



WHEN I was a kid in Rochdale one of my favourite games was to hang on to the back of a tram as it started off, and run with it till it ran me off my feet and I had to let go.

As the tram gathered speed the excitement of keeping up was wonderful. When the moment came that you had to let go you were dizzy.

When I try to remember all that happened to me in the last three years before the war I feel the same way. Life was the tramcar, and I hung on till it ran me off my feet. Then I had to let go—and I nearly died.

These were the years when Hollywood gave me £50,000 a film and yet I had to sell my home to pay the debts I owed to the Income Tax.

When, in South Africa, they made my train wait at every whistle-stop until I'd sung to the crowds blocking the tracks.

When, in America, they boasted they were paying me "the highest salary ever paid to a human being." And when, in London, the King sent for me to go to Buckingham Palace.

Twentieth Century-Fox was the film company who had offered me £200,000 for four films.

When my boat docked in New York Monty Banks was there to meet me, and to tell me that the company had prepared a banquet for America's two hundred most important columnists to meet me.

"But you can't meet them like *that*," he said.

"Like what?" I asked, surprised.

"This is America, Grace. Just look at your make-up . . . your hair!"

I patted my hair. It looked all right to me, I'd done it myself. But I replied obediently:

"All right, Monty. Take me to the right kind of hairdresser."

He whisked me off to our hotel and brought the chief hairdresser to my suite. "The smartest hair-do you can give her," he commanded. Then he disappeared.

When the girl finished with my hair I looked

in the mirror. I'd never seen anything like it. It looked like a Japanese pagoda!

"What've you done, luv?" I asked her faintly. She glanced at me pityingly. "It's the latest style," she said.

Well, whenever I thought something was real daft I was frequently wrong. I thought I looked a proper so-and-so—but still. The photographers came in. Monty returned as the very last flash bulb exploded.

He clutched at his collar, his eyes blazed with disbelief. "No, Grace! No! Not even you! Grace, you wouldn't, you can't have been fool enough to let them take pictures of you looking like *that*!"

He walked round me wringing his hands in despair. "Your hair! Oh my Lord, your hair!"

"You know what happens when you try to get me dressed up," I said. "All right, I'll change it."

I dashed into the bathroom and shoved my head under the tap. Monty followed me, dancing up and down in a frenzy of dismay. "You've only ten minutes before the banquet!"

"All right, lad," I gasped from under the tap. "I'm just washing all this muck out."

I rubbed my head with a towel, grabbed a hat and pulled it down over my wet hair and said to Monty desperately: "It'll have to do." In five minutes we were facing the two hundred writers.

When we got to the huge reception room all talk stopped, and everybody stared. My mouth froze in a silly smile. I wanted to run away, and all the time I could feel a cold trickle from my wet hair dribbling down my neck.

Remembering it like that it was comforting to read the reports the next day.

One of them said: "Having seen *America's* highest paid actress, Mae West, I felt obliged to see the *world's*, Gracie Fields. She breezed in as naturally as a gust of wind, flashed a big honest-to-goodness smile, and said: 'This makes me feel like a blooming queen.' She certainly looks like a hit!"

I certainly felt like a damp, a *very* damp, squib.