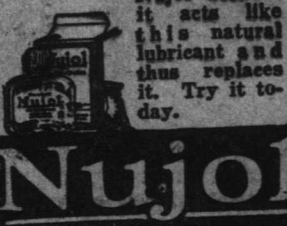


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**Lord Cecil's
Dilemma**
—OR—
The Picnic
—IN—
Woodall Forest

CHAPTER XLV.
"Thank you, old fellow," Sir Charles' voice was husky with emotion, and he looked questioningly at his friend.
"You need explain nothing," was the response. He did not relish the idea of Ada Craythorne being discussed. "She has told me a little."
Sir Charles pressed his hand gratefully, saying:
"I did not know that you were such friends."
"Yes, we were thrown a good deal together when I was here some days since, and I know her people, you see, Charlie, I am glad that your affections were otherwise engaged. I never saw any woman that I admire so much as Miss Craythorne, and if she can find me a little corner in her heart for me, I shall try to win her. There is only one drawback," he added, a little vaguely. "I am so confoundedly poor—such a wail of misery. Still, I have confidence in myself this will be an incentive to attempt and accomplish great things."
"I am sure I wish you luck, old man!"
Sir Charles was assisted downstairs to his snugger—a cosy little room that few enjoyed the privilege of entering. It was generally in a state of disorder, and there was the smell of tobacco smoke in the curtains. The furniture was quaint and more comfortable than elegant; the walls were decorated with prints, old and new, and all of a peculiar or humorous nature, while facing-tables, box-gloves, and other articles of a like nature, were piled in one corner.
"You seem ridiculously light-hearted," observed Gardner, when they were safe from intrusion. "I expected to find a half-dead man."
"I shall be perfectly well in a week," declared Sir Charles. "It is my greatest wish to be able to get out of doors again. You don't know how happy I am, and yet, three days ago, I did not care whether I lived or died. I have much to tell you, Bert, much that will astonish you, and I know that I shall have your hearty congratulations."
For nearly an hour Sir Charles talked, and Gardner listened, only interrupting by an occasional ejaculation of amazement.
"I came here to surprise you," he said, at last, "and you have complete-

ly turned the tables upon me. I knew a portion of what you have told me. I heard it from Lady Gladys' own lips, but the history of this man Spiers and his wife, capped by the climax in connection with the Earl of Stanhope, knocks the wildest imaginings of the novelist into a cocked hat. Now, I will tell you, briefly, what took me to Swinford. I had a letter from Lord Cecil Stanhope; he was in some kind of a muddle, and wanted my advice. As you know, he never belonged to our set—he was too fast—and I replied coolly. He was not to be put off, and the arrangements of a good fee completed the business. I agreed to see him, and went down there. To show you how things are unfolding, I will say at once that part of the business he wanted me for was to consult upon Lord Howard's equivocal position."
"His confession, or the knowledge of his fatal fight with my uncle, need never go any further," declared Hastings. "We must hush it up for my darling's sake."
"That is just what we are powerless to do," went on Gardner. "Listen. The story is in the possession of his steward, and he will give it to the world on New Year's Day, unless the earl yields to demands which are impossible. The steward insists upon the marriage of Lady Gladys and Lord Cecil taking place forthwith. If he is not obeyed, my lord will be arrested. He will not be obeyed."
"Of course not. Cannot the fellow be bribed?"
"No, because Lord Cecil is his son—because Lord Cecil is not Lord Cecil at all, but a changeling, and I am engaged now in finding the Simon Pure."
Sir Charles looked at his friend in absolute bewilderment.
"I shall presently believe that I am ill again, or dreaming. By George, Bert, you are not romancing, are you?" he exclaimed, passing his hand over his face in a dazed sort of way. "Oh, yes, I see it now; the steward is ambitious to see his son well placed in the world, dreaming that his present position is unsafe. The soundest!"
"Now for the final bomb," laughed Gardner. "The steward claims to be my lord's eldest brother!"
"The deuce he does! What select tidbits the papers will have soon!"
(To be continued.)

