

WASTED TIME
Alone, in the dark and silent night,
With the heavy thoughts of a vanished year;

THE WRONG MAN.

BY THE HON. MRS. A. MONTGOMERY.

CHAPTER XII.—(CONTINUED.)

Madeline began to feel that, though acting from the best motives, she was showing a certain degree of weakness, which might become culpable. And yet, on the other hand, what was she to do? She could not fight with her mother over every article of furniture and every picture in the house.

As she read these ominous words, she raised her eyes to her mother, and gazed with mingled compassion and anguish at the small delicate features enclosed in exquisite lace, and the half-closed blue eyes, in which still lingered an almost infantine look of innocence and sweetness.

Camille felt quite sick with a vague horror. She began to perceive that, unless something was done to put an end to this system, it would soon be too late. Though she was at heart anxious to gratify her mother to the utmost extent of her power, yet she revolted at the idea of such a scheme being allowed to succeed, as if it were a righteous act; and she began to apprehend that if she did not take some step at once, it might possibly, for aught she knew, be soon out of her power to obtain any redress.

She was also influenced by another reflection. It might be right for her to put up with any amount of injustice from her mother, and she might easily resign herself to the consequence. But, on the other hand, and in the first place, her father's wishes were absolutely sacred to her; and in the next, she had promised herself to Henri Le Maitre, and that promise had been ratified by her father. From that hour, when she had felt herself to be solemnly affianced to him, she had to consider his interests as mixed up with her own.

When arrived at the house she sent her maid in with a message to the effect that she wished to see him on a matter of importance, if he could give her five minutes private conversation. This was a necessary precaution, as she dreaded being reviewed by Madame Bonnehoe, and finding herself the object of illimitable interest to that good lady and a large family of daughters, to whom her visit would be an event. He then answered, as she was ushered into a large drawing-room, she found the old family lawyer himself

standing at the door to receive her, and the sound of young voices and the rustle of a silk dress valed through a door opposite. Camille had undertaken a task of no slight difficulty. She wanted to know what she could do, what she ought to do, and she desired to arrive at this knowledge without saying a word which might seem disrespectful towards her unhappy mother. It would have taken a great deal to create surprise in Monsieur Bonnehoe at anything on the part of Madame Vonderblanc. He had known her from her marriage, and he had judged her accurately then, in spite of all her juvenile caprices. Further experience had shown him the shallowness of her heart and the depth of her duplicity.

When she had finished, she felt her blood turn cold at the voice of concentrated indignation and horror with which M. Bonnehoe alluded to the incident. He assured her she done quite right in telling him all, and that he had now only to request she would leave the matter entirely in his hands, and without making any reference to her, or divulging the fact that she had sought his protection, he would do in such a manner as to see that justice was done. Camille grew positively alarmed.

Madame Vonderblanc, she exclaimed, "I cannot admit of anything which will humiliate my mother. I am most anxious she should take everything she wishes for, within reason. It is only that she will never discuss you by certain matters to which I know my dear father attached great importance (perhaps an undue importance), his wishes were not carried out. In all lesser matters—everywhere, in short, where it is possible—let my poor mother do as she likes."

Camille was ordered out of her presence before it had reached this stage, and forbidden to appear again that day. She left the room with a heavy heart, feeling very lonely and very friendless in the midst of her wealth. She remained for some time thinking over what had passed, and endeavoring to decide on some course of action. She shrank more than words could express from the thought of exposing her mother even to Monsieur Bonnehoe, to whom, of course, Madame Vonderblanc's eccentricities were no novelty. Yet that was the only chance she had of putting a stop to this persecution, or of protecting herself from being driven, partly by a sense of duty towards her mother, and partly from sheer weariness, into doing or promising something which she might afterwards greatly regret.

While thus meditating on the difficulties of her position, it struck her that, whether or not she sent for Monsieur Bonnehoe, it would be well, first of all, to ascertain whether her mother had really endeavored to substantiate her claim to other articles in the house, or whether, as she hoped, it had merely been a particular bing to possess that one table which had led to the paste and the labels. She rose immediately and went through the suite of rooms described before, directing her steps to the more valuable objects d'art, or pieces of furniture.

By the time she had arrived at this confirmation of all her worst fears, she was in a fever of anxiety and excitement, outraged by her mother's detestable conduct, and yet feeling the greatest reluctance to oppose her, mingled with the apprehensions that, unless she did something now to stop her, matters would grow from bad to worse, and that some accident might then reveal to her friends and relations what had been going on and the scandal become public. She felt she must have advice on the subject, and that she could brook no delay. There was no fear of her mother's calling for her again that day. The evening was closing in. She would no longer find M. Bonnehoe at his office, therefore she would go to his private home. It would be too late if she waited for the carriage to come around, so she would take her maid and go in a hired conveyance.

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