

# GRACIE FIELDS FRAUD

## *Hundreds Duped by Sensational Story of "Double"*

"A'H'M aw reet now," murmured Gracie Fields from her sick-bed a few weeks ago. After two operations for gastric trouble, the beloved, breezy comedienne from grimy Rochdale was pronounced out of danger. After examination by a board of doctors, including the King's physician (Lord Dawson, of Penn), she had been sent to the Chelsea Hospital for Women.

But soon Bert Aza, Miss Fields's manager, had a new headache. A timid little London woman was found to have duped hundreds of devoted fans into raising a fund "to keep poor Gracie," who, she alleged, had "lost all her money, has taken to drink, and has been 'doubled' on the screen by her cousin Bunty."

### The Scheme Revealed

The fraud was uncovered by one of the fan women who wrote to Gracie: "The enclosed photograph I have prized for some months because I was under the impression that it had been autographed and sent by you. About a fortnight ago I was very sadly disillusioned, for it was discovered that a Mrs. X had been impersonating you for over twelve months..."

Revealed by the writer, was the ingenious story used by Gracie's "befriender" to bring in cash for her upkeep.

Gullible sympathisers had been assured that Gracie had been terribly upset by the "death" of her great friend, "faithful Margaret," and that when she had gone to Boston for the funeral, her cheque book with a number of signed forms had been found by her family.

When Gracie returned, she was supposed to have found herself £30,000 overdrawn at the bank, and her house "mortgaged up to the hilt."

### Just Mad

In one of Mrs. X's faked letters, "Gracie" explained what happened after the bank manager had told her she was ruined: "I went back home and had a hell of a row. Then I got drunk and took the car out. I was just mad. I went tearing down the drive, going like hell, and I could not clear the gates, I was going so fast. I hit the wall. My arm went through the windscreen and my face got cut. They got me out, and I was doctored up. I was just doubled up in pain. I had fractured my pelvis."

That, according to the letter, was where Mrs. X stepped in. She took care of "Gracie," who wrote: "When I've made good again it will be her I shall think about and my friends who have been so nice to me..."

This extraordinary story appeared recently in a weekly paper in London. As we have seen no contradiction, we reprint it for what it is worth.



THERE'S no denying, anyway, that this really is Gracie Fields. The photograph was taken on a Palm Springs ranch during her visit to California

Mrs. X sent out dozens of letters of this type, written on cheap, rough paper, with Miss Fields's address, "Green Trees," and enclosing "autographed" photographs.

### Contributions

One working woman promised 30s weekly to the Fields Fund. Another gave £12. A third sent a cheque for £3.

To give her swindle more reality, Mrs. X mimicked Gracie's big-heartedness further by

occasionally ringing up to thank her credulous dupes in a ripe Rochdale accent.

Refinements introduced by Mrs. X were stories that Gracie gave her brother a £350 cheque for a gambling debt, then beat him up so badly that he went blind in one eye; that she had found cousin Bunty down at the studios one day and "just took her by the scruff of the neck and chucked her out."

Gracie's letters usually ended with a tribute to her helpers. Example: "You know as well as I do that it doesn't cost a quid to get a tin of food, and besides, why should you send me so much money for food?" Mrs. X rightly calculated that such sentiments would leave her subscriber glowing self-righteously and in a fit condition for the next payment.

### Innocent Mugs

How innocent were her mugs was apparent from the way she doused their occasional suspicions. One of the women on whose money Mrs. X had been living asked her how Gracie could be staying at her house when she was billed to appear at the Holborn Empire that week? Replied Mrs. X: "Don't say anything. The public mustn't know. It's Gracie's sister who is appearing there."

### Story Made Public

Finally, as Gracie lay recovering, her manager decided to keep the news of the swindle from his star, but gave the story to the veteran journalist Hannen Swaffer for the *Daily Herald*.

How fantastic was Mrs. X's yarn was obvious to fans who knew anything of the real Gracie. The one-time Rochdale mill girl has seldom been seen to drink, never smokes, is abnormally good-tempered.

When she was six she used to sing in Rochdale streets for pennies. At 10 she won a competition, got a job in a travelling juvenile troop at 1s a week, with board and lodging. The broad-humoured revue *Mr Tower of London*, made her a starlet. A stay in hospital now, brings her inquiries from Queen Mary, flowers from Lord Nuffield, and fruit salad from Elisabeth Bergner.

When it was announced that Bert Aza had arranged with the BBC for Gracie to broadcast her thanks, the Variety Artists' Federation were delighted to hear it, but shrewdly begged Mr. Aza not to fix the broadcast for a Saturday evening. They did not want the box-office to be hit on the busiest night of the week.