

**GEORGE
MEREDITH**

EVAN
HARRINGTON,
VOLUME 4

George Meredith
Evan Harrington. Volume 4

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George Meredith

Evan Harrington – Volume 4

CHAPTER XIX

SECOND DESPATCH OF THE COUNTESS

We do not advance very far in this second despatch, and it will be found chiefly serviceable for the indications it affords of our General's skill in mining, and addiction to that branch of military science. For the moment I must beg that a little indulgence be granted to her.

'Purely business. Great haste. Something has happened. An event? I know not; but events may flow from it.

'A lady is here who has run away from the conjugal abode, and Lady Jocelyn shelters her, and is hospitable to another, who is more concerned in this lady's sad fate than he should be. This may be morals, my dear: but please do not talk of Portugal now. A fine-ish woman with a great deal of hair worn as if her maid had given it one comb straight down and then rolled it up in a hurry round one finger. Malice would say carrots. It is called gold. Mr. Forth is in a glass house, and is wrong to cast his sneers at perfectly inoffensive people.

'Perfectly impossible we can remain at Beckley Court together—if not dangerous. Any means that Providence may designate, I would employ. It will be like exorcising a demon. Always excuseable. I only ask a little more time for stupid Evan. He might have little Bonner now. I should not object; but her family is not so good.

'Now, do attend. At once obtain a copy of Strike's Company people. You understand—prospectuses. Tell me instantly if the Captain Evremonde in it is Captain Lawson Evremonde. Pump Strike. Excuse vulgar words. Whether he is not Lord Laxley's half-brother. Strike shall be of use to us. Whether he is not mad. Captain E-'s address. Oh! when I think of Strike—brute! and poor beautiful uncomplaining Carry and her shoulder! But let us indeed most fervently hope that his Grace may be balm to it. We must not pray for vengeance. It is sinful. Providence will inflict that. Always know that Providence is quite sure to. It comforts exceedingly.

'Oh, that Strike were altogether in the past tense! No knowing what the Duke might do—a widower and completely subjugated. It makes my bosom bound. The man tempts me to the wickedest Frenchy ideas. There!

We progress with dear venerable Mrs. Bonner. Truly pious—interested in your Louisa. She dreads that my husband will try to convert me to his creed. I can but weep and say—never!

'I need not say I have my circle. To hear this ridiculous boy Harry Jocelyn grunt under my nose when he has led me unsuspectingly away from company—Harriet! dearest! He thinks it a sigh! But there is no time for laughing.

'My maxim in any house is—never to despise the good opinion of the nonentities. They are the majority. I think they all look up to me. But then of course you must fix that by seducing the stars. My diplomatist praises my abilities—Sir John Loring my style—the rest follow and I do not withhold my smiles, and they are happy, and I should be but that for ungrateful Evan's sake I sacrificed my peace by binding myself to a dreadful sort of half-story. I know I did not quite say it. It seems as if Sir A.'s ghost were going to haunt me. And then I have the most dreadful fears that what I have done has disturbed him in the other world. Can it be so? It is not money or estates we took at all, dearest! And these excellent young curates—I almost wish it was Protestant to speak a word behind a board to them and imbibe comfort. For after all it is nothing: and a word even from this poor thin mopy Mr. Parsley might be relief to a poor soul in trouble. Catholics tell you that what you do in a

good cause is redeemable if not exactly right. And you know the Catholic is the oldest Religion of the two. I would listen to the Pope, staunch Protestant as I am, in preference to King Henry the Eighth. Though, as a woman, I bear him no rancour, for his wives were—fools, point blank. No man was ever so manageable. My diplomatist is getting liker and liker to him every day. Leaner, of course, and does not habitually straddle. Whiskers and morals, I mean. We must be silent before our prudish sister. Not a prude? We talk diplomacy, dearest. He complains of the exclusiveness of the port of Oporto, and would have strict alliance between Portugal and England, with mutual privileges. I wish the alliance, and think it better to maintain the exclusiveness. Very trifling; but what is life!

