

BETWEEN THE SCENES - PROGRESS OF THE STORY THROUGH THE POST.

I.

From George Bartram to Noel Vanstone.

"St. Crux, September 4th, 1847.

"MY DEAR NOEL--Here are two plain questions at starting. In the name of all that is mysterious, what are you hiding for? And why is everything relating to your marriage kept an impenetrable secret from your oldest friends?

"I have been to Aldborough to try if I could trace you from that place, and have come back as wise as I went. I have applied to your lawyer in London, and have been told, in reply, that you have forbidden him to disclose the place of your retreat to any one without first receiving your permission to do so. All I could prevail on him to say was, that he would forward any letter which might be sent to his care. I write accordingly, and mind this, I expect an answer.

"You may ask, in your ill-tempered way, what business I have to meddle with affairs of yours which it is your pleasure to keep private. My dear Noel, there is a serious reason for our opening communications with you from this house. You don't know what events have taken place at St. Crux since you ran away to get married; and though I detest writing letters, I must lose an hour's shooting to-day in trying to enlighten you.

"On the twenty-third of last month, the admiral and I were disturbed over our wine after dinner by the announcement that a visitor had unexpectedly arrived at St. Crux. Who do you think the visitor was? Mrs. Lecount!

"My uncle, with that old-fashioned bachelor gallantry of his which pays equal respect to all wearers of petticoats, left the table directly to welcome Mrs. Lecount. While I was debating whether I should follow him or not, my meditations were suddenly brought to an end by a loud call from the admiral. I ran into the morning-room, and there was your unfortunate housekeeper on the sofa, with all the women servants about her, more dead

than alive. She had traveled from England to Zurich, and from Zurich back again to England, without stopping; and she looked, seriously and literally, at death's door. I immediately agreed with my uncle that the first thing to be done was to send for medical help. We dispatched a groom on the spot, and, at Mrs. Lecount's own request, sent all the servants in a body out of the room.

"As soon as we were alone, Mrs. Lecount surprised us by a singular question. She asked if you had received a letter which she had addressed to you before leaving England at this house. When we told her that the letter had been forwarded, under cover to your friend Mr. Bygrave, by your own particular request, she turned as pale as ashes; and when we added that you had left us in company with this same Mr. Bygrave, she clasped her hands and stared at us as if she had taken leave of her senses. Her next question was, 'Where is Mr. Noel now?' We could only give her one reply--Mr. Noel had not informed us. She looked perfectly thunderstruck at that answer. 'He has gone to his ruin!' she said. 'He has gone away in company with the greatest villain in England. I must find him! I tell you I must find Mr. Noel! If I don't find him at once, it will be too late. He will be married!' she burst out quite frantically. 'On my honor and my oath, he will be married!' The admiral, incautiously perhaps, but with the best intentions, told her you were married already. She gave a scream that made the windows ring again and dropped back on the sofa in a fainting-fit. The doctor came in the nick of time, and soon brought her to. But she was taken ill the same night; she has grown worse and worse ever since; and the last medical report is, that the fever from which she has been suffering is in a fair way to settle on her brain.

"Now, my dear Noel, neither my uncle nor I have any wish to intrude ourselves on your confidence. We are naturally astonished at the extraordinary mystery which hangs over you and your marriage, and we cannot be blind to the fact that your housekeeper has, apparently, some strong reason of her own for viewing Mrs. Noel Vanstone with an enmity and distrust which we are quite ready to believe that lady has done nothing to deserve. Whatever strange misunderstanding there may have been in your household, is your business (if you choose to keep it to yourself), and not ours. All we have any right to do is to tell you what the doctor says. His patient has been delirious; he declines to answer for her life if she goes on as she is going on now; and he thinks--finding that she is perpetually talking of her master--that your presence would be useful in quieting her, if you could come here at once, and exert your influence before it is too late.

"What do you say? Will you emerge from the darkness that surrounds you

and come to St. Crux? If this was the case of an ordinary servant, I could understand your hesitating to leave the delights of your honeymoon for any such object as is here proposed to you. But, my dear fellow, Mrs. Lecount is not an ordinary servant. You are under obligations to her fidelity and attachment in your father's time, as well as in your own; and if you can quiet the anxieties which seem to be driving this unfortunate woman mad, I really think you ought to come here and do so. Your leaving Mrs. Noel Vanstone is of course out of the question. There is no necessity for any such hard-hearted proceeding. The admiral desires me to remind you that he is your oldest friend living, and that his house is at your wife's disposal, as it has always been at yours. In this great rambling-place she need dread no near association with the sick-room; and, with all my uncle's oddities, I am sure she will not think the offer of his friendship an offer to be despised.

