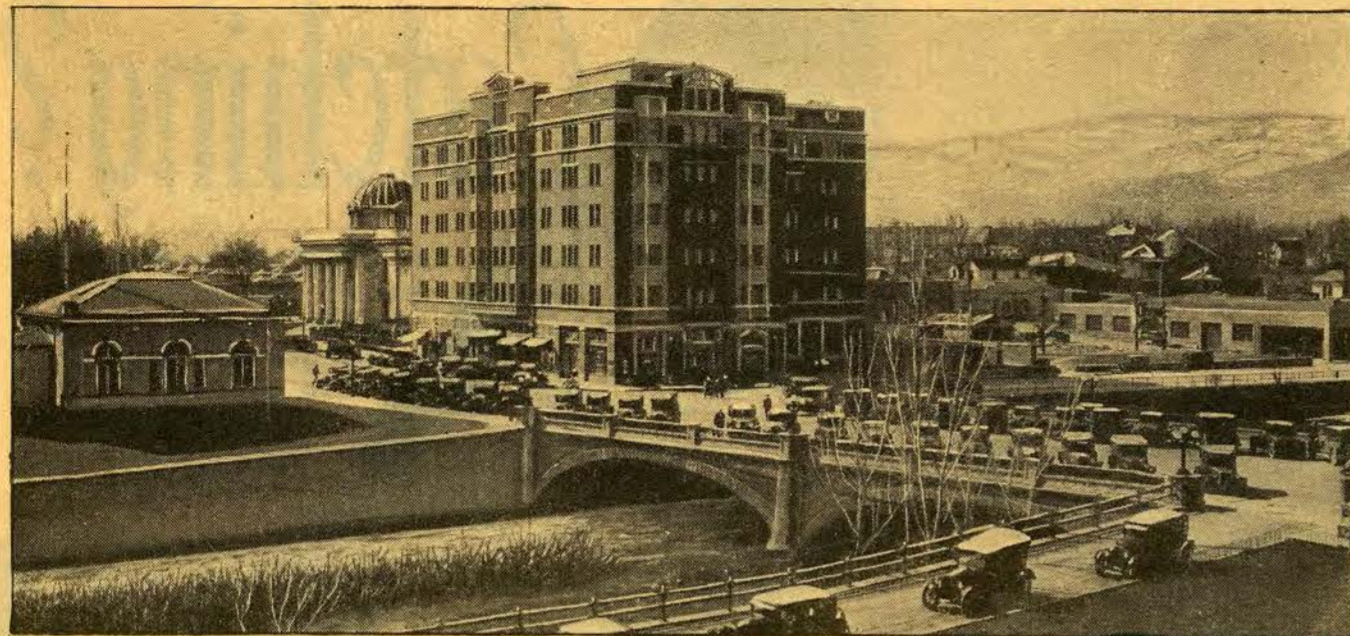


# Out of This World - in Reno



The Riverside Hotel Beside the Truckee River Into Which, Legend Says, Newly-Freeds Hurl Wedding Rings, Is First Stop for Litigants.

By INEZ ROBB  
CHAPTER VI

RENO, Nev.

**D**OES your wife make you nervous, sir? Does your husband inflict you with twitches and the screaming meemies or the jumps, Madam?

Then Reno is your remedy if you haven't strength of character to solve your domestic problems yourself.

O, uneasy thought! If your spouse makes you nervous in any of a thousand ways that is prima facie evidence of cruelty in any Nevada court and entitles you to a divorce in jig time.

In the three to four minutes allotted to each divorce case in Reno's Washoe County courthouse, even a talkative lawyer does not have time to ask too many questions.

But almost invariably, legal counsel—in the monotonous, automatic fashion of a juke box record repeated ad nauseam—asks his client the \$64 question:

"Were you nervous?"

The divorce-seeking client assures the court that he (or she) was so nervous he could scream, and the case is in the bag. The judge, reading or writing on the bench with a quarter ear on the case, automatically nods his head and drones "decree granted."

The number and variety of conditions that make a divorce-seeker nervous are infinite and wonderful beyond compare. The distilled wisdom of Reno courts indicates that among the most nerve-racking marital experiences are:

- (1) your in-laws (they shouldn't happen to a dog).
- (2) your spouse's childhood chums cluttering up the house and making smart with the cracks.
- (3) Nagging, nagging, nagging.
- (4) Arguing, arguing, ARGUING—and you keep my mother and politics out of this!
- (5) Division of intellectual interests, like should we go to the movies tonight or go bowling?

These are the age-old rocks on which the matrimonial barque shatters and sinks as frequently as on drunkenness, non-support, actual physical cruelty and infidelity—all of which are calculated to induce a nervous condition, too.