'Adieu. One word to leave you laughing. Imagine her situation! This stupid Miss Carrington has offended me. She has tried to pump Conning, who, I do not doubt, gave her as much truth as I chose she should have in her well. But the quandary of the wretched creature! She takes Conning into her confidence—a horrible malady just covered by high-neck dress! Skin! and impossible that she can tell her engaged—who is—guess—Mr. George Up—! Her name is Louisa Carrington. There was a Louisa Harrington once. Similarity of names perhaps. Of course I could not let her come to the house; and of course Miss C. is in a state of wonderment and bad passions, I fear. I went straight to Lady Racial, my dear. There was nothing else for it but to go and speak. She is truly a noble woman—serves us in every way. As she should!—much affected by sight of Evan, and keeps aloof from Beckley Court. The finger of Providence is in all. Adieu! but do pray think of Miss Carrington! It was foolish of her to offend me. Drives and walks—the Duke attentive. Description of him when I embrace you. I give amiable Sir Franks Portuguese dishes. Ah, my dear, if we had none but men to contend against, and only women for our tools! But this is asking for the world, and nothing less.

'Open again,' she pursues. 'Dear Carry just come in. There are fairies, I think, where there are dukes! Where could it have come from? Could any human being have sent messengers post to London, ordered, and had it despatched here within this short time? You shall not be mystified! I do not think I even hinted; but the afternoon walk I had with his Grace, on the first day of his arrival, I did shadow it very delicately how much it was to be feared our poor Carry could not, that she dared not, betray her liege lord in an evening dress. Nothing more, upon my veracity! And Carry has this moment received the most beautiful green box, containing two of the most heavenly old lace shawls that you ever beheld. We divine it is to hide poor Carry's matrimonial blue mark! We know nothing. Will you imagine Carry is for not accepting it! Priority of birth does not imply superior wits, dear—no allusion to you. I have undertaken all. Arch looks, but nothing pointed. His Grace will understand the exquisite expression of feminine gratitude. It is so sweet to deal with true nobility. Carry has only to look as she always does. One sees Strike sitting on her. Her very pliability has rescued her from being utterly squashed long ere this! The man makes one vulgar. It would have been not the slightest use asking me to be a Christian had I wedded Strike. But think of the fairy presents! It has determined me not to be expelled by Mr. Forth—quite. Tell Silva he is not forgotten. But, my dear, between us alone, men are so selfish, that it is too evident they do not care for private conversations to turn upon a lady's husband: not to be risked, only now and then.

'I hear that the young ladies and the young gentlemen have been out riding a race. The poor little Bonner girl cannot ride, and she says to Carry that Rose wishes to break our brother's neck. The child hardly wishes that, but she is feelingless. If Evan could care for Miss Bonner, he might have B. C.! Oh, it is not so very long a shot, my dear. I am on the spot, remember. Old Mrs. Bonner is a most just-minded spirit. Juliana is a cripple, and her grandmother wishes to be sure that when she departs to her Lord the poor cripple may not be chased from this home of hers. Rose cannot calculate—Harry is in disgrace—there is really no knowing. This is how I have reckoned; L10,000 extra to Rose; perhaps L1000 or nothing to H.; all the rest of ready-money—a large sum—no use guessing—to Lady Jocelyn; and B. C. to little Bonner—it is worth L40,000 Then she sells, or stops—permanent resident. It might be so soon, for I can see worthy Mrs. Bonner to be breaking visibly. But young men will not see with wiser eyes than their own. Here is Evan risking his neck for an indifferent—

there's some word for "not soft." In short, Rose is the cold-blooded novice, as I have always said, the most selfish of the creatures on two legs.

'Adieu! Would you have dreamed that Major Nightmare's gallantry to his wife would have called forth a gallantry so truly touching and delicate? Can you not see Providence there? Out of Evil—the Catholics again!

'Address. If Lord Lax—'s half-brother. If wrong in noddle. This I know you will attend to scrupulously. Ridiculous words are sometimes the most expressive. Once more, may Heaven bless you all! I thought of you in church last Sunday.

'I may tell you this: young Mr. Laxley is here. He—but it was Evan's utter madness was the cause, and I have not ventured a word to him. He compelled Evan to assert his rank, and Mr. Forth's face has been one concentrated sneer since THEN. He must know the origin of the Cogglesbys, or something. Now you will understand the importance. I cannot be more explicit. Only—the man must go.