"Have I told you already that I went to Aldborough to try and find a clew to your whereabouts? I can't be at the trouble of looking back to see; so, if I have told you, I tell you again. The truth is, I made an acquaintance at Aldborough of whom you know something--at least by report.

"After applying vainly at Sea View, I went to the hotel to inquire about you. The landlady could give me no information; but the moment I mentioned your name, she asked if I was related to you; and when I told her I was your cousin, she said there was a young lady then at the hotel whose name was Vanstone also, who was in great distress about a missing relative, and who might prove of some use to me--or I to her--if we knew of each other's errand at Aldborough. I had not the least idea who she was, but I sent in my card at a venture; and in five minutes afterward I found myself in the presence of one of the most charming women these eyes ever looked on.

"Our first words of explanation informed me that my family name was known to her by repute. Who do you think she was? The eldest daughter of my uncle and yours--Andrew Vanstone. I had often heard my poor mother in past years speak of her brother Andrew, and I knew of that sad story at Combe-Raven. But our families, as you are aware, had always been estranged, and I had never seen my charming cousin before. She has the dark eyes and hair, and the gentle, retiring manners that I always admire in a woman. I don't want to renew our old disagreement about your father's conduct to those two sisters, or to deny that his brother Andrew may have behaved badly to him; I am willing to admit that the high moral position he took in the matter is quite unassailable by such a miserable sinner as I am; and I will not dispute that my own spendthrift habits incapacitate me from offering any opinion on the conduct of other people's pecuniary affairs. But, with all these allowances and drawbacks, I can tell you one thing, Noel. If

you ever see the elder Miss Vanstone, I venture to prophesy that, for the first time in your life, you will doubt the propriety of following your father's example.

"She told me her little story, poor thing, most simply and unaffectedly. She is now occupying her second situation as a governess--and, as usual, I, who know everybody, know the family. They are friends of my uncle's, whom he has lost sight of latterly--the Tyrrels of Portland Place--and they treat Miss Vanstone with as much kindness and consideration as if she was a member of the family. One of their old servants accompanied her to Aldborough, her object in traveling to that place being what the landlady of the hotel had stated it to be. The family reverses have, it seems, had a serious effect on Miss Vanstone's younger sister, who has left her friends and who has been missing from home for some time. She had been last heard of at Aldborough; and her elder sister, on her return from the Continent with the Tyrrels, had instantly set out to make inquiries at that place.

"This was all Miss Vanstone told me. She asked whether you had seen anything of her sister, or whether Mrs. Lecount knew anything of her sister--I suppose because she was aware you had been at Aldborough. Of course I could tell her nothing. She entered into no details on the subject, and I could not presume to ask her for any. All I did was to set to work with might and main to assist her inquiries. The attempt was an utter failure; nobody could give us any information. We tried personal description of course; and strange to say, the only young lady formerly staying at Aldborough who answered the description was, of all the people in the world, the lady you have married! If she had not had an uncle and aunt (both of whom have left the place), I should have begun to suspect that you had married your cousin without knowing it! Is this the clew to the mystery? Don't be angry; I must have my little joke, and I can't help writing as carelessly as I talk. The end of it was, our inquiries were all baffled, and I traveled back with Miss Vanstone and her attendant as far as our station here. I think I shall call on the Tyrrels when I am next in London. I have certainly treated that family with the most inexcusable neglect.

"Here I am at the end of my third sheet of note-paper! I don't often take the pen in hand; but when I do, you will agree with me that I am in no hurry to lay it aside again. Treat the rest of my letter as you like, but consider what I have told you about Mrs. Lecount, and remember that time is of consequence.

"Ever yours,

"GEORGE BARTRAM."

II.

From Norah Vanstone to Miss Garth.

"Portland Place.

"MY DEAR MISS GARTH--More sorrow, more disappointment! I have just returned from Aldborough, without making any discovery. Magdalen is still lost to us.

