

He Got the Habit

Laurence Olivier had a love scene in a play . . . The play is ended, but Lorry keeps on with the love anyhow

By
Edward
Churchill

GET the girl!" With this his slogan, Laurence Olivier has found success.

On the surface, it seems ridiculous that one should devote all his time to being in love and, at the same time, score heavily as an actor, or in any walk of life. The popular belief is that a young man, to be a leader in his profession, whatever it is, must devote himself strictly to business.

Laurence forgot all about his business and devoted himself strictly to the petite Jill Esmond.

Now he has fame.

Now he has Jill.

Laurence, or "Lorry," as we know him out here, is twenty-four, is six thousand miles from home, and lives quite happily on a Hollywood hilltop. Jill, born in Great Britain as was her husband, is twenty-three, is the same distance from home, and is just as happy.

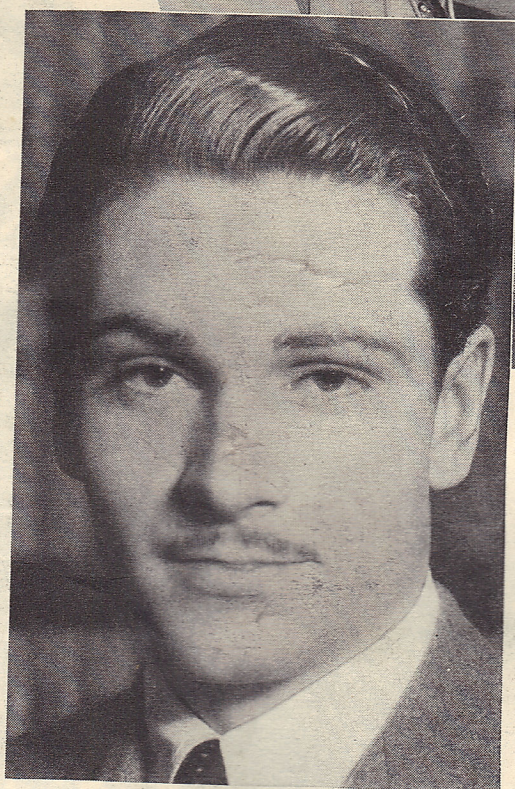
Both have contracts with "star salary" ratings.

And both work for the same studio. (You, Norman Foster, and you, Claudette Colbert, who are always separated, read this and find out how it is done—this staying together business). Laurence, popular in London, has scored in Radio's "Friends and Lovers" and in Fox's "The Yellow Ticket," since coming to Hollywood.

He is almost six feet tall. He has a wide, frank smile, comports himself on the screen in the gentlemanly manner which is a part of him in real life, and reminds one of Ronald Colman. He has the moustache, the British accent and mannerisms, the suavity, the gallantry and the superb courtliness which have made Ronald famous. And yet he is not a carbon copy of Ronald—he wants to be different and he IS different.



With Menjou in "Friends and Lovers" Laurence Olivier made an excellent impression and in "The Yellow Ticket" with Elissa Landi his charming manner reminded many of Colman



The resemblance is merely physical.

Jill has been seen in "Once a Lady," with Ruth Chatterton, and has been the recipient of critical raves. She will be seen

again soon in "Ladies of the Jury," which is Edna May Oliver's newest laugh-fest. She is most attractive and, if one is to take "Lorry's" word for it, she's a better motion picture actress than he is actor.

The idea was to write a story about Laurence Olivier, but in glancing over my copy I find it's a tale about the Oliviers, which makes it so much better—just wait to see what's coming. It's a merry little love story. It hasn't been told yet to anyone; so you'll have it first. But before I get into that phase of things, it's best to give you "Lorry's" background.

First publicity said that he came from a notoriously lengthy family of stage folk. Nothing could be farther from the truth. Fact is that he came from a different sort of family entirely, and his father was an Episcopalian minister. It was Jill's family (there she is again) which hung up a noteworthy reputation on British Boards.

Laurence, furthermore, was not born in London, but in Dorking, Surrey. His mother died when he was thirteen and today his father is retired.

