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LYNCHING ON THE BRIDGE

The only lynching in Reno's history occurred because a secret vigilante group known as the 601 took matters into its own hands on a long ago autumn night in 1891. Like the 601 of Virginia City and Carson City, Reno's group was comprised of several prominent male citizens who sought to keep their community safe and free of violence.

If anyone threatened Reno's tranquility it was Luis Ortiz a vicious drunk who turned dangerous after a few whiskeys. In July 1891 ranch hand Ortiz stopped in at a downtown saloon. A few drinks later he got into a heated argument with three men. The odds were stacked against him until Ortiz pulled a knife and severely wounded all three of his opponents.

For his part in the melee, the young drifter was convicted of assault and urged by Constable Dick Nash to leave town. He did. And as the train pulled out of town, Nash congratulated himself on ridding the town of one more ruffian. Unfortunately for Ortiz, he decided to return to Reno two months later.

On the evening of September 17th, Ortiz stepped off the train, and brushed past friends who urged him to leave town before he got in trouble again. Ignoring their pleas, he headed straight for the bar at the Grand Central Hotel on the corner of Plaza and Virginia Street. The train ride had left him dry.

Ortiz spent several hours, swilling whiskey and itching for a fight. Shortly before midnight the owner of the hotel informed his customers that he was closing the bar for the night. Ortiz asked about a room and was told that none were available. Taking pity on him, the bartender offered to share his room with the young ranch hand. But Ortiz suddenly grew angrier; he wasn't tired, he'd come to town to drink and have a good time. He stomped out onto the buildings front porch and pulled his gun.

"I want to kill some son of a bitch!" He snarled as he pulled the trigger. A bystander was struck in the buttock. Everyone on the porch scattered. No one wanted to get into a gunfight with Ortiz; his reputation was well known to the denizens of this part of town.

Constable Dick Nash was afraid of no man. As the sheriff of Humboldt County he had spent years dealing with men like Luis Ortiz. When he received word that Ortiz was back in town and spoiling for a fight, Nash took two men and headed for the Grand Central. Ortiz had had his chance. This time he was going to jail.

Nash walked to the porch and stared at Ortiz a moment. "C'mon Luis, you're going to jail." He said softly. Without a word, Ortiz pulled his gun and fired again. With Nash and his assistants following close on his heels, he stumbled onto the street. All three officers pounced on him and wrestled him to the ground.

Only when he felt a sharp pain sear through his stomach did Nash realize he had been shot. Friends helped the wounded man to the home of his doctor and Ortiz was taken to jail. The next morning local newspaper reporters came to his jail cell where he

told them, "I don't know what I did. I was drunk yesterday, all day. I don't know nothing. I don't know who brought me here, or why I was arrested. "

Friends of the fallen constable were outraged. How dare Luis Ortiz harm their friend? According to his doctor, Constable Nash's wounds were probably fatal; hope for his recovery was dim.

While other citizens of Reno slept soundly in their beds, a clandestine meeting of the 601 was called and the problem was resolved. Ortiz must swing for his transgression. The group marched to the jailhouse and roused Deputy John Caughlin who was sleeping in a small cot at the door.

"Who's there?" Caughlin asked.

"A friend wants to see you."

When the deputy naively opened the door the angry mob rushed in and overcame him.

Ortiz was wakened and told, "You are wanted downtown!" The group stealthily marched their prisoner to the Virginia Street Bridge that spanned the Truckee River.

"Do you have any final requests?" Someone asked Ortiz as the rope was looped around his neck.

"A priest and a glass of water."

A man proffered a whiskey flask. "Whiskey's all we have Ortiz." He said.

Ortiz gulped the whiskey.

After explaining where he wished his personal effects to be sent, Ortiz faced the mob. "Ready." He announced firmly.

The noose was tightened; he was hoisted out of this world and into the next.

Five hours later the body was cut down from the bridge; within the week Constable Nash made a full recovery. The Weekly Gazette Stockman had this to say about the affair.

Ortiz Hung! The County and Town well rid of a worthless vagabond. The man who was so handy with his gun departs this life at the end of a rope.

Dick Nash would serve another term as constable and as night watchman before being elected justice of the peace. Judge Nash died at his home on Fourth Street on December 15, 1905. As for those who took part in the murder of Luis Ortiz, no one ever publicly admitted having been anywhere near the iron bridge on the night of September 24, 1891.

BRING ME A COFFIN

Drinking while playing with a shotgun can be deadly. Unfortunately, Lula Simmington* and her husband didn't realize this until it was too late. Mr. Simmington worried continually over the safety of his wife Lula, an attractive coffee shop waitress. He saw how men looked at her; he knew how they could be. She needed to learn how to handle a gun. One evening after they'd consumed several glasses of wine, he decided to remedy her shortcomings by bringing out the family shotgun.