LADY IRIS' MISTAKE;
—OR THE—
Hero of 'Surata'

CHAPTER IV.
"Yes, I know them—after a fashion, we exchanged solemn dinner-parties, and good Mr. Bardon grows very flushed and heated in his endeavors to entertain us. The daughter, Marie Bardon, is the nicest member of the family. She will one day have an enormous fortune."
Sir Fulke smiled sedately. How often had that phrase, "an enormous fortune," been uttered within his hearing!
Then Lady Clyffarde rose to take leave; and a little incident happened which opened her eyes more clearly as to the character of the young heiress. Lady Iris still held in her hand the white orchids she had gathered; and, as he bowed his adieu, Sir Fulke said to her—
"In memory of a very happy morning and a very pleasant conversation, may I—Will you give me one of yours?"
There was a faint shadow of surprise on her face.
"Give you a flower! Why should I, Sir Fulke?"
"Because it would be an act of grace that would make me very happy," he replied.
A slow smile came over her face. "You gentlemen of the nineteenth century who live at home at ease do not resemble the knights and courtiers of older times," she said. "You have seen me once, talked to me for an hour, and you ask me for a flower. A knight of old would have risked his life or fought a desperate combat for such a gift!"
She looked at him with sweet proud eyes, and smiling lips. Her clear serene glance stirred the blood in his veins.
"You are right, Lady Iris. I will be content if you will grant me the favor I ask when I have tried to win it."



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"That is more reasonable," she said. "You have forgotten one thing, Lady Iris"—and he spoke with the air of a victor—"that when a knight served a lady so faithfully and so well it was because she was his lady-love."
"There," she said, laying the white orchids on the table—"we have talked nonsense enough for one day!"
"But you will own yourself defeated, Lady Iris?" he cried.
"No, not now—or ever! We Faynes never acknowledge defeat!"
Then the carriage was announced, and Lady Clyffarde, with Sir Fulke, went away. They drove for some minutes in silence, and then Lady Clyffarde said—
"I have seen many lovely girls, Fulke, but none like her."
"No, none like her," he echoed. "Mother what were those doggerel lines you repeated the other day. They haunted me all the time I was talking to her, but I could not recall them."
"All the Faynes are proud and cold—they their name with honor hold. Do you mean those lines, Fulke? Lady Iris does seem proud and cold. I will never believe that she is either; there are great depths of love in that girl's heart."
"If one could but discover them," said her son. "She is very proud. Did you notice she refused to give me one of those orchids? It was rather a change for me; I generally find young ladies willing to share their flowers with me. She almost—say, I may say quite—gave me to understand that I could have no flower until I had worked for it." "I wonder," continued Sir Fulke, with a new light in his eyes, "if I did something to please her, whether she would treat me differently? I must try her."
"Do you like her, Fulke?" asked his mother anxiously.
"Yes. The one great danger is that I may like her too well."
"The wish of my heart is that you should marry her," said his mother. "Between the wish and the accomplishment there is a wide gulf, mother!" he laughed—"not that I think she would refuse me. What lovely eyes she has! They are like wood-violets—the darkest, sweetest violet that was ever called blue."
"You are very enthusiastic, Fulke, about Lady Iris, considering that this is the first time you have seen her since she was a child."
"I tell you frankly, mother, she is the loveliest and the noblest girl I have ever seen. Did you note her face when she said those words, 'Hold with honor! It was like a picture.'"
The young baronet resolutely closed his eyes during the remainder of the drive—closed them to the sunlight and the flowers, lest they should distract his attention from the memory of the loveliest face he had ever seen. His mother watched him with anxious eyes. Although she loved him with her whole heart, and thought him one of the most handsome and accomplished men, she was far too clearly sighted and sensible not to see his faults, the undercurrent of vanity, the taint of conceit, that marred what would otherwise have been a noble manhood.
(To be continued.)

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