'P.S. I have just ascertained that Lady Jocelyn is quite familiar with Andrew's origin!! She must think my poor Harriet an eccentric woman. Of course I have not pretended to rank here, merely gentry. It is gentry in reality, for had poor Papa been legitimized, he would have been a nobleman. You know that; and between the two we may certainly claim gentry. I twiddle your little good Andrew to assert it for us twenty times a day. Of all the dear little manageable men! It does you infinite credit that you respect him as you do. What would have become of me I do not know.

'P.S. I said two shawls—a black and a white. The black not so costly— very well. And so delicate of him to think of the mourning! But the white, my dear, must be family—must! Old English point. Exquisitely chaste. So different from that Brussels poor Andrew surprised you with. I know it cost money, but this is a question of taste. The Duke reconciles me to England and all my troubles! He is more like poor Papa than any one of the men I have yet seen. The perfect gentleman! I do praise myself for managing an invitation to our Carry. She has been a triumph.'

Admire the concluding stroke. The Countess calls this letter a purely business communication. Commercial men might hardly think so; but perhaps ladies will perceive it. She rambles concentrically, if I may so expound her. Full of luxurious enjoyment of her position, her mind is active, and you see her at one moment marking a plot, the next, with a light exclamation, appeasing her conscience, proud that she has one; again she calls up rival forms of faith, that she may show the Protestant its little shortcomings, and that it is slightly in debt to her (like Providence) for her constancy, notwithstanding. The Protestant you see, does not confess, and she has to absolve herself, and must be doing it internally while she is directing outer matters. Hence her slap at King Henry VIII. In fact, there is much more business in this letter than I dare to indicate; but as it is both impertinent and unpopular to dive for any length of time beneath the surface (especially when there are few pearls to show for it), we will discontinue our examination.

The Countess, when she had dropped the letter in the bag, returned to her chamber, and deputed Dorothy Loring, whom she met on the stairs, to run and request Rose to lend her her album to beguile the afternoon with; and Dorothy dances to Rose, saying, 'The Countess de Lispy-Lispy would be delighted to look at your album all the afternoon.'

'Oh what a woman that is!' says Rose. 'Countess de Lazy-Lazy, I think.'

The Countess, had she been listening, would have cared little for accusations on that head. Idlesse was fashionable: exquisite languors were a sign of breeding; and she always had an idea that she looked more interesting at dinner after reclining on a couch the whole of the afternoon. The great Mel and his mate had given her robust health, and she was able to play the high-born invalid without damage to her constitution. Anything amused her; Rose's album even, and the compositions of W. H., E. H., D. F., and F. L. The initials F. L. were diminutive, and not unlike her own hand, she thought. They were appended to a piece of facetiousness that would not have disgraced the abilities of Mr. John Raikes; but we know that very stiff young gentlemen betray monkey-minds when sweet young

ladies compel them to disport. On the whole, it was not a lazy afternoon that the Countess passed, and it was not against her wish that others should think it was.

CHAPTER XX

BREAK-NECK LEAP

The August sun was in mid-sky, when a troop of ladies and cavaliers issued from the gates of Beckley Court, and winding through the hopgardens, emerged on the cultivated slopes bordering the downs. Foremost, on her grey cob, was Rose, having on her right her uncle Seymour, and on her left Ferdinand Laxley. Behind came Mrs. Evremonde, flanked by Drummond and Evan. Then followed Jenny Graine, supported by Harry and William Harvey. In the rear came an open carriage, in which Miss Carrington and the Countess de Saldar were borne, attended by Lady Jocelyn and Andrew Cogglesby on horseback. The expedition had for its object the selection of a run of ground for an amateur steeple-chase: the idea of which had sprung from Laxley's boasts of his horsemanship: and Rose, quick as fire, had backed herself, and Drummond and Evan, to beat him. The mention of the latter was quite enough for Laxley.

'If he follows me, let him take care of his neck,' said that youth.

'Why, Ferdinand, he can beat you in anything!' exclaimed Rose, imprudently.

But the truth was, she was now more restless than ever. She was not distant with Evan, but she had a feverish manner, and seemed to thirst to make him show his qualities, and excel, and shine. Billiards, or jumping, or classical acquirements, it mattered not—Evan must come first. He had crossed the foils with Laxley, and disarmed him; for Mel his father had seen him trained for a military career. Rose made a noise about the encounter, and Laxley was eager for his opportunity, which he saw in the proposed mad gallop.