"I cannot attribute this new overthrow of my hopes to any want of perseverance or penetration in making the necessary inquiries. My inexperience in such matters was most kindly and unexpectedly assisted by Mr. George Bartram. By a strange coincidence, he happened to be at Aldborough, inquiring after Mr. Noel Vanstone, at the very time when I was there inquiring after Magdalen. He sent in his card, and knowing, when I looked at the name, that he was my cousin--if I may call him so--I thought there would be no impropriety in my seeing him and asking his advice. I abstained from entering into particulars for Magdalen's sake, and I made no allusion to that letter of Mrs. Lecount's which you answered for me. I only told him Magdalen was missing, and had been last heard of at Aldborough. The kindness which he showed in devoting himself to my assistance exceeds all description. He treated me, in my forlorn situation, with a delicacy and respect which I shall remember gratefully long after he has himself perhaps forgotten our meeting altogether. He is quite young--not more than thirty, I should think. In face and figure, he reminded me a little of the portrait of my father at Combe-Raven--I mean the portrait in the dining-room, of my father when he was a young man.

"Useless as our inquiries were, there is one result of them which has left a very strange and shocking impression on my mind.

"It appears that Mr. Noel Vanstone has lately married, under mysterious circumstances, a young lady whom he met with at Aldborough, named Bygrave. He has gone away with his wife, telling nobody but his lawyer where he has gone to. This I heard from Mr. George Bartram, who was endeavoring to trace him, for the purpose of communicating the news of his housekeeper's serious illness--the housekeeper being the same Mrs. Lecount whose letter you answered. So far, you may say, there is nothing which need particularly interest either of us. But I think you will be as much surprised as I was when I tell you that the description given by the people at

Aldborough of Miss Bygrave's appearance is most startlingly and unaccountably like the description of Magdalen's appearance. This discovery, taken in connection with all the circumstances we know of, has had an effect on my mind which I cannot describe to you--which I dare not realize to myself. Pray come and see me! I have never felt so wretched about Magdalen as I feel now. Suspense must have weakened my nerves in some strange way. I feel superstitious about the slightest things. This accidental resemblance of a total stranger to Magdalen fills me every now and then with the most horrible misgivings--merely because Mr. Noel Vanstone's name happens to be mixed up with it. Once more, pray come to me; I have so much to say to you that I cannot, and dare not, say in writing.

"Gratefully and affectionately yours,

"NORAH."

III.

From Mr. John Loscombe (Solicitor) to George Bartram, Esq.

"Lincoln's Inn, London, September 6th, 1847.

"SIR--I beg to acknowledge the receipt of your note, inclosing a letter addressed to my client, Mr. Noel Vanstone, and requesting that I will forward the same to Mr. Vanstone's present address.

"Since I last had the pleasure of communicating with you on this subject, my position toward my client is entirely altered. Three days ago I received a letter from him, which stated his intention of changing his place of residence on the next day then ensuing, but which left me entirely in ignorance on the subject of the locality to which it was his intention to remove. I have not heard from him since; and, as he had previously drawn on me for a larger sum of money than usual, there would be no present necessity for his writing to me again--assuming that it is his wish to keep his place of residence concealed from every one, myself included.

"Under these circumstances, I think it right to return you your letter, with the assurance that I will let you know, if I happen to be again placed in a position to forward it to its destination.

"Your obedient servant,

"JOHN LOSCOMBE."

IV.

From Norah Vanstone to Miss Garth.

"Portland Place.

"MY DEAR MISS GARTH--Forget the letter I wrote to you yesterday, and all the gloomy forebodings that it contains. This morning's post has brought new life to me. I have just received a letter, addressed to me at your house, and forwarded here, in your absence from home yesterday, by your sister. Can you guess who the writer is?--Magdalen!

"The letter is very short; it seems to have been written in a hurry. She says she has been dreaming of me for some nights past, and the dreams have made her fear that her long silence has caused me more distress on her account than she is worth. She writes, therefore, to assure me that she is safe and well--that she hopes to see me before long--and that she has something to tell me, when we meet, which will try my sisterly love for her as nothing has tried it yet. The letter is not dated; but the postmark is 'Allonby,' which I have found, on referring to the Gazetteer, to be a little sea-side place in Cumberland. There is no hope of my being able to write back, for Magdalen expressly says that she is on the eve of departure from her present residence, and that she is not at liberty to say where she is going to next, or to leave instructions for forwarding any letters after her.

