

Literature.org:
[Authors](#)
[Contact](#)

[A Millionaire of Yesterday](#)

[E. Phillips Oppenheim](#)

This Book:
[Contents](#)
[Previous Chapter](#)
[Next Chapter](#)

Chapter 20

Ernestine walked from Lincoln's Inn to the office of the Hour, where she stayed until nearly four. Then, having finished her day's work, she made her way homewards. Davenant was waiting for her in her rooms. She greeted him with some surprise.

"You told me that I might come to tea," he reminded her. "If you're expecting any one else, or I'm in the way at all, don't mind saying so, please!"

She shook her head.

"I'm certainly not expecting any one," she said. "To tell you the truth my visiting-list is a very small one; scarcely any one knows where I live. Sit down, and I will ring for tea."

He looked at her curiously. "What a colour you have, Ernestine!" he remarked. "Have you been walking fast?"

She laughed softly, and took off her hat, straightening the wavy brown hair, which had escaped bounds a little, in front of the mirror. She looked at herself long and thoughtfully at the delicately cut but strong features, the clear, grey eyes and finely arched eyebrows, the curving, humorous mouth and dainty chin. Davenant regarded her in amazement.

"Why, Ernestine," he exclaimed, "are you taking stock of your good looks?"

"Precisely what I am doing," she answered laughing. "At that moment I was wondering whether I possessed any."

"If you will allow me," he said, "to take the place of the mirror, I think that I could give you any assurances you required."

She shook her head.

"You might be more flattering," she said, "but you would be less faithful."

He remained standing upon the hearthrug. Ernestine returned to the mirror.

"May I know," he asked, "for whose sake is this sudden anxiety about your appearance?"

She turned away and sat in a low chair, her hands clasped behind her head, her eyes fixed upon vacancy.

"I have been wondering," she said, "whether if I set myself to it as to a task I could make a man for a moment forget himself - did I say forget? - I mean betray!"

"If I were that man," he remarked smiling, "I will answer for it that you could."

"You! But then you are only a boy, you have nothing to conceal, and you are partial to me, aren't you? No, the man whom I want to influence is a very different sort of person. It is Scarlett Trent."

He frowned heavily. "A boor," he said. "What have you to do with him? The less the better I should say."

"And from my point of view, the more the better," she answered. "I have come to believe that but for him my father would be alive to-day."

"I do not understand! If you believe that, surely you do not wish to see the man - to have him come near you!"

"I want him punished!"

He shook his head. "There is no proof. There never could be any proof!"

"There are many ways," she said softly, "in which a man can be made to suffer."

"And you would set yourself to do this?"

"Why not? Is not anything better than letting him go scot-free? Would you have me sit still and watch him blossom into a millionaire peer, a man of society, drinking deep draughts of all the joys of life, with never a thought for the man he left to rot in an African jungle? Oh, any way of punishing him is better than that. I have declared war against Scarlett Trent."

"How long," he asked, "will it last?"

"Until he is in my power," she answered slowly. "Until he has fallen back again to the ruck. Until he has tasted a little of the misery from which at least he might have saved my father!"

"I think," he said, "that you are taking a great deal too much for granted. I do not know Scarlett Trent, and I frankly admit that I am prejudiced against him and all his class. Yet I think that he deserves his chance, like any man. Go to him and ask him, face to face, how your father died, declare yourself, press for all particulars, seek even for

corroboration of his word. Treat him if you will as an enemy, but as an honourable one!"

She shook her head.

"The man," she said, "has all the plausibility of his class. He has learned it in the money school, where these things become an art. He believes himself secure - he is even now seeking for me. He is all prepared with his story. No, my way is best."

"I do not like your way," he said. "It is not like you, Ernestine."

"For the sake of those whom one loves," she said, "one will do much that one hates. When I think that but for this man my father might still have been alive, might have lived to know how much I loathed those who sent him into exile - well, I feel then that there is nothing in the world I would not do to crush him!"

He rose to his feet - his fresh, rather boyish, face was wrinkled with care.

"I shall live to be sorry, Ernestine," he said, "that I ever told you the truth about your father."

"If I had discovered it for myself," she said, "and, sooner or later, I should have discovered it, and had learned that you too had been in the conspiracy, I should never have spoken to you again as long as I lived."

"Then I must not regret it," he said, "only I hate the part you are going to play. I hate to think that I must stand by and watch, and say nothing."

"There is no reason," she said, "why you should watch it; why do you not go away for a time?"

"I cannot," he answered sadly, "and you know why."

She was impatient, but she looked at him for a moment with a gleam of sadness in her eyes.

"It would be much better for you," she said, "if you would make up your mind to put that folly behind you."

"It may be folly, but it is not the sort of folly one forgets."

"You had better try then, Cecil," she said, "for it is quite hopeless. You know that. Be a man and leave off dwelling upon the impossible. I do not wish to marry, and I do not expect to, but if ever I did, it would not be you!"

He was silent for a few moments - looking gloomily across at the girl, loathing the thought that she, his ideal of all those things which most become a woman, graceful, handsome, perfectly bred, should ever be brought into contact at all with such a man as this one whose confidence she was planning to gain. No, he could not go away and leave her! He must be at hand, must remain her friend.

"I wonder," he said, "couldn't we have one of our old evenings again? Listen - "

"I would rather not," she interrupted softly. "If you will persist in talking of a forbidden subject you must go away. Be reasonable, Cecil."

He was silent for a moment. When he spoke again his tone was changed.

"Very well," he said. "I will try to let things be as you wish - for the present. Now do you want to hear some news?"

She nodded.

"Of course "

"It's about Dick - seems rather a coincidence too. He was at the Cape, you know, with a firm of surveyors, and he's been offered a post on the Gold Coast."

"The Gold Coast! How odd! Anywhere near - ?"

"The offer came from the Bekwando Company!"

"Is he going?"

"Yes."

She was full of eager interest. "How extraordinary! He might be able to make some inquiries for me."

He nodded.

"What there is to be discovered about Mr. Scarlett Trent, he can find out! But, Ernestine, I want you to understand this! I have nothing against the man, and although I dislike him heartily, I think it is madness to associate him in any way with your father's death."

"You do not know him. I do!"

"I have only told you my opinion," he answered, "it is of no consequence. I will see with your eyes. He is your enemy and he shall be my enemy. If there is anything shady in his past out there, depend upon it Dick will hear of it."

She pushed the wavy hair back from her forehead - her eyes were bright, and there was a deep flush of colour in her cheeks. But the man was not to be deceived. He knew that these things were not for him. It was the accomplice she welcomed and not the man.

"It is a splendid stroke of fortune," she said. "You will write to Fred to-day, won't you? Don't prejudice him either way. Write as though your interest were merely curiosity. It is the truth I want to get at, that is all. If the man is innocent I wish him no harm - only I believe him guilty."

"There was a knock at the door - both turned round. Ernestine's trim little maidservant was announcing a visitor who followed close behind.

"Mr. Scarlett Trent."