Now Mr. George Uplift, who usually rode in buckskins whether he was after the fox or fresh air, was out on this particular morning; and it happened that, as the cavalcade wound beneath the down, Mr. George trotted along the ridge. He was a fat-faced, rotund young squire—a bully where he might be, and an obedient creature enough where he must be—good-humoured when not interfered with; fond of the table, and brimful of all the jokes of the county, the accent of which just seasoned his speech. He had somehow plunged into a sort of half-engagement with Miss Carrington. At his age, and to ladies of Miss Carrington's age, men unhappily do not plunge head-foremost, or Miss Carrington would have had him long before. But he was at least in for it half a leg; and a desperate maiden, on the criminal side of thirty, may make much of that. Previous to the visit of the Countess de Saldar, Mr. George had been in the habit of trotting over to Beckley three or four times a week. Miss Carrington had a little money: Mr. George was heir to his uncle. Miss Carrington was lean and blue-eyed.

Mr. George was black-eyed and obese. By everybody, except Mr. George, the match was made: but that exception goes for little in the country, where half the population are talked into marriage, and gossips entirely devote themselves to continuing the species. Mr. George was certain that he had not been fighting shy of the fair Carrington of late, nor had he been unfaithful. He had only been in an extraordinary state of occupation. Messages for Lady Racial had to be delivered, and he had become her cavalier and escort suddenly. The young squire was bewildered; but as he was only one leg in love—if the sentiment may be thus spoken of figuratively—his vanity in his present office kept him from remorse or uneasiness.

He rode at an easy pace within sight of the home of his treasure, and his back turned to it. Presently there rose a cry from below. Mr. George looked about. The party of horsemen hallooed: Mr. George yoicked. Rose set her horse to gallop up; Seymour Jocelyn cried 'fox,' and gave the view; hearing which Mr. George shouted, and seemed inclined to surrender; but the fun seized him, and, standing up in his stirrups, he gathered his coat-tails in a bunch, and waggled them with a jolly laugh, which was taken up below, and the clomp of hoofs resounded on the turf as Mr. George led off,

after once more, with a jocose twist in his seat, showing them the brush mockingly. Away went fox, and a mad chase began. Seymour acted as master of the hunt. Rose, Evan, Drummond, and Mrs. Evremonde and Dorothy, skirted to the right, all laughing, and full of excitement. Harry bellowed the direction from above. The ladies in the carriage, with Lady Jocelyn and Andrew, watched them till they flowed one and all over the shoulder of the down.

'And who may the poor hunted animal be?' inquired the Countess.

'George Uplift,' said Lady Jocelyn, pulling out her watch. 'I give him twenty minutes.'

'Providence speed him!' breathed the Countess, with secret fervour.

'Oh, he hasn't a chance,' said Lady Jocelyn. 'The squire keeps wretched beasts.'

'Is there not an attraction that will account for his hasty capture?' said the Countess, looking tenderly at Miss Carrington, who sat a little straighter, and the Countess, hating manifestations of stiff-backedness, could not forbear adding: 'I am at war with my sympathies, which should be with the poor brute flying from his persecutors.'

She was in a bitter state of trepidation, or she would have thought twice before she touched a nerve of the enamoured lady, as she knew she did in calling her swain a poor brute, and did again by pertinaciously pursuing:

'Does he then shun his captivity?'

'Touching a nerve' is one of those unforgivable small offences which, in our civilized state, produce the social vendettas and dramas that, with savage nations, spring from the spilling of blood. Instead of an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, we demand a nerve for a nerve. 'Thou hast touched me where I am tender thee, too, will I touch.'

Miss Carrington had been alarmed and hurt at the strange evasion of Mr. George; nor could she see the fun of his mimicry of the fox and his flight away from instead of into her neighbourhood. She had also, or she now thought it, remarked that when Mr. George had been spoken of casually, the Countess had not looked a natural look. Perhaps it was her present inflamed fancy. At any rate the Countess was offensive now. She was positively vulgar, in consequence, to the mind of Miss Carrington, and Miss Carrington was drawn to think of a certain thing Ferdinand Laxley had said he had heard from the mouth of this lady's brother when ale was in him. Alas! how one seed of a piece of folly will lurk and sprout to confound us; though, like the cock in the eastern tale, we peck up zealously all but that one!