"In happier times I should have thought this letter very far from being a satisfactory one, and I should have been seriously alarmed by that allusion to a future confidence on her part which will try my love for her as nothing has tried it yet. But after all the suspense I have suffered, the happiness of seeing her handwriting again seems to fill my heart and to keep all other feelings out of it. I don't send you her letter, because I know you are coming to me soon, and I want to have the pleasure of seeing you read it.

"Ever affectionately yours,

"NORAH.

"P.S.--Mr. George Bartram called on Mrs. Tyrrel to-day. He insisted on being introduced to the children. When he was gone, Mrs. Tyrrel laughed in her good-humored way, and said that his anxiety to see the children looked, to her mind, very much like an anxiety to see me. You may imagine how my

spirits are improved when I can occupy my pen in writing such nonsense as this!"

V.

From Mrs. Lecount to Mr. de Bleriot, General Agent, London.

"St. Crux, October 23d, 1847.

"DEAR SIR--I have been long in thanking you for the kind letter which promises me your assistance, in friendly remembrance of the commercial relations formerly existing between my brother and yourself. The truth is, I have over-taxed my strength on my recovery from a long and dangerous illness; and for the last ten days I have been suffering under a relapse. I am now better again, and able to enter on the business which you so kindly offer to undertake for me.

"The person whose present place of abode it is of the utmost importance to me to discover is Mr. Noel Vanstone. I have lived, for many years past, in this gentleman's service as house-keeper; and not having received my formal dismissal, I consider myself in his service still. During my absence on the Continent he was privately married at Aldborough, in Suffolk, on the eighteenth of August last. He left Aldborough the same day, taking his wife with him to some place of retreat which was kept a secret from everybody except his lawyer, Mr. Loscombe, of Lincoln's Inn. After a short time he again removed, on the 4th of September, without informing Mr. Loscombe, on this occasion, of his new place of abode. From that date to this the lawyer has remained (or has pretended to remain) in total ignorance of where he now is. Application has been made to Mr. Loscombe, under the circumstances, to mention what that former place of residence was, of which Mr. Vanstone is known to have informed him. Mr. Loscombe has declined acceding to this request, for want of formal permission to disclose his client's proceedings after leaving Aldborough. I have all these latter particulars from Mr. Loscombe's correspondent--the nephew of the gentleman who owns this house, and whose charity has given me an asylum, during the heavy affliction of my sickness, under his own roof.

"I believe the reasons which have induced Mr. Noel Vanstone to keep himself and his wife in hiding are reasons which relate entirely to myself. In the first place, he is aware that the circumstances under which he has married are such as to give me the right of regarding him with a just indignation. In the second place, he knows that my faithful services, rendered through a period of twenty years, to his father and to himself, forbid him, in common decency, to cast me out helpless on the world without a provision for the

end of my life. He is the meanest of living men, and his wife is the vilest of living women. As long as he can avoid fulfilling his obligations to me, he will; and his wife's encouragement may be trusted to fortify him in his ingratitude.

"My object in determining to find him out is briefly this. His marriage has exposed him to consequences which a man of ten times his courage could not face without shrinking. Of those consequences he knows nothing. His wife knows, and keeps him in ignorance. I know, and can enlighten him. His security from the danger that threatens him is in my hands alone; and he shall pay the price of his rescue to the last farthing of the debt that justice claims for me as my due--no more, and no less.

"I have now laid my mind before you, as you told me, without reserve. You know why I want to find this man, and what I mean to do when I find him. I leave it to your sympathy for me to answer the serious question that remains: How is the discovery to be made? If a first trace of them can be found, after their departure from Aldborough, I believe careful inquiry will suffice for the rest. The personal appearance of the wife, and the extraordinary contrast between her husband and herself, are certain to be remarked, and remembered, by every stranger who sees them.

"When you favor me with your answer, please address it to 'Care of Admiral Bartram, St. Crux-in the-Marsh, near Ossory, Essex'. Your much obliged

"VIRGINIE LECOUNT."

VI.

From Mr. de Bleriot to Mrs. Lecount.

"Dark's Buildings, Kingsland,

"October 25th, 1847.

"Private and Confidential.

"DEAR MADAM--I hasten to reply to your favor of Saturday's date. Circumstances have enabled me to forward your interests, by consulting a friend of mine possessing great experience in the management of private inquiries of all sorts. I have placed your case before him (without mentioning names); and I am happy to inform you that my views and his views of the proper course to take agree in every particular.