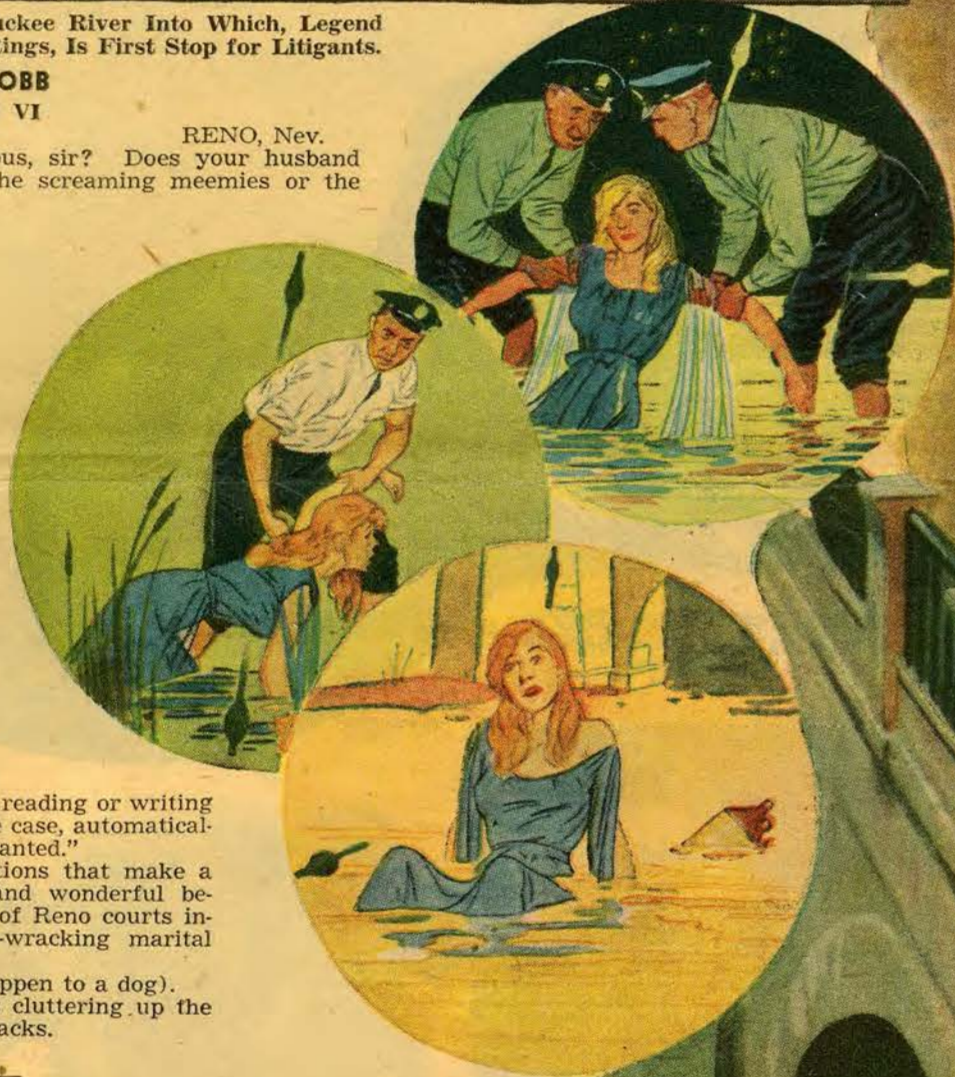
The most exaggerated case of nervousness on recent record is that of a middle-aged woman who recently obtained a divorce in record time when she testified that her husband was in the habit of removing his glass eye at the dinner table. Even the somnolent jurist took note of that one.

"Every time, it gives me heartburn and gas on the stomach," the woman testified, and no one doubted her word.

The slap, slap, slap of his wife's mules on the household floor all day Sunday, his one day of rest, drove a husband into such nervous spasms that nothing but the Reno Cure would do him any good. He got it from a sympathetic court.

The courts have noted one trend since World War II. The rationing of gasoline has made fewer men and women "nervous" over possession of the family car than in the past. The auto, which once assumed the importance of an inanimate co-respondent, no longer figures in divorce statistics.

Three Times the Exhilarated Divorce Seeker Threw Herself Into the Shallow Water of the Truckee, Which So Impressed Her Husband That He Relented, Giving Reno's One Suicide Try a Happy Ending.



But with court calendars clogged, the time has been cut to four and is now edging toward three minutes.

The speed with which marital injustices are adjudicated here is guaranteed to leave the innocent bystander dazed and panting. Before the current boom in divorces started last year, the average Reno divorce case required only about five minutes.