The carriage rolled over the turf, attended by Andrew, and Lady Jocelyn, and the hunt was seen; Mr. George some forty paces a-head; Seymour gaining on him, Rose next.

'Who's that breasting Rose?' said Lady Jocelyn, lifting her glass.

'My brother-in-law, Harrington,' returned Andrew.

'He doesn't ride badly,' said Lady Jocelyn. 'A little too military.'

He must have been set up in England.'

'Oh, Evan can do anything,' said Andrew enthusiastically. 'His father was a capital horseman, and taught him fencing, riding, and every accomplishment. You won't find such a young fellow, my lady—'

'The brother like him at all?' asked Lady Jocelyn, still eyeing the chase.

'Brother? He hasn't got a brother,' said Andrew.

Lady Jocelyn continued: 'I mean the present baronet.'

She was occupied with her glass, and did not observe the flush that took hold of Andrew's ingenuous cheeks, and his hurried glance at and off the quiet eye of the Countess. Miss Carrington did observe it.

Mr. Andrew dashed his face under the palm of his hand, and murmured:

'Oh-yes! His brother-in-law isn't much like him—ha! ha!'

And then the poor little man rubbed his hands, unconscious of the indignant pity for his wretched abilities in the gaze of the Countess; and he must have been exposed—there was a fear that

the ghost of Sir Abraham would have darkened this day, for Miss Carrington was about to speak, when Lady Jocelyn cried: 'There's a purl! Somebody's down.'

The Countess was unaware of the nature of a purl, but she could have sworn it to be a piece of Providence.

'Just by old Nat Hodges' farm, on Squire Copping's ground,' cried Andrew, much relieved by the particular individual's misfortune. 'Dear me, my lady! how old Tom and I used to jump the brook there, to be sure! and when you were no bigger than little Miss Loring—do you remember old Tom? We're all fools one time in our lives!'

'Who can it be?' said Lady Jocelyn, spying at the discomfited horseman.

'I'm afraid it's poor Ferdinand.'

They drove on to an eminence from which the plain was entirely laid open.

'I hope my brother will enjoy his ride this day,' sighed the Countess.

'It will be his limit of enjoyment for a lengthened period!'

She perceived that Mr. George's capture was inevitable, and her heart sank; for she was sure he would recognize her, and at the moment she misdoubted her powers. She dreamed of flight.

'You're not going to leave us?' said Lady Jocelyn. 'My dear Countess, what will the future member do without you? We have your promise to stay till the election is over.'

'Thanks for your extreme kind courtesy, Lady Jocelyn,' murmured the Countess: 'but my husband—the Count.'

'The favour is yours,' returned her ladyship. 'And if the Count cannot come, you at least are at liberty?'

'You are most kind,' said the Countess.

'Andrew and his wife I should not dare to separate for more than a week,' said Lady Jocelyn. 'He is the great British husband. The proprietor! "My wife" is his unanswerable excuse.'

'Yes,' Andrew replied cheerily. 'I don't like division between man and wife, I must say.'

The Countess dared no longer instance the Count, her husband. She was heard to murmur that citizen feelings were not hers:

'You suggested Fallow field to Melville, did you not?' asked Lady Jocelyn.

'It was the merest suggestion,' said the Countess, smiling.

'Then you must really stay to see us through it,' said her ladyship.

'Where are they now? They must be making straight for break-neck fence.

They'll have him there. George hasn't pluck for that.'

'Hasn't what?'

It was the Countess who requested to know the name of this other piece of Providence Mr. George Uplift was deficient in.

'Pluck-go,' said her ladyship hastily, and telling the coachman to drive to a certain spot, trotted on with Andrew, saying to him: 'I'm afraid we are thought vulgar by the Countess.'

Andrew considered it best to reassure her gravely.

'The young man, her brother, is well-bred,' said Lady Jocelyn, and Andrew was very ready to praise Evan.

Lady Jocelyn, herself in slimmer days a spirited horsewoman, had correctly estimated Mr. George's pluck. He was captured by Harry and Evan close on the leap, in the act of shaking his head at it; and many who inspected the leap would have deemed it a sign that wisdom weighted the head that would shake long at it; for it consisted of a post and rails, with a double ditch.