"Both myself and friend, then, are of opinion that little or nothing can be done toward tracing the parties you mention, until the place of their temporary residence after they left Aldborough has been discovered first. If this can be done, the sooner it is done the better. Judging from your letter, some weeks must have passed since the lawyer received his information that they had shifted their quarters. As they are both remarkable-looking people, the strangers who may have assisted them on their travels have probably not forgotten them yet. Nevertheless, expedition is desirable.

"The question for you to consider is, whether they may not possibly have communicated the address of which we stand in need to some other person besides the lawyer. The husband may have written to members of his family, or the wife may have written to members of her family. Both myself and friend are of opinion that the latter chance is the likelier of the two. If you have any means of access in the direction of the wife's family, we strongly recommend you to make use of them. If not, please supply us with the names of any of her near relations or intimate female friends whom you know, and we will endeavor to get access for you.

"In any case, we request you will at once favor us with the most exact personal description that can be written of both the parties. We may require your assistance, in this important particular, at five minutes' notice. Favor us, therefore, with the description by return of post. In the meantime, we will endeavor to ascertain on our side whether any information is to be

privately obtained at Mr. Loscombe's office. The lawyer himself is probably altogether beyond our reach. But if any one of his clerks can be advantageously treated with on such terms as may not overtax your pecuniary resources, accept my assurance that the opportunity shall be made the most of by, dear madam, your faithful servant,

"ALFRED DE BLERIOT."

VII.

From Mr. Pendril to Norah Vanstone.

"Serle Street, October 27th. 1847.

"MY DEAR MISS VANSTONE--A lady named Lecount (formerly attached to Mr. Noel Vanstone's service in the capacity of housekeeper) has called at my office this morning, and has asked me to furnish her with your address. I have begged her to excuse my immediate compliance with her request, and to favor me with a call to-morrow morning, when I shall be prepared to meet her with a definite answer.

"My hesitation in this matter does not proceed from any distrust of Mrs. Lecount personally, for I know nothing whatever to her prejudice. But in making her request to me, she stated that the object of the desired interview was to speak to you privately on the subject of your sister. Forgive me for acknowledging that I determined to withhold the address as soon as I heard this. You will make allowances for your old friend, and your sincere well-wisher? You will not take it amiss if I express my strong disapproval of your allowing yourself, on any pretense whatever, to be mixed up for the future with your sister's proceedings.

"I will not distress you by saying more than this. But I feel too deep an interest in your welfare, and too sincere an admiration of the patience with which you have borne all your trials, to say less.

"If I cannot prevail on you to follow my advice, you have only to say so, and Mrs. Lecount shall have your address to-morrow. In this case (which I cannot contemplate without the greatest unwillingness), let me at least recommend you to stipulate that Miss Garth shall be present at the interview. In any matter with which your sister is concerned, you may want an old friend's advice, and an old friend's protection against your own generous impulses. If I could have helped you in this way, I would; but Mrs. Lecount gave me indirectly to understand that the subject to be discussed was of too delicate a nature to permit of my presence. Whatever this objection may be really worth, it cannot apply to Miss Garth, who has brought you both up from childhood. I say, again, therefore, if you see Mrs. Lecount, see her in Miss Garth's company.

"Always most truly yours,

"WILLIAM PENDRIL."

VIII.

From Norah Vanstone to Mr. Pendril.

"Portland Place, Wednesday.

"DEAR MR. PENDRIL--Pray don't think I am ungrateful for your kindness. Indeed, indeed I am not! But I must see Mrs. Lecount. You were not aware when you wrote to me that I had received a few lines from Magdalen--not telling me where she is, but holding out the hope of our meeting before long. Perhaps Mrs. Lecount may have something to say to me on this very subject. Even if it should not be so, my sister--do what she may--is still my sister. I can't desert her; I can't turn my back on any one who comes to me in her name. You know, dear Mr. Pendril, I have always been obstinate on this subject, and you have always borne with me. Let me owe another obligation to you which I can never return, and bear with me still!

"Need I say that I willingly accept that part of your advice which refers to Miss Garth? I have already written to beg that she will come here at four to-morrow afternoon. When you see Mrs. Lecount, please inform her that Miss Garth will be with me, and that she will find us both ready to receive her here to-morrow at four o'clock. Gratefully yours,

"NORAH VANSTONE."

IX.

From Mr. de Bleriot to Mrs. Lecount.

"Private.

"Dark's Buildings, October 28th.

