

**GEORGE
MEREDITH**

EVAN
HARRINGTON,
VOLUME 3

George Meredith
Evan Harrington. Volume 3

«Public Domain»

Meredith G.

Evan Harrington. Volume 3 / G. Meredith — «Public Domain»,

Содержание

CHAPTER XIV	5
CHAPTER XV	11
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	13

George Meredith

Evan Harrington – Volume 3

CHAPTER XIV

THE COUNTESS DESCRIBES THE FIELD OF ACTION

Now, to clear up a point or two: You may think the Comic Muse is straining human nature rather toughly in making the Countess de Saldar rush open-eyed into the jaws of Demogorgon, dreadful to her. She has seen her brother pointed out unmistakably as the tailor-fellow. There is yet time to cast him off or fly with him. Is it her extraordinary heroism impelling her onward, or infatuated rashness? or is it her mere animal love of conflict?

The Countess de Saldar, like other adventurers, has her star. They who possess nothing on earth, have a right to claim a portion of the heavens. In resolute hands, much may be done with a star. As it has empires in its gift, so may it have heiresses. The Countess's star had not blinked balefully at her. That was one reason why she went straight on to Beckley.

Again: the Countess was a born general. With her star above, with certain advantages secured, with battalions of lies disciplined and zealous, and with one clear prize in view, besides other undeveloped benefits dimly shadowing forth, the Countess threw herself headlong into the enemy's country.

But, that you may not think too highly of this lady, I must add that the trivial reason was the exciting cause—as in many great enterprises. This was nothing more than the simple desire to be located, if but for a day or two, on the footing of her present rank, in the English country-house of an offshoot of our aristocracy. She who had moved in the first society of a foreign capital—who had married a Count, a minister of his sovereign, had enjoyed delicious high-bred badinage with refulgent ambassadors, could boast the friendship of duchesses, and had been the amiable receptacle of their pardonable follies; she who, moreover, heartily despised things English:—this lady experienced thrills of proud pleasure at the prospect of being welcomed at a third-rate English mansion. But then, that mansion was Beckley Court. We return to our first ambitions, as to our first loves not that they are dearer to us, —quit that delusion: our ripened loves and mature ambitions are probably closest to our hearts, as they deserve to be—but we return to them because our youth has a hold on us which it asserts whenever a disappointment knocks us down. Our old loves (with the bad natures I know in them) are always lurking to avenge themselves on the new by tempting us to a little retrograde infidelity. A schoolgirl in Fallow field, the tailor's daughter, had sighed for the bliss of Beckley Court. Beckley Court was her Elysium ere the ardent feminine brain conceived a loftier summit. Fallen from that attained eminence, she sighed anew for Beckley Court. Nor was this mere spiritual longing; it had its material side. At Beckley Court she could feel her foreign rank. Moving with our nobility as an equal, she could feel that the short dazzling glitter of her career was not illusory, and had left her something solid; not coin of the realm exactly, but yet gold. She could not feel this in the Cogglesby saloons, among pitiable bourgeois—middle-class people daily soiled by the touch of tradesmen. They dragged her down. Their very homage was a mockery.

Let the Countess have due credit for still allowing Evan to visit Beckley Court to follow up his chance. If Demogorgon betrayed her there, the Count was her protector: a woman rises to her husband. But a man is what he is, and must stand upon that. She was positive Evan had committed himself in some manner. As it did not suit her to think so, she at once encouraged an imaginary conversation, in which she took the argument that it was quite impossible Evan could have been so mad, and others instanced his youth, his wrongheaded perversity, his ungenerous disregard for his

devoted sister, and his known weakness: she replying, that undoubtedly they were right so far: but that he could not have said he himself was that horrible thing, because he was nothing of the sort: which faith in Evan's steadfast adherence to facts, ultimately silenced the phantom opposition, and gained the day.

With admiration let us behold the Countess de Saldar alighting on the gravel sweep of Beckley Court, the footman and butler of the enemy bowing obsequious welcome to the most potent visitor Beckley Court has ever yet embraced.