Seymour Jocelyn, Mrs. Evremonde, Drummond, Jenny Graine, and William Harvey, rode with Mr. George in quest of the carriage, and the captive was duly delivered over.

'But where's the brush?' said Lady Jocelyn, laughing, and introducing him to the Countess, who dropped her head, and with it her veil.

'Oh! they leave that on for my next run,' said Mr. George, bowing civilly.

'You are going to run again?'

Miss Carrington severely asked this question; and Mr. George protested.

'Secure him, Louisa,' said Lady Jocelyn. 'See here: what's the matter with poor Dorothy?'

Dorothy came slowly trotting up to them along the green lane, and thus expressed her grief, between sobs:

'Isn't it a shame? Rose is such a tyrant. They're going to ride a race and a jump down in the field, and it's break-neck leap, and Rose won't allow me to stop and see it, though she knows I'm just as fond of Evan as she is; and if he's killed I declare it will be her fault; and it's all for her stupid, dirty old pocket handkerchief!'

'Break-neck fence!' said Lady Jocelyn; 'that's rather mad.'

'Do let's go and see it, darling Auntie Joey,' pleaded the little maid. Lady Jocelyn rode on, saying to herself: 'That girl has a great deal of devil in her.' The lady's thoughts were of Rose.

'Black Lymport'd take the leap,' said Mr. George, following her with the rest of the troop. 'Who's that fellow on him?'

'His name's Harrington,' quoth Drummond.

'Oh, Harrington!' Mr. George responded; but immediately laughed— 'Harrington? 'Gad, if he takes the leap it'll be odd—another of the name. That's where old Mel had his spill.'

'Who?' Drummond inquired.

'Old Mel Harrington—the Lymport wonder. Old Marquis Mel,' said Mr. George. 'Haven't ye heard of him?'

'What! the gorgeous tailor!' exclaimed Lady Jocelyn. 'How I regret never meeting that magnificent snob! that efflorescence of sublime imposture! I've seen the Regent; but one's life doesn't seem complete without having seen his twin-brother. You must give us warning when you have him down at Croftlands again, Mr. George.'

'Gad, he'll have to come a long distance—poor old Mel!' said Mr. George; and was going on, when Seymour Jocelyn stroked his moustache to cry, 'Look! Rosey 's starting 'em, by Jove!'

The leap, which did not appear formidable from where they stood, was four fields distant from the point where Rose, with a handkerchief in her hand, was at that moment giving the signal to Laxley and Evan.

Miss Carrington and the Countess begged Lady Jocelyn to order a shout to be raised to arrest them, but her ladyship marked her good sense by saying: 'Let them go, now they're about it'; for she saw that to make a fuss now matters had proceeded so far, was to be uncivil to the inevitable.

The start was given, and off they flew. Harry Jocelyn, behind them, was evidently caught by the demon, and clapped spurs to his horse to have his fling as well, for the fun of the thing; but Rose, farther down the field, rode from her post straight across him, to the imminent peril of a mutual upset; and the party on the height could see Harry fuming, and Rose coolly looking him down, and letting him understand what her will was; and her mother, and Drummond, and Seymour who beheld this, had a common sentiment of admiration for the gallant girl. But away went the rivals. Black Lymport was the favourite, though none of the men thought he would be put at the fence. The excitement became contagious. The Countess threw up her veil. Lady Jocelyn, and Seymour, and Drummond, galloped down the lane, and Mr. George was for accompanying them, till the line of Miss Carrington's back gave him her unmistakeable opinion of such a course of conduct, and he had to dally and fret by her side. Andrew's arm was tightly grasped by the Countess. The rivals were crossing the second field, Laxley a little a-head.

'He 's holding in the black mare—that fellow!' said Mr. George. 'Gad, it looks like going at the fence. Fancy Harrington!'

They were now in the fourth field, a smooth shorn meadow. Laxley was two clear lengths in advance, but seemed riding, as Mr. George remarked, more for pace than to take the jump. The

ladies kept plying random queries and suggestions: the Countess wishing to know whether they could not be stopped by a countryman before they encountered any danger. In the midst of their chatter, Mr. George rose in his stirrups, crying:

'Bravo, the black mare!'

'Has he done it?' said Andrew, wiping his poll.

'He? No, the mare!' shouted Mr. George, and bolted off, no longer to be restrained.

