

Tucholsky Wagner Zola Scott  
Turgenev Wallace Fonatne Sydon Freud Schlegel  
Twain Walther von der Vogelweide Fouqué Friedrich II. von Preußen  
Weber Freiligrath Frey  
Fechner Fichte Weiße Rose von Fallersleben Kant Ernst Richthofen Frommel  
Engels Fielding Hölderlin Eichendorff Tacitus Dumas  
Fehrs Faber Flaubert Eliasberg Eliot Zweig Ebner Eschenbach  
Feuerbach Maximilian I. von Habsburg Fock Ewald Vergil  
Goethe Elisabeth von Österreich London  
Mendelssohn Balzac Shakespeare Rathenau Dostojewski Ganghofer  
Trackl Stevenson Lichtenberg Doyle Gjellerup  
Mommsen Thoma Tolstoi Lenz Hambruch Droste-Hülshoff  
Dach Thoma von Arnim Hägele Hanrieder Hauptmann Humboldt  
Karrillon Reuter Verne Rousseau Hagen Hauff Baudelaire Gautier  
Garschin Defoe Hebbel Hegel Kussmaul Herder  
Damaschke Descartes Schopenhauer Bebel Proust  
Wolfram von Eschenbach Darwin Dickens Grimm Jerome Rilke George  
Bronner Campe Horváth Aristoteles Voltaire Federer Herodot  
Bismarck Vigny Gengenbach Barlach Heine Grillparzer Georgy  
Storm Casanova Lessing Langbein Gilm Gryphius  
Chamberlain Schiller Lafontaine Iffland Sokrates  
Brentano Strachwitz Claudius Schilling Kralik Katharina II. von Rußland Bellamy Gerstäcker Raabe Gibbon Tschechow  
Löns Hesse Hoffmann Gogol Wilde Gleim Vulpius  
Luther Heym Hofmannsthal Klee Hölty Morgenstern Goedicke  
Roth Heyse Klopstock Puschkin Homer Kleist Mörike Musil  
Luxemburg La Roche Horaz Kraus  
Machiavelli Kierkegaard Kraft Kraus  
Navarra Aurel Musset Lamprecht Kind Kirchhoff Hugo Moltke  
Nestroy Marie de France  
Nietzsche Nansen Laotse Ipsen Liebknecht Ringelnatz  
Marx Lassalle Gorki Klett Leibniz  
von Ossietzky May vom Stein Lawrence Irving  
Petalozzi Platon Pückler Michelangelo Knigge Kock Kafka  
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# **Letters of a Dakota Divorcee**

Jane Burr

# Imprint

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Gratefully Dedicated  
to  
My Sioux Falls Friends.



## AUTHOR'S NOTE.

This little volume will soon assume the proportions of an invaluable reference book as the Divorcee is gradually becoming extinct in South Dakota.

Species may thrive in a given latitude and longitude for ages. Suddenly the atmospheric, climatic, or diatetic conditions become so altered as to preclude the further development of the species—yes even the further survival of the animal. The result may be either of two alternatives:

1st. The animal finding the habitat no longer conducive to its well being may migrate singly or in bunches to another environment. In this [Pg 6] case scientists have noted that the animal undergoes a considerable morphological and physiological change.

2nd. In an environment unfavorable to its existence an animal may become extinct.

In the case of the South Dakota Divorcee the former alternative would seem to be the course followed, for up to date the animal has shown itself to be quite too resourceful to lapse into that most archaic condition—extinctness.

Time was when it roamed the prairies and hills of the State in vast herds, but owing to the removal of the protective underbrush in the form of the Referendum (which decrees that one year is necessary for its complete development), it has gone in great droves to Nevada and Oklahoma, which promise to be a more suitable environment for it.

[Pg 7]

There are a few rare species left, but they are disconsolate and hang-jawed and by no means representative of the species. In former years the Divorcee reached maturity in three short months, and was so tame that it built its lair near the city limits and some even ventured quite into the hearts of the villages and attempted to live there. But these were half tamed individuals and by no means indicative of the genus as a whole. Then peculiar to relate, the environmental influences caused them to grow less rapidly and six

whole months passed before a single specimen could call itself full fledged. The other Dakota animals sported around with the Divorcee and received it *a bras ouverts*, but the latter developed a slight *degage* mannerism and the other beasts grew alarmed and crawled within their dens.

