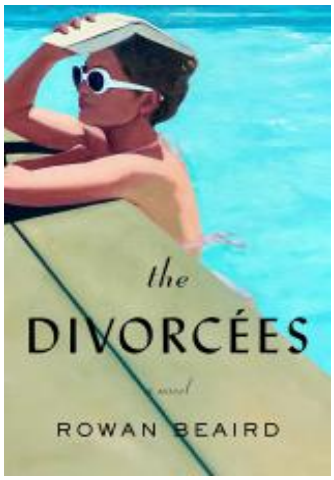
# The Divorcées

by Rowan Beaird




## About the Book

**A "delicious" (Rebecca Makkai) and "deeply compelling" (Lauren Groff) debut novel set at a 1950s Reno "divorce ranch," about the complex friendship between two women who dare to imagine a different future.**

Lois Saunders thought that marrying the right man would finally cure her loneliness. But as picture-perfect as her husband is, she is suffocating in their loveless marriage. In 1951, though, unhappiness is hardly grounds for divorce --- except in Reno, Nevada.

At the Golden Yarrow, the most respectable of Reno?s famous ?divorce ranches,? Lois finds herself living with half a dozen other would-be divorcées, all in Reno for the six weeks? residency that is the state?s only divorce requirement. They spend their days riding horses and their nights flirting with cowboys, and it?s as wild and fun as Lake Forest, Illinois, is prim and stifling. But it isn?t until Greer Lang arrives that Lois? world truly cracks open. Gorgeous, beguiling and completely indifferent to societal convention, Greer is unlike anyone Lois has ever met --- and she sees something in Lois that no one else ever has. Under her influence, Lois begins to push against the limits that have always restrained her. How far will she go to forge her independence, on her own terms?

Set in the glamorous, dizzying world of 1950s Reno, where housewives and movie stars rubbed shoulders at gin-soaked casinos, THE DIVORCÉES is a riveting page-turner and a dazzling exploration of female friendship, desire and freedom.

## Discussion Guide

**Please note: In order to provide reading groups with the most informed and thought-provoking questions possible, it is sometimes necessary to reveal important aspects of the plot of the novel, as well as the ending. If you have not finished reading THE DIVORCÉES, we respectfully suggest that you wait before reviewing this guide.**

**1.** What do you make of the immediate connection between Lois and Greer from their first meeting? Given Greer?s actions, do you see that relationship as one-sided on Lois? part, or do you think Greer was genuinely drawn to Lois, too? Explain.

**2.** When the other women at the Golden Yarrow ask about Lois? divorce, she explains, ?I just felt that --- if I stayed with him --- I?d, not explode exactly, that sounds too violent or exciting even, but collapse in on myself. That I?d disappear.? What do you think she means? How do you understand her marriage to Lawrence? Why was it so damaging to Lois?

**3.** Why do you think Rita and Lois have such a testy relationship? Why does Lois struggle to make friends in Lake Forest and at the Golden Yarrow, until meeting Greer? How do things change for her in Los Angeles?

**4.** What role does setting play in this novel? How is Reno depicted? Did any aspects of that portrait surprise you? How do Reno and its surroundings shape the characters? experience at the Golden Yarrow?

**5.** Lois reflects that her mother took her to the movies ?to show Lois that there were other ways to live.? How do you understand that explanation? What do movies represent for Lois? Why do you think she is so drawn to them?

**6.** Lois is haunted by her mother?s unhappiness as a wife and mother and doesn?t want to repeat her mistakes. Discuss their relationship, as you understand it, and the effect it continues to have on Lois.

**7.** Greer says of Rita, ?She pretends she cares about us, but she?s practically another husband, trying to control our every thought and move.? Do you agree? Both Rita and Greer are magnetic figures at the Golden Yarrow, with strong ideas about how the other women should act. Compare and contrast their worldviews and the advice they give. Overall, do you think they have a positive or negative impact at the ranch?

**8.** In her first conversation with Greer, Lois tells her about almost drowning in Lake Michigan as a girl. At the Golden Yarrow, she swims in the pool nearly every day, and the novel ends with her finally visiting the ocean in California. Why do you think swimming is so meaningful for Lois? What does it represent for her?

**9.** The women at the Golden Yarrow are, according to Mr. Tarleton, ?always a class above the rest,? yet there are still subtle class distinctions between, say, Dorothy and Vera, or Lois and Mary Elizabeth. What role does class play in this novel, especially in how it shapes the relationships between the women? How does Greer manage to circumvent the system?

**10.** Did you believe Lois? claim that she knew the gun she aimed at Mary Elizabeth?s husband wasn?t loaded? Why do the other women treat her so differently after that moment? What do you think Lois is capable of?

**11.** When Lois tells Greer that Lawrence promised he?d take care of her and is now refusing to, Greer responds, ?Never trust a man who says something like that. Ever. No one will ever give you anything if they can help it. Even your own father won?t let you stay in his house. All they?ll do is take, which is why we have to do the same.? Do you sympathize with Greer?s view? Does it at all justify her eventual betrayal, in your mind?

**12.** Greer convinces Lois to follow through on their planned heist by appealing to their shared nature: ?I need this, Lois. I have nowhere to go back to, really, just like you. We want the same thing. I sensed it that first day I saw you in the

pool, how easily you could hold your breath and plunge to the bottom. It was almost like you didn?t care if you ever came to the surface.? Do you agree that Greer and Lois ?want the same thing?? What is that thing, if so? Do you think Greer ever meant to go ahead with the heist, or was she always leading Lois on? Explain.

**13.** Greer begins giving all of the women, but especially Lois, a series of escalating dares, from kissing the bison skull, to spitting in a man?s drink, to stealing from Rita and the casino. She tells Lois, ?I?ve done what I could, but sometimes people prefer to stay where it?s safe, to stick to what they know, even when what they know is a prison.? Do you believe Greer had the women?s best interests at heart, or were her actions purely selfish?

**14.** In the final pages of the novel, Lois reflects: ?Without Greer, she wouldn?t know what it felt like to wander a flea market alone, tasked only with pleasing herself; to have one of the girls at the counter offer her their last cigarette; to wake in the morning and lie in bed for an hour, listening to the finches flutter outside her window; to float in the belly of the ocean. She wouldn?t have these quiet moments, small and bright as pearls, when she realizes that her life is finally her own.? Do you think Lois is better off for having met Greer, despite everything? How much of Lois? transformation is due to Greer, and how much is Lois? own agency?

**15.** Discuss the last line of the novel: ?The phone rings, and she rises to answer it.? What do you think the future holds for Lois? What about for Greer?

**16.** THE DIVORCÉES is set in the 1950s, when divorce laws were much stricter than they are now. How are societal expectations of women different in the world of this novel, and how do they continue to persist today? If you are comfortable sharing, did any aspects of Lois? experience resonate with you?

## Author Bio

Rowan Beaird is a fiction writer whose work has appeared in *The Kenyon Review*, *The Southern Review* and *The Common*, among others. She is the recipient of the *Ploughshares* Emerging Writer Award, and she has received scholarships from the Bread Loaf Writers? Conference and StoryStudio. Her first novel, THE DIVORCÉES, was named a best book by *Harper?s Bazaar*, *Elle*, *People*, *The Independent* and the *Chicago Review of Books*. Her second and latest novel is TENDERNESS.

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