He handed her the gun and while he expounded on the finer points of shooting, the gun went off, not once but twice. The wall of their South Virginia Street apartment was scarred with bullet holes and Mr. Simmington was dead; dead before he even hit the floor.

According to Lula she had spent the next few hours screaming and in shock before calling the police. The DA thought differently. She was charged with murder in the second degree.

While she waited in the Washoe County Jail, a local mortuary prepared her husband's body for transport to Roseville California. As his widow, she wanted to say a final goodbye. Her attorney asked that she be allowed to attend the funeral and pay her last respects. Nothing doing. In the meantime, shipment of the body was delayed until the matter could be resolved; Lula was beside herself with grief. Surely her attorney could do something.

The attorney turned to the Nevada Supreme Court; although they sympathized, the court could find nothing that would permit the widow to attend her husband's funeral. Finally, in what seems like an act of desperation, he suggested that the coffin bearing her husband's body be brought to the jail for one final visit. Jailers were nervous lest some weird precedent be set concerning visitors to the jail.

No dice! Such a visit could not be permitted. The funeral home was free to transport the body to Roseville and the widow would have to say her farewell without gazing upon her husband.

But Lula's luck was not entirely bad. She was being held without bail on a murder charge. However, when the grand jury indicted her on manslaughter, her bail was set at \$2500. Her friends put up the bail and she was out of jail in time for Christmas.

While detectives went through the Simmington's personal effects, a letter from a friend in West Virginia was found. The letter said in part...*How are things going with you? I have been worried. For several nights now I have dreamed about funerals in which you were playing a prominent part...*

The letter was written and mailed two days before Mr. Simmington's death.

On May 2, 1955 Lula was convicted of involuntary manslaughter and sentenced to one to five years in the state prison. When sentencing her, Judge Grant Bowen said he had thought about having her serve her term in the jail rather than the prison. But decided against it because, in his words, "The county jail is no place for a woman."

TOO YOUNG TO DIE

Barbara Hopman was dead. Shot and killed by her sixteen-year-old boyfriend in a downtown Reno hotel room; she would never have the opportunity to do any of the things that girls of the early 1950's dreamed of doing. Barbara Hopman was thirteen years old.



Barbara's family had lived in Tracy California only a short time before she met *Lowell Reyes at a school football game. The attraction was immediate. Within the week they were inseparable and going steady. Had they known, Barbara's parents would certainly have disapproved. But they were not aware of the budding romance. And so it continued...

HONEYMOON HORROR

August 24, 1962 was Jack Foster's 23rd birthday. This year there would be no celebrations. The young bartender fought for life in the Intensive Care Unit at the Washoe County Hospital. Before the day was out, he would die, and his murderer would be arraigned...

Nineteen year old Lester Morford III came to town from Santa Rosa California. Too young for gambling, the itinerant ranch hand wandered the city's downtown streets taking in Reno's nightlife. He purchased several tubes of airplane glue, some sodas and candy bars, and settled in at a Center Street motel that didn't cost too much.

Jack and Genna* drove to Reno from Oregon with plans to start their new life together. They would be married, celebrate Jack's birthday, and then head back home. On a tight budget, they chose a clean, but reasonably priced motel. Maybe next year they could afford a fancier room...

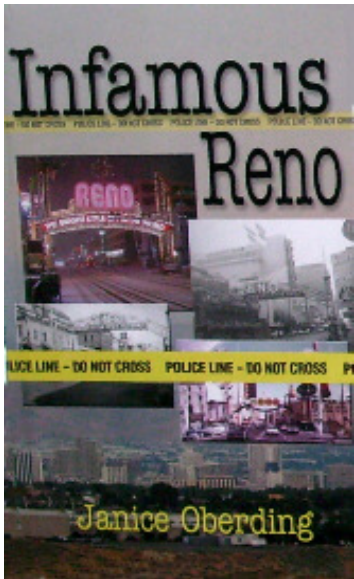
WHAT EVIDENCE?

It was bad enough when three trustees at the Reno city jail were caught smoking marijuana in a second floor storeroom one Saturday night in September 1974; but things got worse.

The next day two officers were called to a residence where they discovered a lush marijuana plant growing in the window. Officer James Hoff carefully put the plant in the backseat of his patrol car beside his K-9 partner, Judge and headed for the station.

On arrival, most of the plant was missing and Judge was feeling no pain. No charges were filed against Judge because, as officers said, "laws are only made for people. Animals don't commit crimes."

That information might have come in very handy for Mary, the unfortunate elephant who was hanged for murder in 1916 in Erwin, Tennessee.



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