

maid, who had lived in the "best places," was ever known to have attained, Gilbert continued: "The rest of us had better go to the drawing-room to take care of what we can!"

With his diminished cortege, he hurried along. As he entered the state apartment of the house, a glance showed him a dark, irregular splotch of spreading moisture in the delicately-tinted ceiling. At the same instant his

motor here immediately. Say to Mrs. Hale that she must come out in the trolley, or wait until I send the machine for her. I need it immediately for the dinner."

"Yes, sir," the subordinate replied, in a tone to which distance lent no veiling of the distinct note of surprise.

Gilbert hung up the receiver with an impatient gesture. When he turned,

"That you, Benson?" he demanded. "Is Mrs. Hale come in?"

"Yes, sir," the announcement came back promptly. "Mrs. Hale was here not five minutes ago. Mrs. Hale telephoned Mrs. Jameson, though, and Mrs. Jameson came with her motor, and Mrs. Hale has gone off to luncheon with her. Mrs. Hale said she did not know when she would get home, but to keep the automobile when it came."

"Oh, yes—that's all, Benson," Hale concluded; but with the security of the suspended receiver, he continued under his breath: "Zounds! Also gadsooks!"

The attitude of meek helplessness observable in the waiting Maria worked as a further irritant to his nerves.

"There won't be no dinner, sir," she enunciated in fateful warning.

The full significance of the impending descent of the greatest and gravest of household catastrophes was not lost upon Gilbert. He paused, facing the horrors of the situation. Before he could come to any determination, he was disturbed by the dramatically startling appearance of Dobson from the right upper entrance, who advanced down stage swiftly.

"Mr. Hale! Mr. Hale!"

"What's the matter?" Gilbert demanded.

"They're puttin' in the coal, sir! With the water all cut off, sir, there's no way of moistenin' it, and the coal-dust is blowin' in all the windows of the west wing!"

"Shut them!"

"But the black's gettin' over everything! It's even got in upstairs, and it's ruined Mrs. Hale's dress for this evening, sir, that I had out!"

"I'll see about it."

Gilbert set off resolutely. Before he could reach the door, his progress was checked by the entrance of the parlour-maid, once more in a state of much excitement.

"Oh, sir," she exclaimed, "there's men stringin' a wire across the lawn, and they've entin' away the branches of the tree that you admires so much!"

"What's that?" he cried, suddenly stopping, and quickly starting on again. "My favourite elm?"

He had hardly attained the hall when his farther advance was arrested by the onrush of a female of ample proportions and ruddy countenance from the backward regions of the house. In a rapid succession only to be equaled by the messengers in Greek tragedy, the heralds of fresh disaster were arriving. Like another but blameless Orestes, Gilbert stood bewildered by the blows of fate.

"Who are you?" he thundered in rising exasperation.

"It's the cook—Eliza, sir," prompted Maria reproachfully.

"Oh—ah—yes, to be sure," Gilbert continued, with a lightning transition to propitiatory mildness.

"Musha! Musha!" Eliza began, before Hale could make more fitting amends for such ignorant oversight. "All the silver, sir, that was in the pantry from the breakfast—"

"What?"

"It's not there, sir! The window's been open, and nobody's been about to look out for it, and some thafe must have broken in and stole it!"

"Come on," announced Hale, and he plunged onward again, accompanied by a retinue in a state of seething excitability.

He had not taken a dozen steps when he was confronted by the second maid, who stood holding out a yellow envelope which she had received from the boy at the open front door beyond. Hale's seized the dispatch and hastily tore it open. His eye ran along the lines, reading them at a glance:

Arrive this afternoon. Meet me at the station.
Aunt Jane.

IV.

The afternoon shadows were slowly lengthening. Already the sun had fallen below the clump of trees by the entrance gate. The birds gave utterance to twitterings and warblings, which proved that they had taken note of the approaching evening. In the garden, the flowers appeared to bend on more languorous stems, and several had commenced to withdraw within themselves, in preparation for the dark. Such darting things as began their activities with the twilight were already on the wing. Indeed, the night aspects of nature were about to replace those of the day.

An automobile sped up the drive. At the main portal of the house, a dishevelled and impatient figure awaited its approach.

"I'm perfectly wornout!" Pamela announced, as she descended with manifest weariness from the motor.

