and known to every barkeep and saloon owner. In a town whose frontier code will not tolerate blackmail or any variation of the old badger game for a split second, it never scienceless, tricked-up cowboys and town ceases to amaze me that this band of con- duses is permitted to ply its trade openly.

Of course, Reno authorities may figure that anything that happens to the divorce-seeking wolverines is too good for them. And they've got something. But there are occasional innocent and heartbroken victims.

ONE of the most flagrant and pitiful of such cases has been in progress since I came here. A nice woman, indeed, a good woman, came here from the East five months ago to get a divorce. She was really a sympathetic case, for she was that rare thing in Reno; a discarded wife getting a divorce from a man who wanted to remarry.

Only thirty, pretty and well educated, she and her ten-year-old son made many friends here. Somewhere she met one of the town's most notorious wolves and drunks, and fell in love with him.

Since that time, he has mulcted her of every penny of the \$50,000 settlement made by her husband when she divorced him. In a drunken frenzy, he has driven her and her child away from the home she bought for all of them. He has beaten her unmercifully and now cashes regularly the monthly check for alimony she receives from her former husband. He has no intention of ever marrying her.

You may say the woman is a fool, and I'll agree. But she got into the situation in the first place, not because she was vicious and immoral, but because she was inexperienced and too trusting.

And she got into this situation because Reno authorities permit such men to operate openly in the town. Reno citizens take a curious pride in pointing out the wolves to me, as they do to other visiting firemen.

This is strange, indeed, in a town where any attempt at blackmail would be prosecuted to the full extent of the law. After all, many divorcees do lay themselves open to blackmail by their behavior. But divorcees are Reno's Star Boarders who bring millions into the town annually.

Reno is only too eager to protect its equity in



Mecca of the Maritally Mixed Up, Virginia Street, Where the Wolves and Wolverines Prowl and Howl.



Hocus-Focus, a Corny Catchpenny That Helped the Maharajah of Indore Pass the Time.

dreds of potential customers. So a blackmailer caught here can expect to be just about hung, drawn and quartered.

But the little band of wolves goes happily on its plundering way. Considering the fact that by chasing two or three dozen assorted neo-cowboys and duds out of town, Reno could vastly improve her moral tone, I'm surprised that nothing is done about the situation. Two or three experienced lawyers told me that the first advice they gave a woman client was not to hang around a half dozen bars and cocktail lounges which are frequented by the wolf pack.

"If they think a woman has money, God help her," one of these lawyers exclaimed. And I thought of the young woman, in her mid twenties, who is a standard fixture in the cocktail lounge of the hotel in which I was staying. Reading from left to right, the semi-conscious, bandy-legged cowboy sitting next to her is the husband she married here on the rebound.

Let's call her Darcy. This present marriage, her second, has lasted almost two years, to the amazement of the local experts. Darcy came to Reno from the East almost three years ago for the usual purpose. She was divorcing the no-good scion of a socially prominent New York family whom she had met during her debutante year in society.

Darcy did not take the divorce lightly. A serious-minded gal, she was horrified that her marriage had failed. She blamed the failure on society with a capital "S." Perhaps, she kept telling her friends, she would have made a success of marriage if only she had married some nice, simple home-loving Johnny Jones instead of a Cadwalader Vere de Vere, who wanted to shine in any limelight available.

Her current husband, the alcoholic cowboy, scrapped up an acquaintance with Darcy in a Reno bar. He was a simple child of nature, if nothing else. His alleged homespun qualities were in such contrast to Cadwalader's mannered posturings that Darcy quickly accepted him as the genuine lady's home companion.

The cowboy stayed sober long enough to woo and wed Darcy. His alcoholic daze has been continuous ever since. Darcy is grimly determined that this second marriage shall not end in divorce, too.

She has given up all effort to "reform" him. The sad thing is that Darcy, in despair, has decided to lead the life her husband prefers.

In deference to justice, however, it must be reported that semi-occasionally one of these wolves does get his comeuppance. A few years ago, one of Reno's super-menaces stalked a young di-



Ring-Toss Ceremony, With the Truckee River Receiving the Gold Wedding Band of the Gal Who's Just Been Put Back in Circulation.

vorcee who had no enthusiasm for his performance. Eventually, she consented to go to dinner with him. They met in the bar of the fashionable hotel where such encounters so often begin and end.

The wolf drove about five miles out of town and then demanded that his passenger either submit to a fate worse than death or walk back. Seemingly to acquiesce to her fate, the lady debarked from the car. So did the wolf who, in an excess of enthusiasm, began tossing his garments into the bushes.

Quick as a flash, our gal grabbed them, jumped in the car and headed back to town lickety-split.

Furious, she walked into the bar, where the crowd was grinningly anticipating the return of a triumphant wolf. Contemptuously, she tossed the gent's trousers across the bar.

"The next time Mr. _____ comes in," she instructed the bartender in ringing tones, "be good enough to give him his pants!"

RENO, Nevada, and slightly, the phrase going "Reno," a generic term for divorcees on the loose who drink like fish and whose wolverine howls echo through the town.

"Women don't learn to drink double Scotches overnight coming to Reno in a Pullman car," is the flat opinion of Bob Miller, manager of the El Cortez Hotel, one of the town's best.

They don't become drunks overnight in Reno, either, or suddenly discover the desirability of extralegal living arrangements. There are a handful of unhappy, rebellious women who are here against their will. But when they take to drink, they're the kind of toss-pots who fall on their face after two glasses of Sherry. And if, in their bitterness and loneliness, they have an affair, it usually isn't a public procession.

Reno, as I said before, gets the cream of the neurotics and psychopaths in the nation's divorce crop. This group is bound to include a fair number of drunks and nymphomaniacs. Sometimes a precocious cookie manages to be both. And then it's Katie-Bar-the-Door!

After all, a divorcee is an adult. And Nevada flatters an adult by presuming that he is intelligent enough to know what he wants to do and how to do it. This, again, stems directly from the state's pioneer conviction that if a man isn't master of his own destiny, he's better off dead.

How Reno's easy divorce became famous, not only in America, but throughout the world, will be told by Miss Robb in her next article.



This Is Reno—The City of Unparalleled Opportunities to Drink, Cavort and Gamble While Waiting To Tell It to the Judge.