The despatches of a general being usually acknowledged to be the safest sources from which the historian of a campaign can draw, I proceed to set forth a letter of the Countess de Saldar, forwarded to her sister, Harriet Cogglesby, three mornings after her arrival at Beckley Court; and which, if it should prove false in a few particulars, does nevertheless let us into the state of the Countess's mind, and gives the result of that general's first inspection of the field of action. The Countess's epistolary English does small credit to her Fallow field education; but it is feminine, and flows more than her ordinary speech. Besides, leaders of men have always notoriously been above the honours of grammar.

'MY DEAREST HARRIET,

'Your note awaited me. No sooner my name announced, than servitors in yellow livery, with powder and buckles started before me, and bowing one presented it on a salver. A venerable butler—most impressive! led the way. In future, my dear, let it be de Saldar de Sancorvo. That is our title by rights, and it may as well be so in England. English Countess is certainly best. Always put the de. But let us be systematic, as my poor Silva says. He would be in the way here, and had better not come till I see something he can do. Silva has great reliance upon me. The farther he is from Lymport, my dear!—and imagine me, Harriet, driving through Fallow field to Beckley Court! I gave one peep at Dubbins's, as I passed. The school still goes on. I saw three little girls skipping, and the old swing-pole. SEMINARY FOR YOUNG LADIES as bright as ever! I should have liked to have kissed the children and given them bonbons and a holiday.

'How sparing you English are of your crests and arms! I fully expected to see the Jocelyns' over my bed; but no—four posts totally without ornament! Sleep, indeed, must be the result of dire fatigue in such a bed. The Jocelyn crest is a hawk in jesses. The Elburne arms are, Or, three falcons on a field, vert. How heraldry reminds me of poor Papa! the evenings we used to spend with him, when he stayed at home, studying it so diligently under his directions! We never shall again! Sir Franks Jocelyn is the third son of Lord Elburne, made a Baronet for his patriotic support of the Ministry in a time of great trouble. The people are sometimes grateful, my dear. Lord Elburne is the fourteenth of his line—originally simple country squires. They talk of the Roses, but we need not go so very far back as that. I do not quite understand why a Lord's son should condescend to a Baronetcy. Precedence of some sort for his lady, I suppose. I have yet to learn whether she ranks by his birth, or his present title. If so, a young Baronetcy cannot possibly be a gain. One thing is certain. She cares very little about it. She is most eccentric. But remember what I have told you. It will be serviceable when you are speaking of the family.

'The dinner-hour, six. It would no doubt be full seven in Town. I am convinced you are half-an-hour too early. I had the post of honour to the right of Sir Franks. Evan to the right of Lady Jocelyn. Most fortunately he was in the best of spirits—quite brilliant. I saw the eyes of that sweet Rose glisten. On the other side of me sat my pet diplomatist, and I gave him one or two political secrets which astonished him. Of course, my dear, I was wheedled out of them. His contempt for our weak intellects is ineffable. But a woman must now and then ingratiate herself at the expense of her sex. This is perfectly legitimate. Tory policy at the table. The Opposition, as Andrew says, not represented. So to show that we were human beings, we differed among ourselves, and it soon became clear to me that Lady Jocelyn is the rankest of Radicals. My secret suspicion is, that she is a person of no birth whatever, wherever her money came from. A fine woman—yes; still to be admired, I suppose, by some kind of men; but totally wanting in the essentially feminine attractions.

'There was no party, so to say. I will describe the people present, beginning with the insignifacants.

'First, Mr. Parsley, the curate of Beckley. He eats everything at table, and agrees with everything. A most excellent orthodox young clergyman. Except that he was nearly choked by a fish-bone, and could not quite conceal his distress—and really Rose should have repressed her desire to laugh till the time for our retirement—he made no sensation. I saw her eyes watering, and she is not clever in turning it off. In that nobody ever equalled dear Papa. I attribute the attack almost entirely to the tightness of the white neck-cloths the young clergymen of the Established Church wear. But, my dear, I have lived too long away from them to wish for an instant the slightest change in anything they think, say, or do. The mere sight of this young man was most refreshing to my spirit. He may be the shepherd of a flock, this poor Mr. Parsley, but he is a sheep to one young person.