He has an older sister, [Continued on page 62]

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He Got the Habit

[Continued from page 20]

Sybil Olivier, who appeared on the London stage for a time, before going into retirement because, as he explained it, the critics couldn't spell her given name correctly. An older brother is a rubber planter in the colonies.

Contrary to earlier reports, "Lorry" is neither an old friend nor a protégé of the illustrious Colman. He has, in fact, met him only once. Young Mister Olivier did go to school with Ralph Forbes, husband of Ruth Chatterton, however, and the Forbes and the Oliviers are today very close friends in Hollywood. (I say, chappie—isn't it?)

Ralph and Laurence broke out with a dramatic rash at about the same time and at ten they were playing, respectively, Cassius and Brutus in their school play. They scored heavily in this dramatization of "Julius Caesar." Sybil Thorndike, Ellen Terry and other first ladies of the British stage, witnessed their performances and applauded heartily.

He and Ralph scored their pre-professional triumphs in "The Taming of the Shrew." Laurence, then fourteen, played Katherine. He and the rest of the cast did so well that they were invited to present their achievement at the theatre at Stratford-on-Avon, birthplace of that immortal bard, Shakespeare. Laurence was told that he was "lovely" and must go on the stage.

However, a wave of wanting to be an engineer swept over the school he attended and he joined the public movement toward engineering. When he was seventeen, he got over being an embryo engineer, left school and went on the stage.

He went on the stage, but not as an actor. He was an assistant stage manager, a property man, and an understudy. And, from this point, his progress to leading roles was gradual.

"I got ahead," he said, "line by line. In each play I appeared, I got one more line than the one before until, at last, I went to London with the Birmingham Repertory Company in a play in which I had

twelve lines to speak."

He even went so far as to do research for this role, and he did his work so markedly—in the face of the objections of the stage director, who said he wasn't real at all—that St. John Irvine, outstanding critic, praised him. This led to a role in Tennyson's "Harold" and, as he says, "the young man became quite a thing himself."

Now Jill creeps back into the picture. He did well in Mister Tennyson's masterpiece and he was given a love scene opposite Jill in "Bird in Hand," by John Drinkwater. He did his love scene well, and so did Jill. In fact, the more he practiced it, the better he got—and she got.

The play lasted seven months.

Jill and "Lorry" met in July, 1928.

And "Lorry" forgot all about his career. He was broken-hearted when Jill went to America with "Bird in Hand." He realized that that love scene ought to be played over and over again. But he couldn't go to New York and Chicago with the show. Life was just a matter of waiting until Jill came home. Or, so it seemed.

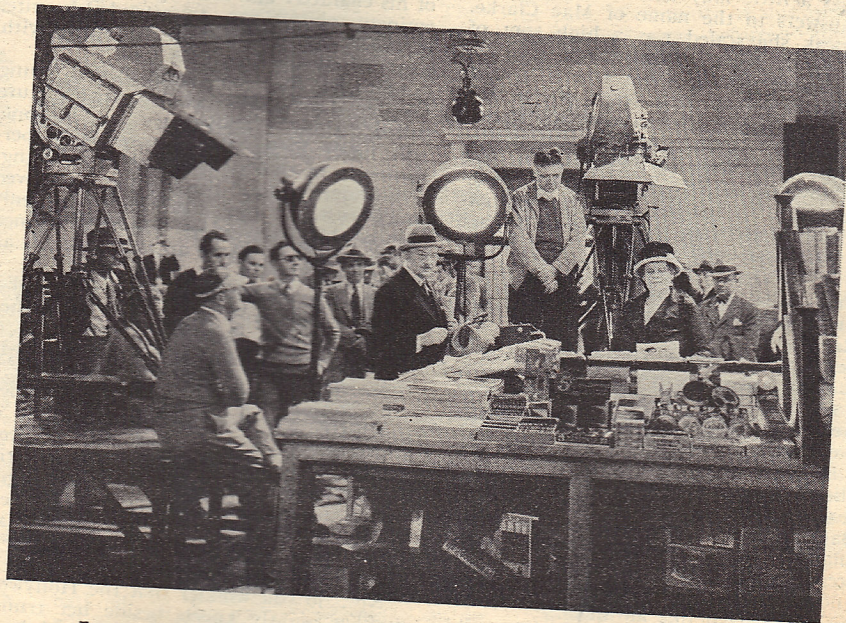
Laurence, in a London Sunday tryout, created Captain Stanhope in "Journey's End."

