

lasting bonfire. She looked to me to hold out the restraining hand.

"You have already spoken to Dale on the subject?" I asked, mindful of the inharmonious socks and tie.

"I can talk to him of nothing else," said Lady Kynnersley desperately.

"That's a pity," said I. "You should talk to him of Heaven, or pigs, or Babylonian cuneiform—anything but Lola Brandt. You ought to go to work on a different system."

"But I haven't a system at all," cried the poor lady. "How was I to foresee that my only son was going to fall in love with a circus rider? These are contingencies in life for which one, with all the thought in the world, can make no provision. I had arranged, as you know, that he should marry Maisie Ellerton, as charming a girl as ever there was. Isn't she? And an independent fortune besides."

"A rosebud wrapped in a gold leaf," I murmured.

"Now he's breaking the child's heart——"

"There was never any engagement between them, I am sure of that," I remarked.

"There wasn't. But I gave her to understand it was a settled affair—merely a question of Dale speaking. And, instead of speaking, he will have nothing to do with her, and spends all his time—and, I suppose, though I don't like to refer to it, all his money—in the society of this unmentionable woman."

"Is she really so—so red as she is painted?" I asked.

"She isn't painted at all. That's where her artful and deceitful devilry comes in——"

"I suppose Dale," said I, "declares her to be an angel of light and purity?"

"An angel on horseback! Whoever heard of such a thing?"

"It's the name of rather a fiery savoury," said I.