The Countess, doubly relieved, threw herself back in the carriage, and Andrew drew a breath, saying: 'Evan has beat him—I saw that! The other's horse swerved right round.'

'I fear,' said Mrs. Evremonde, 'Mr. Harrington has had a fall. Don't be alarmed—it may not be much.'

'A fall!' exclaimed the Countess, equally divided between alarms of sisterly affection and a keen sense of the romance of the thing.

Miss Carrington ordered the carriage to be driven round. They had not gone far when they were met by Harry Jocelyn riding in hot haste, and he bellowed to the coachman to drive as hard as he could, and stop opposite Brook's farm.

The scene on the other side of the fence would have been a sweet one to the central figure in it had his eyes then been open. Surrounded by Lady Jocelyn, Drummond, Seymour, and the rest, Evan's dust-stained body was stretched along the road, and his head was lying in the lap of Rose, who, pale, heedless of anything spoken by those around her, and with her lips set and her eyes turning wildly from one to the other, held a gory handkerchief to his temple with one hand, and with the other felt for the motion of his heart.

But heroes don't die, you know.

CHAPTER XXI

TRIBULATIONS AND TACTICS OF THE COUNTESS

'You have murdered my brother, Rose Jocelyn!'

'Don't say so now.'

Such was the interchange between the two that loved the senseless youth, as he was being lifted into the carriage.

Lady Jocelyn sat upright in her saddle, giving directions about what was to be done with Evan and the mare, impartially.

'Stunned, and a good deal shaken, I suppose; Lymport's knees are terribly cut,' she said to Drummond, who merely nodded. And Seymour remarked, 'Fifty guineas knocked off her value!' One added, 'Nothing worse, I should think'; and another, 'A little damage inside, perhaps.' Difficult to say whether they spoke of Evan or the brute.

No violent outcries; no reproaches cast on the cold-blooded coquette; no exclamations on the heroism of her brother! They could absolutely spare a thought for the animal! And Evan had risked his life for this, and might die unpitied. The Countess diversified her grief with a deadly bitterness against the heartless Jocelyns.

Oh, if Evan dies! will it punish Rose sufficiently?

Andrew expressed emotion, but not of a kind the Countess liked a relative to be seen exhibiting; for in emotion worthy Andrew betrayed to her his origin offensively.

'Go away and puke, if you must,' she said, clipping poor Andrew's word about his 'dear boy.' She could not help speaking in that way—he was so vulgar. A word of sympathy from Lady Jocelyn might have saved her from the sourness into which her many conflicting passions were resolving; and might also have saved her ladyship from the rancour she had sown in the daughter of the great Mel by her selection of epithets to characterize him.

Will it punish Rose at all, if Evan dies?

Rose saw that she was looked at. How could the Countess tell that Rose envied her the joy of holding Evan in the carriage there? Rose, to judge by her face, was as calm as glass. Not so well seen through, however. Mrs. Evremonde rode beside her, whose fingers she caught, and twined her own with them tightly once for a fleeting instant. Mrs. Evremonde wanted no further confession of her state.

Then Rose said to her mother, 'Mama, may I ride to have the doctor ready?'

Ordinarily, Rose would have clapped heel to horse the moment the thought came. She waited for the permission, and flew off at a gallop, waving back Laxley, who was for joining her.

'Franks will be a little rusty about the mare,' the Countess heard Lady Jocelyn say; and Harry just then stooped his head to the carriage, and said, in his blunt fashion, 'After all, it won't show much.'

'We are not cattle!' exclaimed the frenzied Countess, within her bosom. Alas! it was almost a democratic outcry they made her guilty of; but she was driven past patience. And as a further provocation, Evan would open his eyes. She laid her handkerchief over them with loving delicacy, remembering in a flash that her own face had been all the while exposed to Mr. George Uplift; and then the terrors of his presence at Beckley Court came upon her, and the fact that she had not for the last ten minutes been the serene Countess de Saldar; and she quite hated Andrew, for vulgarity in others evoked vulgarity in her, which was the reason why she ranked vulgarity as the chief of the deadly sins. Her countenance for Harry and all the others save poor Andrew was soon the placid heaven-confiding sister's again; not before Lady Jocelyn had found cause to observe to Drummond:

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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