'Mr. Drummond Forth. A great favourite of Lady Jocelyn's; an old friend. He went with them to the East. Nothing improper. She is too cold for that. He is fair, with regular features, very self-possessed, and ready—your English notions of gentlemanly. But none of your men treat a woman as a woman. We are either angels, or good fellows, or heaven knows what that is bad. No exquisite delicacy, no insinuating softness, mixed with respect, none of that hovering over the border, as Papa used to say, none of that happy indefiniteness of manner which seems to declare "I would love you if I might," or "I do, but I dare not tell," even when engaged in the most trivial attentions—handing a footstool, remarking on the soup, etc. You none of you know how to meet a woman's smile, or to engage her eyes without boldness—to slide off them, as it were, gracefully. Evan alone can look between the eyelids of a woman. I have had to correct him, for to me he quite exposes the state of his heart towards dearest Rose. She listens to Mr. Forth with evident esteem. In Portugal we do not understand young ladies having male friends.

'Hamilton Jocelyn—all politics. The stiff Englishman. Not a shade of manners. He invited me to drink wine. Before I had finished my bow his glass was empty—the man was telling an anecdote of Lord Livelyston! You may be sure, my dear, I did not say I had seen his lordship.

'Seymour Jocelyn, Colonel of Hussars. He did nothing but sigh for the cold weather, and hunting. All I envied him was his moustache for Evan. Will you believe that the ridiculous boy has shaved!

'Then there is Melville, my dear diplomatist; and here is another instance of our Harrington luck. He has the gout in his right hand; he can only just hold knife and fork, and is interdicted Port-wine and penmanship. The dinner was not concluded before I had arranged that Evan should resume (gratuitously, you know) his post of secretary to him. So here is Evan fixed at Beckley Court as long as Melville stays. Talking of him, I am horrified suddenly. They call him the great Mel! 'Sir Franks is most estimable, I am sure, as a man, and redolent of excellent qualities—a beautiful disposition, very handsome. He has just as much and no more of the English polish one ordinarily meets. When he has given me soup or fish, bowed to me over wine, and asked a conventional question, he has done with me. I should imagine his opinions to be extremely good, for they are not a multitude.

'Then his lady—but I have not grappled with her yet. Now for the women, for I quite class her with the opposite sex.

'You must know that before I retired for the night, I induced Conning to think she had a bad head-ache, and Rose lent me her lady's-maid—they call the creature Polly. A terrible talker. She would tell all about the family. Rose has been speaking of Evan. It would have looked better had she been quiet—but then she is so English!

Here the Countess breaks off to say, that from where she is writing, she can see Rose and Evan walking out to the cypress avenue, and that no eyes are on them; great praise being given to the absence of suspicion in the Jocelyn nature.

The communication is resumed the night of the same day.

'Two days at Beckley Court are over, and that strange sensation I had of being an intruder escaped from Dubbins's, and expecting every instant the old schoolmistress to call for me, and expose me, and take me to the dark room, is quite vanished, and I feel quite at home, quite happy. Evan is behaving well. Quite the young nobleman. With the women I had no fear of him; he is really admirable with the men—easy, and talks of sport and politics, and makes the proper use of Portugal. He has quite won the heart of his sister. Heaven smiles on us, dearest Harriet!

'We must be favoured, my dear, for Evan is very troublesome—distressingly inconsiderate! I left him for a day—remaining to comfort poor Mama—and on the road he picked up an object he had known at school, and this creature, in shameful garments, is seen in the field where Rose and Evan are riding—in a dreadful hat—Rose might well laugh at it!—he is seen running away from an old apple woman, whose fruit he had consumed without means to liquidate; but, of course, he rushes bolt up to Evan before all his grand company, and claims acquaintance, and Evan was base enough to acknowledge him! He disengaged himself so far well by tossing his purse to the wretch, but if he knows not how to—cut, I assure him it will be his ruin. Resolutely he must cast the dust off his shoes, or he will be dragged down to their level. By the way, as to hands and feet, comparing him with the Jocelyn men, he has every mark of better blood. Not a question about it. As Papa would say—We have Nature's proof.

'Looking out on a beautiful lawn, and the moon, and all sorts of trees, I must now tell you about the ladies here.

'Conning undid me to-night. While Conning remains unattached, Conning is likely to be serviceable. If Evan, would only give her a crumb, she would be his most faithful dog. I fear he cannot be induced, and Conning will be snapped up by somebody else. You know how susceptible she is behind her primness—she will be of no use on earth, and I shall find excuse to send her back immediately. After all, her appearance here was all that was wanted.