"DEAR MADAM--One of Mr. Loscombe's clerks has proved amenable to a small pecuniary consideration, and has mentioned a circumstance which it may be of some importance to you to know.

"Nearly a month since, accident gave the clerk in question an opportunity of looking into one of the documents on his master's table, which had attracted his attention from a slight peculiarity in the form and color of the paper. He had only time, during Mr. Loscombe's momentary absence, to satisfy his

curiosity by looking at the beginning of the document and at the end. At the beginning he saw the customary form used in making a will; at the end he discovered the signature of Mr. Noel Vanstone, with the names of two attesting witnesses, and the date (of which he is quite certain)--the thirtieth of September last.

"Before the clerk had time to make any further investigations, his master returned, sorted the papers on the table, and carefully locked up the will in the strong box devoted to the custody of Mr. Noel Vanstone's documents. It has been ascertained that, at the close of September, Mr. Loscombe was absent from the office. If he was then employed in superintending the execution of his client's will--which is quite possible--it follows clearly that he was in the secret of Mr. Vanstone's address after the removal of the 4th of September; and if you can do nothing on your side, it may be desirable to have the lawyer watched on ours. In any case, it is certainly ascertained that Mr. Noel Vanstone has made his will since his marriage. I leave you to draw your own conclusions from that fact, and remain, in the hope of hearing from you shortly,

"Your faithful servant,

"ALFRED DE BLERIOT."

X.

From Miss Garth to Mr. Pendril.

"Portland Place, October 28th.

"MY DEAR SIR--Mrs. Lecount has just left us. If it was not too late to wish, I should wish, from the bottom of my heart, that Norah had taken your advice, and had refused to see her.

"I write in such distress of mind that I cannot hope to give you a clear and complete account of the interview. I can only tell you briefly what Mrs. Lecount has done, and what our situation now is. The rest must be left until I am more composed, and until I can speak to you personally.

"You will remember my informing you of the letter which Mrs. Lecount addressed to Norah from Aldborough, and which I answered for her in her absence. When Mrs. Lecount made her appearance to-day, her first words announced to us that she had come to renew the subject. As well as I can remember it, this is what she said, addressing herself to Norah:

"I wrote to you on the subject of your sister, Miss Vanstone, some little time since, and Miss Garth was so good as to answer the letter. What I feared at that time has come true. Your sister has defied all my efforts to check her; she has disappeared in company with my master, Mr. Noel Vanstone; and she is now in a position of danger which may lead to her disgrace and ruin at a moment's notice. It is my interest to recover my master, it is your interest to save your sister. Tell me--for time is precious--have you any news of her?"

"Norah answered, as well as her terror and distress would allow her, 'I have had a letter, but there was no address on it.'

"Mrs. Lecount asked, 'Was there no postmark on the envelope?'

"Norah said, 'Yes; Allonby.'

"Allonby is better than nothing,' said Mrs. Lecount. 'Allonby may help you to trace her. Where is Allonby?'

"Norah told her. It all passed in a minute. I had been too much confused and startled to interfere before, but I composed myself sufficiently to interfere now.

"You have entered into no particulars,' I said. 'You have only frightened us--you have told us nothing.'

"You shall hear the particulars, ma'am,' said Mrs. Lecount; 'and you and Miss Vanstone shall judge for yourselves if I have frightened you without a cause.'

"Upon this, she entered at once upon a long narrative, which I cannot--I might almost say, which I dare not--repeat. You will understand the horror we both felt when I tell you the end. If Mrs. Lecount's statement is to be relied on, Magdalen has carried her mad resolution of recovering her father's fortune to the last and most desperate extremity--she has married Michael Vanstone's son under a false name. Her husband is at this moment still persuaded that her maiden name was Bygrave, and that she is really the niece of a scoundrel who assisted her imposture, and whom I recognize, by the description of him, to have been Captain Wragge.