"I know—I know," Gilbert interrupted inattentively; "but—"

"I went to the office," she continued, "and gave them the prints. They wanted to ask my advice about a new wallpaper they were going to put on the designing-room. When I got back, they said the automobile was gone, and I telephoned Eleanor Jameson to go out for lunch. I knew you were having a nice, quiet time at home—"

"A nice, quiet time!" gasped the indignant Gilbert. "See here, Pamela. You said something about Hercules. I'd rather have his job—go through the whole of the twelve labours, from downing the Lernaean hydra to getting the gold apples of the Hesperides—than put in another such day! There has been the mischief to pay. I don't believe there is going to be anything for dinner."

"Gilbert!" she exclaimed.

"The drawing-room is flooded."

"Gilbert!" she cried in a crescendo of emotion.



He plunged onward again, accompanied by a retinue in a state of seething excitability.

ear caught the continuous drip of falling water, and the fact became painfully manifest that a steadily growing stream was descending on Pamela's new grand piano.

Lame as he was, he flung himself at it. He was unable to stir the weighty mass. The casters, buried deep in the soft, thick rug, held the great instrument as immovable as the house itself.

"Quick!" he shouted. "Get oilcloths, and—and pails, and mops, and—all that sort of thing!"

Both his coadjutors obediently flew to execute his bidding, and he was left oppressively alone.

In the hope of working some alleviation of the situation, he caught up another rug, and hastily spread it over the top of the inundated piano. Then he sprang to rescue a pink satin chair from beneath another menacing downpour.

III.

Ten minutes later, Gilbert paused, wiping the perspiration from his brow. A gradual cessation of the destructive torrent led him and his fellow toilers to desist from their labours. Almost synchronically, the assemblage was further increased by the entrance of Dobson, proudly conveying her capture of Tim, the gardener.

"He's turned it off, sir," she began, and paused in consternation as she beheld the spectacle of devastation presented by the drawing-room. "What ever will Mrs. Hale say?"

"I don't know what Mrs. Hale will say," muttered Gilbert to himself. "I know what I say!"

"Please, sir," the faithful Maria hereupon interposed, reappearing from the hall after a mysterious summons to the door, "the automobile hasn't come back, and Eliza says—"

"Hang Eliza!" exclaimed Gilbert. "I'll telephone Mrs. Hale at once."

A wrong number was given him, and his fervid inquiry as to whether he was speaking with his own office was met by the calm information that he was addressing the local ice company. Finally, however, he obtained the presence of his managing clerk at the end of the line.

"Is Mrs. Hale still there?"

"She was here, sir, but she's just stepped out."

"Where?"

"I don't know, sir. Mrs. Hale did not say where she was going or when she'd be back."

"But—why—never mind. Is the automobile there?"

"Yes, sir."

"Tell the chauffeur to bring the

he discovered the parlour-maid waiting to speak to him.

"Excuse me, sir," she heralded. "Miss Whitelaw's just telephoned, sir, that her little niece is took with the measles, and she can't come to dinner."

"But that throws the table all out!" exclaimed Gilbert, in consternation.

"However, I can't remedy that."

For the present, at least, his troubles seemed to be over. He could return to peace and "Le Comte de Monte Cristo." In his pleasant nook on the verandah he could remain until the general disturbance subsided, or until Pamela should be able to quiet it. Of course, something came to be done about getting someone to fill Miss Whitelaw's place at dinner; but Pamela could see about that. For a time he strove to read.

"Please, sir!"

Maria's tone was deeply solemn. At the sight of her, and at the sound of the inevitable formula, apprehension unavoidably seized his soul. He at once put down the book.

"Yes," he replied despairingly.

"The cook, sir—"

"Good Heavens, am I to hear nothing except about the cook? I arranged about the dinner."

"That's just it, sir. I told her, and her feelings is hurt. She says that if all the confidence you places in her is to bring a pack of outside interlopers about the house, why, they'd better just do all the cooking. She says she washes her hands of it, and she's gone up to pack her trunk."

"But—but that's nonsense!" stammered Gilbert, in the extremity of his consternation. "There are a number of important parts of the dinner to which she must attend. I know the club people are coming, but they are only going to see about some of the entrees and entremets, which she could not get ready in time with the materials spoiled."

"It makes no difference, sir," Maria declared, with a full acceptance of the cordon bleu's point of view, and a lurking sympathy with it. "Her feelings is hurt. She says if she ain't good enough for all, she ain't good enough for any—"

"Can't she see that it was simply that she couldn't do all—"

"She has took her stand," Maria declared with finality.

"And Mrs. Hale isn't here yet!" he exclaimed desperately.

As if the statement offered a straw at which to clutch before the waves closed over him, Hale returned with all speed he could to the telephone. The communication with the office was this time but the work of a few moments.



"The silver from the breakfast-table is gone."