

minute. Instead of that, you never gave it one thought. You were out on a wild goose chase after Fraser. She took you out of the world you know into the world she knows, where you are a mere baby. I could follow her mad mind, because I have smoked opium. You might try that, too, by the way, Macpherson, if the Russian Ballet doesn't appeal to you!

"And now, Mr. Fisher, I wish you to answer my second question. I have reasons for inclining to acquit you, in part; for giving you a chance. The man I mean to hang is Dr. Leslie. He is one of a common type, the ambitious money-loving Scotsman, clever and handsome, who comes to London to make his way. They become women's doctors; they seduce their patients; they make them drug-fiends; they perform abortions; and to the extortionate charges for their crimes they add a tenfold profit by blackmail. These men are the curse of London."

"It's true; I think he ruined Clara with morphine. I feel sure she was a good girl once."

"Tell us of your relations with her."

"I met her a year ago. Her fascination conquered me at once. Oh, you don't know her! She could do anything with us all! She could tantalize and she could gratify, beyond all dreams. She was a liar to the core; but so wonderful, that even at the moment when reason declared her every word to be a lie, the heart and soul believed, as a nun clings to a crucifix! I was her slave. She tortured and enraptured me by day and night. At this moment I would kill myself to please her whim. She has delighted to make me do degrading and horrible things; she has paid me for a week of agony with a kiss or a smile; she——"

The boy gasped, almost fainted. "Are there such women?" asked Macpherson. "I thought it was a fairy-tale."

"I have known three, intimately," returned Simon Iff: "Edith Harcourt, Jeanne Hayes, Jane Forster. What the boy says is true. I may say that indulgence in drink or drugs tends to create such monsters out of the noblest women. Of the three I have mentioned, the two latter were congenitally bad; Edith Harcourt was one of the finest women that ever lived, but her mother had taught her to drink when yet a child, and in a moment of stress the hidden enemy broke from ambush and destroyed her soul. Her personality was wholly transformed; yes, sir, on the whole, I believe in possession by the devil. All three women ruined the men, or some of them, with whom they were associated. Jeanne Hayes ruined the life of her husband and tore the soul out of her lover before she killed herself; Jane Forster drove a worthy lawyer to melancholy madness. Of their lesser victims, mere broken hearts and so on, there is no count. Edith Harcourt made her husband's life a hell for three years, and after—"

her divorce broke loose altogether, and destroyed many others with envenomed caresses."

"You knew her intimately, you say?"

"She was my wife."

Macpherson remained silent. Fisher was sitting with his head clasped in his hands, his body broken up with sobs.

"Now, Macpherson, we are going to compound felony. I'm glad there was no murder, after all. I want you to let me take Fisher away with me; I'm going to put him with a society of which I am president, which specializes in such cases, without cant or cruelty. Its aim is merely to put a man in the conditions most favorable to his proper development. This was a fine lad until he met the woman who destroyed him, and I know that such women have a more than human power.

"It will be your business to put Miss Clavering in an asylum, if you can catch her, which I sorely doubt. But I think that if you go warily, you may catch Leslie."

It turned out as he had said. Clara had scented mischief, with her morphine-sharpened intellect and her hysteric's intuition. She had persuaded Sir Bray Clinton to send her down to a hospital of his own in the country—and on the way she had seized the soul of the chauffeur. They disappeared together, and there was no word of her for many a day. But Leslie had suspected nothing in the visit, or had laughed it off, or had decided to bluff it out; he was arrested, and sentenced to penal servitude for life.

Fisher justified the good opinion of Simon Iff; but his spirit was broken by his fatal love, and he will never do more than serve the society that saved him, with a dog's devotion.

Macpherson followed the old mystic's advice; he is to-day the most daring, although the soundest, financier in London. Two nights ago he dined with the magician at the Hemlock Club. "I've brought Shakespeare into the Bank," he said, laughingly, to Simple Simon. "But I'll keep him out of the Club, this time!"

"Oh well!" said Simon, "to spend too much time in studies is sloth; to use them too much for ornament is affectation; to make judgment wholly by their rules is the humor of a scholar; they perfect nature, and are themselves perfected by experience; crafty men condemn them, wise men use them, simple men admire them; for they teach not their own use, but that there is a wisdom without them and above them won by observation. It's well worth Five Pounds!"

"But," objected Macpherson, "that's not Shakespeare; that's Bacon!"

Simon Iff did not permit himself so much as the antepenumbra of a smile. "William Shakespeare wrote the works of Francis Bacon; that is one of the Official Beliefs of the Hemlock Club."

"For the Lord's sake!" cried the Banker. "I'll never live up to this Club. Man, it's a marvel!"

"Well," answered the magician, sipping his wine, "You might try a course of William Blake."

SEKHET.

By Adam d'As.

Shall it be claws or paws to-day,	Breast against bosom, shall I feel	Will you express your spirit-stress
Jehane, your lover-lion play?	The lure of velvet or of steel?	By laughter or by holiness?
Sweetness of torment bring completeness	Will it be fire or water flies	I care not—either serves our play—
To love, or torment sharpen sweetness?	From the wild opal of your eyes?	If it be claws or paws to-day.