"I spare you Mrs. Lecount's cool avowal, when she rose to leave us, of her own mercenary motives in wishing to discover her master and to enlighten him. I spare you the hints she dropped of Magdalen's purpose in contracting this infamous marriage. The one aim and object of my letter is to implore you to assist me in quieting Norah's anguish of mind. The shock she has received at hearing this news of her sister is not the worst result of what has happened. She has persuaded herself that the answers she innocently gave, in her distress, to Mrs. Lecount's questions on the subject of her letter--the answers wrung from her under the sudden pressure of confusion and alarm--may be used to Magdalen's prejudice by the woman who purposely startled her into giving the information. I can only prevent her from taking some desperate step on her side--some step by which she may forfeit the friendship and protection of the excellent people with whom she is now living--by reminding her that if Mrs. Lecount traces her master by means of the postmark on the letter, we may trace Magdalen at the same time, and by the same means. Whatever objection you may personally feel to renewing the efforts for the rescue of this miserable girl which failed so lamentably at York, I entreat you, for Norah's sake, to take the same steps now which we took then. Send me the only assurance which will quiet her--the assurance, under your own hand, that the search on our side has begun. If you will do this, you may trust me, when the time comes, to stand between these two sisters, and to defend Norah's peace, character, and future prosperity at any price.

"Most sincerely yours,

"HARRIET GARTH."

XI.

From Mrs. Lecount to Mr. de Bleriot.

"October 28th.

"DEAR SIR--I have found the trace you wanted. Mrs. Noel Vanstone has written to her sister. The letter contains no address, but the postmark is Allonby, in Cumberland. From Allonby, therefore, the inquiries must begin. You have already in your possession the personal description of both husband and wife. I urgently recommend you not to lose one unnecessary moment. If it is possible to send to Cumberland immediately on receipt of this letter, I beg you will do so.

"I have another word to say before I close my note--a word about the discovery in Mr. Loscombe's office.

"It is no surprise to me to hear that Mr. Noel Vanstone has made his will since his marriage, and I am at no loss to guess in whose favor the will is made. If I succeed in finding my master, let that person get the money if that person can. A course to follow in this matter has presented itself to my mind since I received your letter, but my ignorance of details of business and intricacies of law leaves me still uncertain whether my idea is capable of ready and certain execution. I know no professional person whom I can trust in this delicate and dangerous business. Is your large experience in other matters large enough to help me in this? I will call at your office tomorrow at two o'clock, for the purpose of consulting you on the subject. It is of the greatest importance, when I next see Mr. Noel Vanstone, that he should find me thoroughly prepared beforehand in this matter of the will. Your much obliged servant,

"VIRGINIE LECOUNT."

XII.

From Mr. Pendril to Miss Garth.

"Serle Street, October 29th.

"DEAR MISS GARTH--I have only a moment to assure you of the sorrow with which I have read your letter. The circumstances under which you urge your request, and the reasons you give for making it, are sufficient to silence any objection I might otherwise feel to the course you propose. A trustworthy person, whom I have myself instructed, will start for Allonby to-day, and as soon as I receive any news from him, you shall hear of it by special messenger. Tell Miss Vanstone this, and pray add the sincere expression of my sympathy and regard.

"Faithfully yours,

"WILLIAM PENDRIL."

XIII.

From Mr. de Bleriot to Mrs. Lecount.

"Dark's Buildings. November 1st.

"DEAR MADAM--I have the pleasure of informing you that the discovery has been made with far less trouble than I had anticipated.

"Mr. and Mrs. Noel Vanstone have been traced across the Solway Firth to Dumfries, and thence to a cottage a few miles from the town, on the banks of the Nith. The exact address is Baliol Cottage, near Dumfries.

"This information, though easily hunted up, has nevertheless been obtained under rather singular circumstances.

"Before leaving Allonby, the persons in my employ discovered, to their surprise, that a stranger was in the place pursuing the same inquiry as themselves. In the absence of any instructions preparing them for such an occurrence as this, they took their own view of the circumstance. Considering the man as an intruder on their business, whose success might deprive them of the credit and reward of making the discovery, they took advantage of their superiority in numbers, and of their being first in the field, and carefully misled the stranger before they ventured any further with their own investigations. I am in possession of the details of their proceedings, with which I need not trouble you. The end is, that this person, whoever he may be, was cleverly turned back southward on a false scent before the men in my employment crossed the Firth.

"I mention the circumstance, as you may be better able than I am to find a clew to it, and as it may possibly be of a nature to induce you to hasten your journey.

"Your faithful servant,

"ALFRED DE BLERIOT."

XIV.

From Mrs. Lecount to Mr. de Bleriot.

"November 1st.

"DEAR SIR--One line to say that your letter has just reached me at my lodging in London. I think I know who sent the strange man to inquire at Allonby. It matters little. Before he finds out his mistake, I shall be at Dumfries. My luggage is packed, and I start for the North by the next train.

"Your deeply obliged

"VIRGINIE LECOUNT."