'Mrs. Melville and her dreadful juvenile are here, as you may imagine—the complete Englishwoman. I smile on her, but I could laugh. To see the crow's-feet under her eyes on her white skin, and those ringlets, is really too ridiculous. Then there is a Miss Carrington, Lady Jocelyn's cousin, aged thirty-two—if she has not tampered with the register of her birth. I should think her equal to it. Between dark and fair. Always in love with some man, Conning tells me she hears. Rose's maid, Polly, hinted the same. She has a little money.

'But my sympathies have been excited by a little cripple—a niece of Lady Jocelyn's and the favourite grand-daughter of the rich old Mrs. Bonner—also here—Juliana Bonner. Her age must be twenty. You would take her for ten. In spite of her immense expectations, the Jocelyns hate her. They can hardly be civil to her. It is the poor child's temper. She has already begun to watch dear Evan—certainly the handsomest of the men here as yet, though I grant you, they are well-grown men, these Jocelyns, for an untravelled Englishwoman. I fear, dear Harriet, we have been dreadfully deceived about Rose. The poor child has not, in her own right, much more than a tenth part of what we supposed, I fear. It was that Mrs. Melville. I have had occasion to notice her quiet boasts here. She said this morning, "when Mel is in the Ministry"—he is not yet in Parliament! I feel quite angry with the woman, and she is not so cordial as she might be. I have her profile very frequently while I am conversing with her.

'With Grandmama Bonner I am excellent good friends,—venerable silver hair, high caps, etc. More of this most interesting Juliana Bonner by- and-by. It is clear to me that Rose's fortune is calculated upon the dear invalid's death! Is not that harrowing? It shocks me to think of it.

'Then there is Mrs. Shorne. She is a Jocelyn—and such a history! She married a wealthy manufacturer—bartered her blood for his money, and he failed, and here she resides, a bankrupt widow, petitioning any man that may be willing for his love AND a decent home. AND—I say in charity.

'Mrs. Shorne comes here to-morrow. She is at present with—guess, my dear!—with Lady Racial. Do not be alarmed. I have met Lady Racial. She heard Evan's name, and by that and the likeness I saw she knew at once, and I saw a truce in her eyes. She gave me a tacit assurance of it—she was engaged to dine here yesterday, and put it off—probably to grant us time for composure. If she comes I do not fear her. Besides, has she not reasons? Providence may have designed her for a staunch ally—I will not say, confederate.

'Would that Providence had fixed this beautiful mansion five hundred miles from L—, though it were in a desolate region! And that reminds me of the Madre. She is in health. She always will be overbearingly robust till the day we are bereft of her. There was some secret in the house when I was there, which I did not trouble to penetrate. That little Jane F— was there—not improved.

'Pray, be firm about Torquay. Estates mortgaged, but hopes of saving a remnant of the property. Third son! Don't commit yourself there. We dare not baronetize him. You need not speak it—imply. More can be done that way.

'And remember, dear Harriet, that you must manage Andrew so that we may positively promise his vote to the Ministry on all questions when Parliament next assembles. I understood from Lord Livelyston, that Andrew's vote would be thought much of. A most amusing nobleman! He pledged himself to nothing! But we are above such a thing as a commercial transaction. He must countenance Silva. Women, my dear, have sent out armies—why not fleets? Do not spare me your utmost aid in my extremity, my dearest sister.

'As for Strike, I refuse to speak of him. He is insufferable and next to useless. How can one talk with any confidence of relationship with a Major of Marines? When I reflect on what he is, and his conduct to Caroline, I have inscrutable longings to slap his face. Tell dear Carry her husband's friend—the chairman or something of that wonderful company of Strike's—you know—the Duke of Belfield is coming here. He is a blood-relation of the Elburnes, therefore of the Jocelyns. It will not matter at all. Breweries, I find, are quite in esteem in your England. It was highly commendable in his Grace to visit you. Did he come to see the Major of Marines? Caroline is certainly the loveliest woman I ever beheld, and I forgive her now the pangs of jealousy she used to make me feel.