Cases are run off on the belt-line system, with no time out between cases. As one plaintiff leaves the witness stand with newly bestowed freedom, the next plaintiff is prodded forward by his legal counsel who realizes that time is of the essence.

To save time, both the plaintiff and his (or her) residence witnesses are sworn jointly, not separately. Usually the essential residence witness, who must swear that he has seen the plaintiff on each and every day of his six weeks residence in Reno, is the only witness called. His testimony takes some 45 seconds. The rest of the time is the plaintiff's, in which to compress all the woes of the marital state.

If the plaintiff shows any inclination to be gabby or a determination to air a long record of infelicity now that he has got the stand, he is doomed to disappointment. His attorney, if not the court itself, will shut him up and get him back to the skeleton outline of why—in this particular case—the plaintiff is so nervous he has gnawed his

well-manicured finger nails right up to the wrist. Usually the plaintiff looks dazed by the speed and ease of it all when the judge murmurs "decree granted" and the attorney briskly orders, "Step down, please."

The essence of Nevada's divorce statutes is this state's repudiation of the axiom that marriages are made in Heaven. Nevada, like the poet Southey, believes the evidence is against the assertion and concurs with him that "if marriages are made in Heaven, they ought to be happier."

This tart observation leads directly to Nevada's contention that marriage is solely a legal or civil contract and not a religious sacrament, a solemn obligation or an institution for the preservation of social order.

This is the position of Nevada's legal fraternity to a man.

Marriage, they argue, is merely a civil contract between two individuals and can be broken by due process of law.

You may call this view of marriage pragmatic, materialistic, realistic, sacrilegious or—opportunist. But as long as it concerns a well-paying business, the Nevada Bar is not apt to change its views.

If this is the basic theory of Nevada divorce law, then the cornerstone of its administration is the residence requirement. Every man or woman who obtains a divorce in a Reno court must solemnly testify under oath that he has come to Nevada to make it his home or permanent residence.

"Did you come to Nevada with the intention of making this your home for an indefinite period of time?" is the sing-song routine of every lawyer whose client is on the stand.

The client, whose return ticket home is usually in his pocket at the moment, says a vigorous "Yes."

Every time I hear this testimony in a Reno court, I expect at least an admonitory clap of thunder, if not a bolt of lightning, aimed right at the falsifying divorcee.

"Surely the court, the divorcee and her attorney know she's lying in her teeth!" I exclaimed indignantly to the lawyer who had kindly taken me into court to see my first Nevada divorce case. "They must know she's not going to make her home here any more than I am."

"Certainly, dope!" said my lawyer friend genially. "But that's the essential part of the racket. She's got to establish her residence here before she can get her decree. That's what makes the decree stick."

I mulled this over for a moment. "But doesn't that amount to collusion, malpractice, perjury and fraud, to say nothing of the perversion of justice?" I asked.

"How you do talk, honey, and what big words you know!" my legal light said tolerantly, and closed the conversation.

Nevada's residence requirement, now shaved to six weeks, stems from a legitimate, historic impulse in the growth of the nation. In 1864 Nevada was admitted to the Union as a state by the Proclamation of President Lincoln, who desperately needed the new state's electoral votes in the impending presidential election, just as the Union itself des-

perately needed the millions in gold and silver pouring out of Virginia City's fabulous lodes. (It is a historic fact that a substantial part of the vast sums needed for the prosecution of the Civil War and the preservation of the Union poured out of the Comstock and Nevada's other new found mines.)

The State's population, always small at best, fluctuated so drastically with her mining booms and depressions that Nevada passed a law requiring only six months residence to make one a resident and voter. This was a shorter period than that required by any of her sister States.

It is this law, designed to keep a decent show of strength at the polls, that first attracted the divorce trade to Nevada and Reno at the turn of the century.

It must have been in that far off day, too, that some spirited woman, after leaving the divorce court with her decree, tossed the sign of her former bondage—her wedding ring—into the near-by Truckee River.

That the wedding ring into Truckee—is another Reno legend I had planned to help eke out expenses in Reno by hanging around the South Virginia Street bridge over the Truckee and doing a little marine salvage work.

However, after the first fruitless weeks, I began to lose faith in the legend. Then I was told that the last person — and mayhap the first — to play ring-toss in the Truckee was the movie actress, Margot Grahame.

Margot did it at the request of an enterprising photographer after first providing herself with a ring from the five-and-dime.

The legend still persists, but the rippling surface of the Truckee isn't constantly disturbed by showers of once-cherished bands of wedlock.

As for any tragedy-ridden divorcee tossing herself in the river, only once have the police been forced to fish a woman out of the Truckee.