He thought the play wonderful but did not believe that it would be a financial success. So, when Basil Dean offered him the title role in "Beau Geste," which his young friend, Ralph Forbes, played as a motion picture in America, he accepted. "Beau Geste" lasted four weeks and "Journey's End," later made into a motion picture, lasted two years.

"A very silly thing to do," he said. "But I didn't know."

Perhaps his judgment wasn't very good because he couldn't keep his mind off Jill. He felt he had to see her. Something must be done about it. Managing to stick it out in London for a few more months, however, he played with Anna May Wong in "The Circle of Chalk," with Edna Best in "Paris Bound," and with Olga Lindo in "The Stranger Within."

By autumn, however, he couldn't think



Jean Hersholt buys Emma (Marie Dressler) a high brow magazine. Of course, Marie...

of anything but Jill.

"I managed to find a chance to play in New York," he told me, "and I jumped at it. The show—Murder on the Second Floor—only lasted five weeks.

"But—" here triumph flashed in his eyes—"I got to see Jill."

After this journey—a junket which deprived him of some laurels which he might have added to his crown—he ended his little game of "hokey" and went back to work. He made a success of his role in "The Last Enemy," started putting money in the bank, and made a picture for UFA called "The Temporary Widow."

When he was finishing this picture, little Jill decided that she wanted to see "Lorry." She couldn't wait any longer. So she packed up, turned down several New York offers and caught the first boat home. She arrived early in the summer.

On or about July 11, 1930, A.D., Jill and "Lorry" were sitting on a river bank at the country estate of some friends. There were birds in the trees. The grass was green. The river whispered lazily by them. The sun was at its zenith and all was tranquil. "Lorry" suddenly turned to Jill.

"All this gadding about," said he, "is silly. We've got to be married."

"That's a noble idea," replied Jill. "When?"

"Lorry" counted the days on his fingers. There was work in the office, and it looked as if their honeymoon would be "nolested" by the fall openings if something wasn't done shortly.

"Say two weeks," said "Lorry."

"Two weeks," said Jill.

They were married on July 25, and there were TWO bishops on hand—the wedding was very fashionable—and the guests were notable. Followed the honeymoon.

"No more being separated," said "Lorry."

"Right'o," said Jill.

And two very brave young people, both in a profession which is legendary for keeping people apart, made a pledge.

Love laughs at stage managers, however, and the first thing they knew they were working together.

Noel Coward, the young genius, who is a friend of both, asked them to play in "Private Lives." They signed contracts, and the play ran for something more than three months in London. Then it came to New York and they came too. They played in "Private Lives" for three months in New York City.

Then motion picture producers became interested in them. They came to see "Lorry" first, and recommended a trip to Hollywood. He drew himself up gallantly and declared:

"Not without Jill!"

He admits he was a little bit patronizing in this gesture, insofar as he felt that he was the superior person. He virtually asked the motion picture moguls to tolerate Jill. They both took tests. After the tests, the sentiment was reversed. The motion picture folks picked up Jill and dropped "Lorry" like a hot cake.

"Nothing doing!" she exclaimed, when they offered her contracts. "You've got to take Lorry, too!"

This time she was a bit patronizing, you can bet. But the contract signers were not at all opposed to having "Lorry," so they took him, too. And here they are!

Laurence, the young man who tossed over several chances for Jill, has had his chance to succeed through Jill. Jill, who gave up everything to be with "Lorry" in London, has everything that she could desire.

It's just one of those fairy-tale romances which sometimes appear in real life.

And you see how impossible it is to tell the story of "Lorry" without telling the story of his Jill.

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Maurice Chevalier's new picture, the tuneless "One Hour With You," reveals Jeanette MacDonald's appealing personality and seductive voice to fine advantage