

FOYLE AND KITTY.

FOYLE was not Foyle and Kitty was not Kitty. What their real names were does not matter two straws. Foyle was an acrobat; Kitty was his assistant. When she started with him she called him "Mr Foyle." "Stow the Mister!" he said, "call me Daddy; I'm old enough for that." So she compromised by calling him nothing. In her mind, however, he was 'Alf,' the name used by his associates and equals. Only in her mind.

Foyle brooked no liberties. He was out for business. Once, in a weak moment, she ventured to say she hoped she made a good *foil* to him. He threw a cushion at her. She dodged it, for Kitty had a quick eye and nimble feet. And Foyle was a decent sort anyway.

Her predecessor, Kitty the first, had put her up to the game: "a straight deal, no monkey tricks, and keep fit for your job, and you'll find old Daddy Foyle as good as they're made." It had worked out to the letter.

Foyle rarely spoke about himself. On the stage he did not speak at all. Theirs was a silent turn, depending for its success on smartness and precision, and to a large extent, on a certain quaintness of gait and expression which was one of Foyle's gifts. He did not *look* the part, and yet he *was* the part. Every day they practised, going through their turn half a dozen times or more, adding a little touch here and there, until everything was slick. He was a hard taskmaster.

But when he said: "that's posh," Kitty somehow felt amply rewarded.

Kitty was what was known as a "good-looker." Her part in the game was to be accurate, and, at the same time, attractive. She had other duties. She wrote Foyle's letters, she kept his diary, and she pasted into a book the favourable press notices. Foyle was pleased. At the end of six months he gave her a bonus, and a rise. With the bonus she bought a fur coat.

Kitty was now happy if not supremely happy. Foyle, however, had a stubborn bit in him. He did not allow her much liberty. He was continually fathering her. Frequently she would get presents and letters from admirers. Sometimes they would seek to make an appointment. "Cut it out!" Foyle would say, "eat their blinkin' chocolates, and wear their bloomin' flowers if you like; but Daddy Foyle's having no gadabout as his partner—come on home!" And home it was every night.

The afternoons were her own. Sometimes Foyle insisted on taking her to a picture gallery. He was mad on pictures, and although a poor writer, he could draw well. "My word, aint it lovely!" he would say: "look at them tints in the sky, an' the water—lor' you could drink it," or "There's a face now as might make a man start to trust women—see the softness of the skin—makes you want to stroke it, it does!"

That was one thing about Foyle; he opened Kitty's eyes to beauty. She often found herself going back alone to look at a particular picture and find out something more about it. She even carried about with her a small reproduction of Vermeer's "Head of a Girl." Foyle called it "his little sweetheart." "Stick it up,

Kitten," he would say at breakfast. And she would prop it against the sugar basin. "Gee, wot a picture! *There* was a bloke as could paint; the 'last word' I calls it."

There came a day in early spring, the sun bright and warm, the air palpitant with coming life. "Like champagne!" said Foyle as they stepped down Cambridge Street to the theatre. The daily practice was a rule never broken. He opened the stage door. The interior was dark and uninviting. He sighed, and turned abruptly. "Let's have a day in the country, Kitten!" he said.

They took a bus to Balmaha. Over the hillsides they wandered, the sunlit loch ever in their view. Standing, on the road to Rowardenan, looking out on the fairy islands, Kitty saw a hint of tears float like a film over Foyle's eyes. They spoke little to each other.

On the way back Foyle said in an unusually quiet voice: "This'll do us good, Kitten; I feel as young as anything."

"You *are* young," said Kitty.

"Too old at forty," replied Foyle.

"Forty is not old," said Kitty very softly.

The show went well that night, at least up to a point. Kitty was radiant, and Foyle had an ease and freedom in his movements that he had not felt for many a long day. They had come to the last item in their turn. Foyle was balancing himself, his hand on the top rung of a ladder, his feet in the air. He had never kept up so long before. It seemed ridiculously easy. Suddenly he fell backwards, and crashed to the floor. In a moment he sprang to his feet again, not before Kitty

had time to utter one piercing terror-stricken shriek—" Alf! " He looked towards her, and, seeing her expression, stood stock still. The tableau thrilled the house, and brought it down about their ears. Again and again they had to bow.

As they emerged from the stage door into the lane a young man handed some flowers to Kitty.

" 'Ere young man! " said Foyle, " take yer roses 'ome an' give 'em to muvver! "

" That was a narrow one, " said Kitty.

" What? " asked Foyle.

" I thought you were killed, " replied Kitty.

" Would you have been sorry? " queried Foyle, touching her cheek. There were tears in Kitty's eyes.

" I always thought I was too old, " said Foyle.

" And I always thought I was too young, " replied Kitty.

" A couple of blymed fools; that's wot I calls us, " said Foyle.

" Don't you believe it! " said Kitty, hugging his arm.