Some years ago a lovely little lady putting in the required time in Reno, who, frankly, had acquired a swell brannigan, threw herself into the swift mountain stream.

However, it was mid-summer and the Truckee was low. So the police hauled the victim out without too much damage even to their own tempers. The cold waters had helped sober her up. Authorities deemed it safe to return her to her hotel suite without preferring charges.

Imagine the annoyance of the police when they were called out at 3 a. m. to fish our heroine out of the Truckee once more. There is no concealing the fact that in the interim our heroine had been drinking like a fish, but not water.

Naturally, the police were antagonized and took our gal to jail. By 6 a. m., she seemed fairly sober and once more the gendarmes returned her to her hotel suite.

Picture their chagrin when, at 8 a. m., they were again forced to do a Weissmuller and pull little Miss Lush from the river.

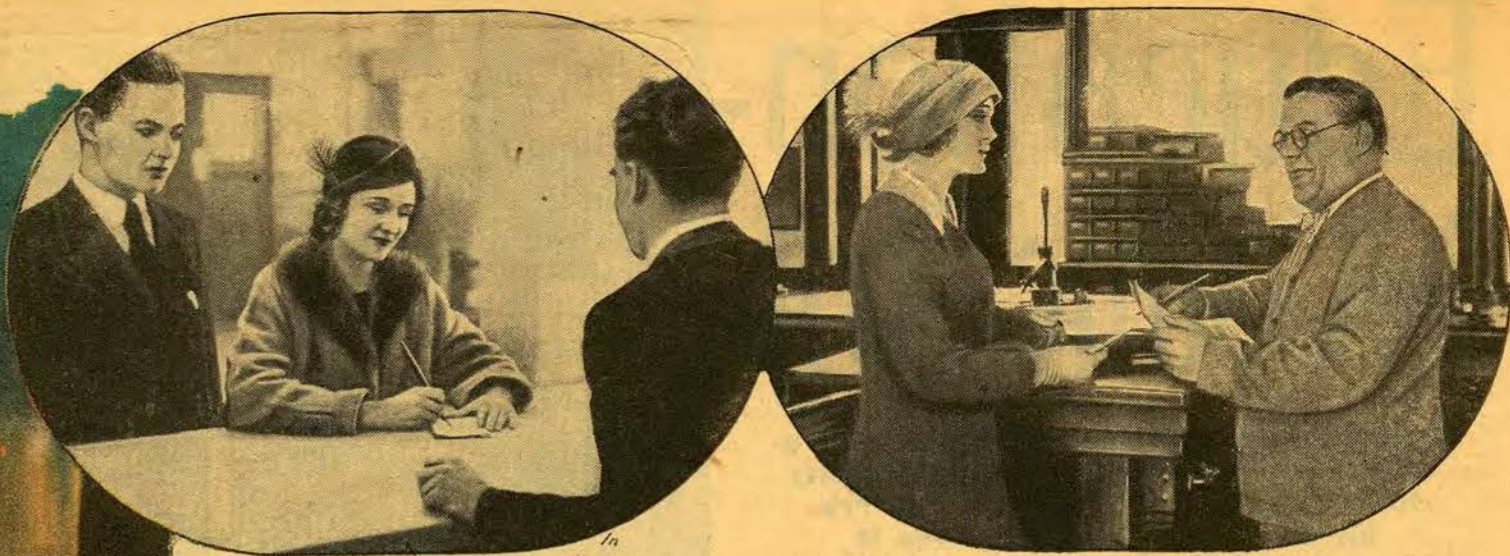
This time, alas, she had miscalculated her leap. She had struck a boulder and broken a leg. Instead of shooting her, the police sent for her husband.

He, the boob, was so impressed by the boundless love—to say nothing of the quantities of liquor—that had driven his little woman to her suicidal tries that he gathered her to his bosom.

When last seen, the reunited couple was boarding the train, homeward bound. That is one of the few authentic reconciliations on record in Reno.

And it is a story that has been told and retold because it doesn't follow the Reno pattern and stands out as a unique episode in the city's history.

The wild life of many Reno "guests" and the opportunities they have for indulging in it will be told in next week's article by Miss Robb.



Complying With the State's Residence Requirements a Newcomer Registers At a Hotel in the Presence of a Witness Whose Testimony Will Establish Her Citizenship.

Six Weeks of Waiting and a Four-Minute Trial Complete the Cure. County Clerk Elwood Beember Formally Presents the Eagerly-Sought Paper That Proclaims an Ex-Wife's Newly-Bestowed Freedom.



A Reno Lawyer Who Has Aided in Cutting Thousands of Knots.