[Pg 8]

Now they have almost died out entirely as the atmosphere grew not only unfriendly, but owing to the sudden cool change their development was intensely slow. The animal originally migrated from New York and thus anything slow would naturally unnerve its intuitively high strung temperament.

And if in some future sociological period of the earth's history some antiquarian of the post-aviatorian age, prying into the *modus vivendi* of the men of pre-air-shippian times can learn "a thing or two" about that delicate gazelle-like mammal so as to show his contemporaries how "fierce" living was before the age of trial marriages and legitimate affinities, the dessicated author will rattle what is left of her teeth [Pg 9] in a contended mummified smile.

Duckie Lorna:

Sip a mint julip—slowly, gently, through a long dry straw, then before it dies in you, read my P. O. mark—Sioux Falls, South Dakota,—Yes, I've bolted!

Don't dare to tell anyone where I am for if my husband should find out, he might make me go where I could get a divorce more quickly—You know I'm here for his health. I would splash round in orange blossoms, and this is the result.

My boarding house is a love, furnished with prizes got with soap—"Buy ten bars of our Fluffy Ruffles soap, and we will mail you, prepaid, one of our large size solid mahogany library tables."

Would you believe dear, that these Sioux [Pg 10] Fallians have already complained because I bathe my dear, shaggy Othello in the bath tub. And there isn't a human being here with a pedigree as long as his.

If you hear any talk about my being seen in a Staten Island beer garden with Bern Cameron, don't believe one word of it—we didn't

go in at all, the place was too smelly. And that fib about his giving me a diamond ring,—deny it please, as I have never shown it to a soul—So you can see how people manufacture gossip.

I walk to the Penitentiary for recreation, as I may have to visit there some day and I never like to be surprised at anything. It isn't refined.

My Attorney is thoroughly picturesque. He wears a coat in his office that his wife [Pg 11] must have made. His collar came from Noah's grab bag, and, if you remember, there was no washing machine on the ark. A heavy gold chain meanders down his shirt front to protect his watch from improbable theft. On Sunday he passes the contribution box and is considered a philanthropic pest. I asked how much the fee would be and he said, "One hundred if you furnish witnesses, two hundred if we do." You can hire a man for five dollars out here to swear that he killed you.

When my attorney talks, he sits on his haunches, showing his teeth that would do credit to a shark, and fancies he's smiling when he permits his cracked purple lips to slide back. I wouldn't trust my case to him, only he could not lose if he tried.

Every time I look at him I wonder if there could be a face behind that nose and those [Pg 12] whiskers, which give his head the appearance of a fern dish. He wears an old silk hat whose nap is attacked with a skin disease. They say he belongs to one of the first families of this town—first on the way coming up from the station I suppose. He was married years ago, but isn't working at it now. I am so unstrung after our seances that I feel like crawling right out under a bush and eating sage. If I weren't afraid of him I'd raise my umbrella while he talks—his conversation is so showery. In my ingrown heart I hate him so there is no danger for me, tho' I've heard that he's a perfect fusser with the women.

I telephoned the livery stable yesterday and asked if any of the hearse horses were idle, as I'd like to take a ride. The fellow said he'd send me a winner, so I togged up in my bloomers, boots and spurs and stood on the [Pg 13] veranda waiting. A young boy galloped up with something dragging behind him. I said: "Do you call that insect a horse?" he answered; "No, but it used to be, m'am." The poor creature was all bones and only waiting for a nudge to push

him into the grave. I mounted the broncho, which kept "bronking," but after an encouraging tclk-tclk, I made a detour of the block, then sent the nag to the stable.

There were two children and a dog drowned here yesterday – it almost makes one afraid to go near the tub.

The man who sits on my right at the table, says he's here for nervousness. First time I ever heard a divorce called that, but anyway we all know that he gets out of jail on December, and I will be glad, for the way he plays the anvil chorus with his soup makes me [Pg 14] get out of my skin backwards. Hope some day that the Devil will play dominoes with his bones.

The lady on the other end, chews with her lips and of course I'm always excited for fear her dinner will fall overboard. The way she juggles food would get her a job in the vaudeville game any day. She sits up as tho' she'd been impaled, and the shaft broken off in her body.

Long ago—a being, desirous of unhitchment could come here, rent a room, hang her pajamas in the closet and fade away back to Broadway, but times are changed, and you must serve six months or the Judge's wife will not let you have a divorce. The Judge's house is next to mine and the way I look demure when I pass, is a heathenism hypocrisy. But he is under petticoat tyranny and I dread ruffling the petticoat. [Pg 15]

Formerly the law was three months, but the Cataract Hotel had the Legislature change it as they could not make enough money.