'Andrew, I hope, has received the most kind invitations of the Jocelyns. He must come. Melville must talk with him about the votes of his abominable brother in Fallow field. We must elect Melville and have the family indebted to us. But pray be careful that Andrew speaks not a word to his odious brother about our location here. It would set him dead against these hospitable Jocelyns. It will perhaps be as well, dear Harriet, if you do not accompany Andrew. You would not be able to account for him quite thoroughly. Do as you like—I do but advise, and you know I may be trusted—for our sakes, dear one! I am working for Carry to come with Andrew. Beautiful women always welcome. A prodigy!—if they wish to astonish the Duke. Adieu! Heaven bless your babes!'

The night passes, and the Countess pursues:

'Awakened by your fresh note from a dream of Evan on horseback, and a multitude hailing him Count Jocelyn for Fallow field! A morning dream. They might desire that he should change his name; but "Count" is preposterous, though it may conceal something.

'You say Andrew will come, and talk of his bringing Caroline. Anything to give our poor darling a respite from her brute. You deserve great credit for your managing of that dear little good-natured piece of obstinate man. I will at once see to prepare dear Caroline's welcome, and trust her stay may be prolonged in the interest of common humanity. They have her story here already.

'Conning has come in, and says that young Mr. Harry Jocelyn will be here this morning from Fallow field, where he has been cricketing. The family have not spoken of him in my hearing. He is not, I think, in good odour at home—a scapegrace. Rose's maid, Polly, quite flew out when I happened to mention him, and broke one of my laces. These English maids are domesticated savage animals.

'My chocolate is sent up, exquisitely concocted, in plate of the purest quality—lovely little silver cups! I have already quite set the fashion for the ladies to have chocolate in bed. The men, I hear,

complain that there is no lady at the breakfast-table. They have Miss Carrington to superintend. I read, in the subdued satisfaction of her eyes (completely without colour), how much she thanks me and the institution of chocolate in bed. Poor Miss Carrington is no match for her opportunities. One may give them to her without dread.

'It is ten on the Sabbath morn. The sweet churchbells are ringing. It seems like a dream. There is nothing but the religion attaches me to England; but that—is not that everything? How I used to sigh on Sundays to hear them in Portugal!

'I have an idea of instituting toilette-receptions. They will not please Miss Carrington so well.

'Now to the peaceful village church, and divine worship. Adieu, my dear. I kiss my fingers to Silva. Make no effort to amuse him. He is always occupied. Bread!—he asks no more. Adieu! Carry will be invited with your little man You unhappily unable She, the sister I pine to see, to show her worthy of my praises. Expectation and excitement! Adieu!'

Filled with pleasing emotions at the thought of the service in the quiet village church, and worshipping in the principal pew, under the blazonry of the Jocelyn arms, the Countess sealed her letter and addressed it, and then examined the name of Cogglesby; which plebeian name, it struck her, would not sound well to the menials of Beckley Court. While she was deliberating what to do to conceal it, she heard, through her open window, the voices of some young men laughing. She beheld her brother pass these young men, and bow to them. She beheld them stare at him without at all returning his salute, and then one of them—the same who had filled her ears with venom at Fallow field—turned to the others and laughed outrageously, crying

'By Jove! this comes it strong. Fancy the snipocracy here—eh?'

What the others said the Countess did not wait to hear. She put on her bonnet hastily, tried the effect of a peculiar smile in the mirror, and lightly ran down-stairs.

CHAPTER XV

A CAPTURE

The three youths were standing in the portico when the Countess appeared among them. She singled out him who was specially obnoxious to her, and sweetly inquired the direction to the village post. With the renowned gallantry of his nation, he offered to accompany her, but presently, with a different exhibition of the same, proposed that they should spare themselves the trouble by dropping the letter she held prominently, in the bag.

'Thanks,' murmured the Countess, 'I will go.' Upon which his eager air subsided, and he fell into an awkward silent march at her side, looking so like the victim he was to be, that the Countess could have emulated his power of laughter.

'And you are Mr. Harry Jocelyn, the very famous cricketer?'

He answered, glancing back at his friends, that he was, but did not know about the 'famous.'

'Oh! but I saw you—I saw you hit the ball most beautifully, and dearly wished my brother had an equal ability. Brought up in the Court of Portugal, he is barely English. There they have no manly sports. You saw him pass you?'

'Him! Who?' asked Harry.

'My brother, on the lawn, this moment. Your sweet sister's friend. Your uncle Melville's secretary.'

'What's his name?' said Harry, in blunt perplexity.

