

"I Was Her Husband—in Name Only"

Lillian Lorraine's Unhappy Husband Gives an Illuminating Picture of the Topsy-Turvy Matrimonial Life of a Man Who Marries a Broadway Footlight Idol

By Fred M. Gresham
(In an Interview)

I MARRIED Lillian Lorraine, the Broadway musical comedy star—and I soon discovered that I was a husband in name only. Whatever the words of the marriage ceremony mean to most brides—they mean nothing to a pet of the footlights.

"Love, honor and obey"—love me she sometimes did, honor me she rarely did, obey me she never did. My honeymoon was like a grotesque dream in the world of Topsy-Turvy. Everything was exactly the opposite of what conventional society considers the usual and proper relation of bride and bridegroom. I was the husband according to the law, but nobody recognized me. I was the head of the household, but nobody paid any attention to me. My wife looked upon me as she would upon a bangle on her arm—to dangle around her when it pleased her or to take it off and toss it aside when it did not suit her moods or her engagements or might be in the way.

When I took on the title of husband I imagined I had acquired the rights and privileges which are commonly supposed to go with that title. But a Broadway star recognizes none of the habits, hours or customs of conventional society. She lives in a little world apart, and she rules that little world.

The picture of domestic life I had painted in my brain was turned completely upside down. It was not for me to plan for the evening—my wife had her own plans. It was useless for me to suggest where we should dine—my wife had already made an engagement. It was futile for me to propose a supper party—my wife had one on hand and perhaps I was included, perhaps not.

People came to the house, but they never asked to see me. The telephone rang, but always for Lillian. Men took my wife out to supper without consulting me, or inviting me, or telling me where they were going, or when they would be back.

My wife's dog was treated with much more consideration than I was. The dog was often invited to go along when I was not. Considerable interest and solicitude were shown in the dog's meals, its daily outing and its hours of rest. My pride, my feelings and my affairs were of no such concern.

Our home was without routine. Breakfast was a meal more honored in the breach than in the observance. During all of my life as the husband of a Broadway idol I never had breakfast with my wife, because she breakfasted when she liked, and she never liked to breakfast at the same time at which she had ever breakfasted before.

The day began wrong, and it seemed to go wrong. I worked as hard as I could considering that I had been doing the Broadway treadmill the night before. Business was over about four. I did not go, as other business men do, to a quiet home, there to enjoy a rest from the turmoil of downtown.

My wife would telephone me at what cafe I could find her. There I joined her. And there others joined us. This manager, that actress, would drop in upon us. The domestic group thus reinforced would move on to another restaurant. Then another. Raise that two to three. Then to her show if my wife was playing, to some other show if she wasn't. And then more restaurants. Crowds came to our table to visit us. We made the rounds of the tables visiting others. It was silly as a Punch and Judy performance. But my wife called it "Life." And it went on until it was nearly the death of me.

We might get to our home at two o'clock in the morning. But it was extremely improbable. We were far more likely to rattle in at the same witching hour as milk wagons, between three and four.

But however late, the next night the same rounds must be repeated. If not there was danger that we might miss something. Something of the gossip that is the small change and scandal that is the big currency on Broadway.

I spent five years trying to keep up with a Broadway star. In those five years I never saw a woman reading a book, except at the race track. Amusement-between hours at the theatre consists in shrill singing of popular songs or in telling once again the old story of woman's allure and man's weakness. It was sickening. But I could not stop it unless I ran away. My wife chided me, said I was grumpy. Was not this "Life"?

Fancy with what an empty head a man would begin the struggle to take the other fellow's money away from him, which is modern business. A man's head aches. He thinks in a fever. His eyes are staring. His hand is unsteady. This is the pitiable creature who faces and tries to combat the clear-headed man downtown.

If by some miracle we were to have a quiet evening at home then—"Ting-a-ling"—the telephone rings.

"Hello!" I would hear some man's voice exclaim. "I wish to speak to Miss Lorraine."

My wife springs up and goes to the telephone. I wave her away. "I'll save you the trouble, dear," I whisper. "I am Miss Lorraine's husband."

"Her husband. You won't do. I must speak to Miss Lorraine." "Give me the message," I answer. "I represent her."

Derisive laughter at the other end of the

phone. "The blank you do!" I hear the click of a receiver being hung up. The faint dawn of a realization of what a Broadway husband is comes to me. He is a cipher, an object of derision, a jest, a husband in name only.

I talk to my wife of "a sweet little home in the suburbs." She laughs. Her laughter jars. I feel as I so often do downtown as a schoolboy who puts his head on his arms and cries.

I try to read to her. I look up. A passage in the book seems to me particularly appealing. My wife's eyes have a faraway look. It is clear that she has not heard a word. Had I been reading last year's almanac she would have been as well-entertained.