We had chicken last night and asparagus tips—did you ever notice what a lot of skin a boarding house chicken has? And the tips just missed by one, being tip. The meals are an unsatisfactory substitute for something to eat, and I find myself filling up on bread to keep my stomach and backbone apart.

I am up against old timers that are always to be met at boarding houses—the dear old soldier and the lady "too heavy for light amusements, and not old enough to sit in the corner and knit," as George Ade puts it. She is simply ubiquitous; she is everywhere; she does not gossip! Oh no! Still she wonders if they really are married, you know, and if that strange man is her brother or not? Oh [Pg 16]

you know the whole tribe! Dear old parasites on the body politic! I have also had sudden paralysis of the jaw from looking into a country mirror and was not again convinced, until consulting my own hand glass during the night that one of my eyes had not slipped down below my nose. I can get along very well if my hair is not parted at all, but I insist upon my features remaining in the same locations.

I am copying down some of the stories that I hear as they are well worth it, and may come in handy some day. I have the advantage of coming upon them suddenly for the first time, with an absolute unbiased mind, which like the Bellman's chart in "The Hunting of the Snark" is "a perfect and absolute blank."

I know I shall go mad before the six months are up, for after ten days, I am down-down [Pg 17] deep in a bog of melancholy, and so bored that I feel like the president of the gimlet club.

My stomach like nature abhors a vacuum, so me to the strangled eggs and baked spuds which are our unfailing morning diet.

In the name of Charity, send me messages from the world I love.

Devotedly,  
MARIANNE.  
[Pg 18]



Dearest Lorna:

There's an old maid here (Heaven knows she's out of place) who wears her hair in one of those "tied for life knots," and she comes tip-toeing to my room each night to ask me if I think she'll ever get a man. Because I've had one, and am making something that resembles a trousseau, she thinks that I have a recipe for cornering the male market. Her dental arch is like the porte-cochere of the new Belmont Hotel, and last night a precocious four-year-old said, "Miss Mandy, why don't you tuck your teeth in?"—Miss Mandy would if she could but she can't. She is the sort who would stop her own funeral to sew up a hole in her shroud.

The moonlight nights here are a perfect [Pg 19] irritation, and I really think this moon isn't half as calloused to demonstration as our dear old New York moon. There are so few men here that the female congregation is getting terribly out of practice.

I have found out lately that our attorneys out here rob us of everything and politely allow us to keep the balance.

My abode of virtue is filled with furniture from the vintage of the early forties and I sit in it alone and am so pathetically good, that I am beginning to suspect myself.

You know I was born when I was very young and have been desperately tidy about my morals ever since, but for fear of stumbling just because I'm so bored I have entrenched myself behind a maddening routine. Six months here ought to put ballast into the brain of the silliest. [Pg 20]

I think that marriage has become a social atrophy, and I never want to be guilty of irrevocably skewering two hearts together.

I fear myself only when I'm bored. Eve never would have flirted with the snake if Adam hadn't got on her nerves. I always could resist everything but temptation.

Bern once told me that every married man ought to be made to run after his wife. And I told him he'd be out of breath most of the time if he tied up with me.

I went to church Sunday and the funny man at the head of the table said he was going round to view the ruins in the afternoon. Fa-

ther Time, who sits opposite me and mows down the food said, "Every stylish woman I see, I know she's getting a divorce and I can't understand it, as most of them are good looking." [Pg 21] I answered "You didn't see the other half."

I am not going to correspond with Bern as our mail might be intercepted. For although I'm passing through the mournful ceremony of losing my husband in South Dakota, I don't want to gather too much dust on my skirts on the way to the funeral. We send each other registered letters every day—but that's different—nobody could possibly get those.

There is a woman here who does a queer, pretty sort of embroidery. And she said this morning with unquenchable urbanity, "I will learn you how to do shadow work." Now Bern and I have been busy on all sorts of shadow work for the past four years in New York, but this is a different pattern. Sioux Falls is plethoric of widows and when one [Pg 22] is freed, the other convicts writhe under the burden of their stripes. Dearie, won't you drop in and try to quiet my dressmaker? She is beginning to show evidences of dissatisfaction—inscrutable sign-manual of finances at low tide. I'm not rich but I'm sweet and clean—did I hear two dollars and a dish of cherries?