The Countess repeated his name, which in her pronunciation was 'Hawington,' adding, 'That was my brother. I am his sister. Have you heard of the Countess de Saldar?'

'Countess!' muttered Harry. 'Dash it! here's a mistake.'

She continued, with elegant fan-like motion of her gloved fingers: 'They say there is a likeness between us. The dear Queen of Portugal often remarked it, and in her it was a compliment to me, for she thought my brother a model! You I should have known from your extreme resemblance to your lovely young sister.'

Coarse food, but then Harry was a youthful Englishman; and the Countess dieted the vanity according to the nationality. With good wine to wash it down, one can swallow anything. The Countess lent him her eyes for that purpose; eyes that had a liquid glow under the dove—like drooping lids. It was a principle of hers, pampering our poor sex with swinish solids or the lightest ambrosia, never to let the accompanying cordial be other than of the finest quality. She knew that clowns, even more than aristocrats, are flattered by the inebriation of delicate celestial liquors.

'Now,' she said, after Harry had gulped as much of the dose as she chose to administer direct from the founts, 'you must accord me the favour to tell me all about yourself, for I have heard much of you, Mr. Harry Jocelyn, and you have excited my woman's interest. Of me you know nothing.'

'Haven't I?' cried Harry, speaking to the pitch of his new warmth. 'My uncle Melville goes on about you tremendously—makes his wife as jealous as fire. How could I tell that was your brother?'

'Your uncle has deigned to allude to me?' said the Countess, meditatively. 'But not of him—of you, Mr. Harry! What does he say?'

'Says you're so clever you ought to be a man.'

'Ah! generous!' exclaimed the Countess. 'The idea, I think, is novel to him. Is it not?'

'Well, I believe, from what I hear, he didn't back you for much over in Lisbon,' said veracious Harry.

'I fear he is deceived in me now. I fear I am but a woman—I am not to be "backed." But you are not talking of yourself.'

'Oh! never mind me,' was Harry's modest answer.

'But I do. Try to imagine me as clever as a man, and talk to me of your doings. Indeed I will endeavour to comprehend you.'

Thus humble, the Countess bade him give her his arm. He stuck it out with abrupt eagerness.

'Not against my cheek.' She laughed forgivingly. 'And you need not start back half-a-mile,' she pursued with plain humour: 'and please do not look irresolute and awkward—It is not necessary,' she added. 'There!'; and she settled her fingers on him, 'I am glad I can find one or two things to instruct you in. Begin. You are a great cricketer. What else?'

Ay! what else? Harry might well say he had no wish to talk of himself. He did not know even how to give his arm to a lady! The first flattery and the subsequent chiding clashed in his elated soul, and caused him to deem himself one of the blest suddenly overhauled by an inspecting angel and found wanting: or, in his own more accurate style of reflection, 'What a rattling fine woman this is, and what a deuce of a fool she must think me!'

The Countess leaned on his arm with dainty languor.

'You walk well,' she said.

Harry's backbone straightened immediately.

'No, no; I do not want you to be a drill-sergeant. Can you not be told you are perfect without seeking to improve, vain boy? You can cricket, and you can walk, and will very soon learn how to give your arm to a lady. I have hopes of you. Of your friends, from whom I have ruthlessly dragged you, I have not much. Am I personally offensive to them, Mr. Harry? I saw them let my brother pass without returning his bow, and they in no way acknowledged my presence as I passed. Are they gentlemen?'

'Yes,' said Harry, stupefied by the question. 'One 's Ferdinand Laxley, Lord Laxley's son, heir to the title; the other's William Harvey, son of the Chief Justice—both friends of mine.'

'But not of your manners,' interposed the Countess. 'I have not so much compunction as I ought to have in divorcing you from your associates for a few minutes. I think I shall make a scholar of you in one or two essentials. You do want polish. Have I not a right to take you in hand? I have defended you already.'

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

Текст предоставлен ООО «ЛитРес».

Прочитайте эту книгу целиком, [купив полную легальную версию](#) на ЛитРес.

Безопасно оплатить книгу можно банковской картой Visa, MasterCard, Maestro, со счета мобильного телефона, с платежного терминала, в салоне МТС или Связной, через PayPal, WebMoney, Яндекс.Деньги, QIWI Кошелек, бонусными картами или другим удобным Вам способом.