"Ting-a-ling!" It is the telephone. This time my wife brushes me away and answers. A man's voice addresses her. He calls her Lillian. I hate that I may be old-fashioned but I wish my wife to be addressed by her name, "Mrs. Gresham." They talk long about a "contract," "terms." I grind my teeth. As well might I be in Senegambia. Her husband! Empty title, indeed, on Broadway.

The Broadway wife comes home from the theatre. Poor husband with the empty title notices a new ring. "Where did you get that, dear?" he humbly asks. "It came in a bouquet that was tossed on the stage to-night." "Ah! And who sent the tribute to your art?"

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The Dog That Was of More Concern Than the Husband

I walked the floor as one distracted. One, two, three, four, five, six! There was a faint sound outside. A key turned almost soundlessly in the door.

The door swung open. My wife stood before me, lovely, a shade tired, her evening dress looking garish in the cold first rays of morning.

"Where have you been?" I asked. "I met a girl that used to be in the chorus with me. We have been together talking about old times."

"What's her name?" I asked. "I can't think of her name," said my charming wife, tossing off her evening cloak indifferently. "She has been married since I knew her."

"Why didn't you come home before?" "I didn't want to come up here alone so late so I stayed with her at her room."

"Where is her room?" "At Rector's."

"What was the number of her room?" "I don't know."

"What floor was she on?" "Really, I don't remember."

That was the stage at which the worm of Broadway turned. I, the disregarded, the less than nothing, the nullity, the husband in name only, told her I was going to leave her.

"I am going to sail for Europe on the ten o'clock boat," I said.

She didn't want me to go. "It's Saturday. Let us go for a week-end to the country."

"Not until you have told me where you spent the night," I answered.

"I'll tell you while we are in the country, Freddy, dear," she said.

I was not proof against her cajolery. I went. But she gave me no account more convincing than the story of the former chorus girl. We came back to the city. I carried out my determination. I sailed for Europe.

Broadway, it has been said, is a street of a thousand surprises. But the husband of a Broadway idol ought never to be surprised at anything he sees, hears or imagines.

I made the unpleasant discovery that my wife frequented the race track. I had not known this until, while I was searching her desk for stationery that I needed, I found some race track statements, and some pawn tickets. The tickets were for jewels I had given her. The money had been flung away on the track.

I determined to assert myself and I forbade her to go again to the track. She promised. But it was scarcely a week later that I heard that she had been seen at the track with a theatrical manager who was also addicted to the sport. Then I came upon her talking with him on the street. I knocked him down and temporarily at least "pied" his features, as newspaper folk say when they talk of a "mix-up."

The man who marries a star of Broadway is a fool. He should be kidnapped by his friends and detained in some safe and sane place until he recovers his reason.

For when he looks sanely at the matter he knows that the Broadway girl is of a class alone. There is none like her. And it is as well, in fact better, for humanity.

Again and again I broke away from the thrall of Miss Lorraine's charm for me. Again and again I came back to it. We cared for each other in the peculiar Broadway fashion, else we would not have returned. But two years ago I resolved to divorce her. I have taken the first step.

When that is done I shall be a free and self-respecting man. If I ever marry again it will be some one whose address is a thousand miles from Broadway!

(Copyright, 1919)

Lillian Lorraine Gresham.

"I don't know." With that answer he must be content. If he rages she orders him to be calm. "You know that I must not be disturbed by domestic scenes. My doctor says it is bad for my nerves." The time in which I fully realized how less than nothing is the Broadway husband was when I watched vainly for my wife to come home one night. We had foregone the four o'clock meeting at a cafe. I had stayed later than usual at the office. At six I arrived at our rooms at the Sherman Square Hotel. My wife was not there. Her maid said she had gone out to dine with friends. She didn't know where. She didn't know with what friends.

That night the domestic situation, known in the home, circle, was reversed. It was the

husband who waited and watched. I sat at the table where the telephone stood. There was nothing to answer. I hoped she would call up to tell me where she was. There was no ring. It seemed to me that all her friends knew where she was, for not once did the telephone ring. Instead of the usual dozen or more calls there was silence so deep that the striking of the clock seemed shrill. The prying of the Angora cat was so loud that I wanted to strangle the beast. I waited, speculating, wondering, fearing. I could not go to the theatre to ask for her. At that time the theatre was closed. My wife was not playing. I was ashamed to ring up her friends. I was chagrined that they might know where she was and I did not. But my humiliation was borne in upon me. I was not a real husband. I was only a Broadway one, therefore not to be counted. The clock struck three. Still the silence of the room was broken only by my restless breathing, by the ticking of the clock, by snore of the cat. Four! The milk was being retiled just, coming up at eleven o'clock. Five!

Mr. Fred M. Gresham, Husband of LILLIAN LORRAINE