I have bought a calendar with the dates on a block of pages—one page for each day, just for the joy of tearing them off with a vim every twenty-four hours. Sometimes I allow two days to pass, then I do a war dance like a Sioux, wild at the opportunity of pulling off a couple at a time.

There is a N. Y. Central time table on my desk and I am eternally looking up train connections until I feel like a bureau of information. I have enough money to get back on, [Pg 23] tucked away in my stocking. And if I have to take in washing I won't touch it. Funds are getting very low so I've started writing short stories again but "like" usual, publishers don't seem to recognize a genius and my P. O. box is always filled with long yellow comebacks—slip enclosed "Sorry we find your valuable Mss. unavailable for our publication, etc." However, nothing beats trying but failure. And although everything on this mud ball looks inky, and I am once more Past Grand Master of Hoodoo Philosophy, I shall grit my teeth and

push ahead as I have done a thousand times before. My debts are growing like a snow ball and although I am not entirely broke, I am so badly bent that it ceases to be funny. There isn't a blooded dog here except the ones we Easterners bring. The Sioux Falls dogs are like the [Pg 24] people—you can't tell exactly what breed they are, but as a few of the N. Y. lawyers and doctors and a few of the N. Y. dogs have remained here, we hope for a better blending in the next litter.

There is an Englishman here who calls himself "Chappie" but "Baw Jove" he never saw the other side of the Atlantic if I am any judge. But you can hand these people any sort of pill and they'll swallow it without making a face. We have no indigestible pleasures here, but the food. I am suffering from gastric nostalgia. I was so hungry for something sharp and sour last night that I bought a bottle of horse-radish and ate it in cold blood. Today my digestive apparatus is slumped and I feel like the ragged edge of a misspent career.

Every night the man in the next room, [Pg 25] treats himself to a skin full and comes home so pleasantly lit up that he has to be put to bed. Last night he must have drunk like the sands of the desert, for he was a bit more tipsy than ever and flung apologies and hiccoughs over my transom.

I look back upon my old life as an impression received in the dawn, and already it seems but a level highroad on a gray day. Marriage laws were made by old maids—any one can see that. And they have decreed that conjugal love, apart from passion, is elevating and a woman in yielding herself may evict the sanctum of love if the man may legally call her his own. It's all wrong dear—woman has been sacrificed to the family. And what a degrading imitation of Nature to propagate the species. How glorious never again to be shod in the slippers of matrimony—I [Pg 26] seem to demand the advantages of marriage with none of the drawbacks.

To return to things less serious, Othello hates something about my new combination lingerie and barks like fury when I put it on—maybe it is the blue ribbon—I'll try a dash of lavender tomorrow.

You will agree that my *geistes ab vesend* has reached an alarming degree when I tell you that this A. M. after my tub, I liberally dashed tooth powder all over my body instead of talcum.

My affection is all for you – for the opposite sex it seems to have grown as cold as a raked-out oven.

Goodnight,  
MARIANNE.

September 21.

Most Precious Lorna:

I am excited—excited—from the bottom lift on my French heels to the top hair on my golden puffs.

Now who would have thought that the "Fate Sisters" would discover me way out here and sit on the corner of Minnesota and 12th spinning their breakable yarn.

Well—well—yesterday the one with the weary look and the crooked nose, got a knot in her twine and this is how it happened. I was crossing this Minnie-something street, when a shrill siren and the cannonade of a powerful exhaust warned me to stay my tootsies. I wasn't looking for a big white aseptic machine out here or any other kind, so the [Pg 28] blooming thing crashed into us and rather than have Bunky hurt, I ran the risk (not quite, but nearly) of losing my life, but not until I had assured myself that the man at the wheel was exotic to this soil.

Zip-bang-gasoline-smoke! and I was fished out, laid tenderly on the back seat and rushed to a druggery. I allowed the dramatic spirits of pneumonia to be forced down my throat by his manicured hands and somehow I couldn't find the courage to take my head away from his shoulder—it was such a comfy, tailored Fifth Avenue shoulder. You know my reputation—30 years in a circus and never lost a spangle.

What is it that the Christian Scientists have on their souvenir spoons: "There is no life in matter?"—well old girl I can sign a testimonial to the opposite. Poor little Bunky [Pg 29] added one more knot to his tail during the mix-up, but as every knot is worth twenty-four dollars on a French bull pup's tail, I don't mind this acquisition.

I was asked the other day if Bunk was a Pomeranian and I said, "No, a French bull pup." The woman answered, "That's the same thing, isn't it?"

Finally with a little home-made sob I opened my eyes and asked the same question that Eve put to Adam the morning after God had

presented him with that poisonous bon-bon. "Where am I?" and it's none of your inquisitive business what he answered. The white auto will call tonight to see of I'm still living and meantime I have ordered fifty yards of white dabby stuff from "Fantles" to keep busy on. No—not a trousseau—I shall never—never marry again—I'm too full of experience. [Pg 30]

I told the white auto that I had been hemmed in so long that I did not know how to act in decent society any more and he said he's the best hem-ripper that ever lived, so I think I'll take a chance. Isn't there a great difference in men, dear? But, in husbands—they vary only in the color of their hair.

I'm so glad motors stand without hitching. Now you'll say "Can't you leave men alone for six months?" Sometimes my conscience does get feverish and bothers me, but it's so seldom that I am grateful for the change as it acts as a stimulation to my gray matter—whatever that is.

My honest intentions were to leave off my puffs and artificials while here, just to give Nature a chance, but now that I have been run over by an auto I consider the plan inadvisable. [Pg 31]

There are dandy golf links here but they don't allow "Divorsays" on the ground. The Sioux Falls women, (cats for short) had it stopped three years ago, because they were all neglected when any number of my tribe appeared.

Not a soul knows what I'm here for. One must never tell. That's the first divorce colony by-law. I have become a perfect diplomat and know how to keep still in three languages. I just casually told my troubles to the boarding house keeper and her daughters, but they don't count, as they are such dears, and it won't go any further.

As long as I live, my attorney says, I must sign in hotel registers from Sioux Falls—If I do the clerks will stoop to pick cockle burrs and tumble weeds off my skirts and help me to loosen my Indian wampum—whatever that is. [Pg 32]

Father Time, whom I mentioned in my last and who possesses as much energy for getting divorces (this being his third time on earth) as Roosevelt exhibits in the Baby market, has taken to peddling "The Ladies Home Journal," and the "Saturday Evening Post," and if you

only knew how cunning he looks with his abbreviated coat and short, quick, little steps, you would give a dollar for a picture of him to paste in your book of curiosities of the world.

Court was in session last week and all sorts of real Indians paraded the streets. They weren't like our dear old Irish Indians on Manhattan Island, who perambulate inside little houses placarded with one night corn cures; these were the real article and their wives walked behind, just like New York wives, carrying an orphan asylum on their [Pg 33] backs and provisions for the week on their hips.

Poor down trodden creatures. I feel like organizing a class to show them how to *marcelle* their mops and "straight front" their stomachs. A tommyhawk for me and no mop to *marcelle* if I try to revolutionize Indiandom.

Last night at a wonderful performance of Fiske in "Rosmerholm," the house was packed with Indians and in the ghostly part where everybody throws himself into the mill-stream, Squaw Sloppy-Closey and Chief Many-Lacey opened soda pop and passed it to each other for a drink out of the same bottle. Poor Fiske was horrified and threatened to stop the performance if the soda pop artillery didn't cease its bombarding.

The wind tears around the corner of my [Pg 34] room on the bias and the cats keep up a Thomas Concert beneath my windows all night long. No wonder I have nightmares. Last night I dreamed that I was a saint with an apple pie for a halo—this boarding house pie habit will eventually tell on the strongest nerves.

Last night I cut my leg on a barbed wire—no dear I wasn't hurdling the fence—the wire was on the side walk, where everything except the kitchen stove usually lies. I hope I won't have lockjaw—it's harder on a woman than it is on a man anytime. I was just thinking how clever it would be, if a man who had a chattering wife, would keep a bunch of rusty pins on hand.

I sat down to the piano this morning and ran through that pyrotechnical *Solfigetto* by the other Bach, and Father Time, who sat enchanted, said, "You and the piano has met [Pg 35] before." It's a shame to cheat the aged.

Thank heaven that the sunshine is free and that the florist's window is gratis to look at, otherwise on my slender means I should have to take advantage of the bankrupt law.

My old friend Insomnia again stands incessantly at the foot of my bed and bids me corner the sunrise market. A heavy heart is mine tonight and though I try to fancy beautiful pictures in the crystal ball of the future, I grow sick with anticipation as the visions fall away before they are half formed, leaving me melancholy and wondering if there is an angel somewhere who collects the sighs of such ever-repressed feeling.

Goodnight,  
MARIANNE.