

OUT OF DARKNESS.

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CHAPTER VII.

FLIGHT.



IT was to Guy Ryder's great astonishment next morning, that whilst he was dividing his attention between his breakfast and the *Guardian*, Helen and Caryl were announced. He started up in something like dismay.

"Is Mrs. Brookes ill?" he inquired.

The Countess laughed and came forward, holding out her hand. Had the young clergyman ever sufficiently interested himself in her to analyse her different moods and the various changes of her manner, he would have instantly seen that the lady was upon fascination bent, and might therefore have been put upon his guard. But, unfortunately for him and others, his main study had always been how to avoid her.

"Indeed no!" she answered. "Are we then such birds of ill omen that we must make you to think of bad luck; and all because we come out together for a refreshing promenade?"

That speech gave Guy time to recover his manners, though certainly it did not allay his surprise. Early walks were a most unexampled form of exercise upon the part of brother and sister.

"Will you allow me to offer you some coffee?" he responded. And as Helen smiled her acceptance of the invitation he gave her a chair, and rang the bell. "But I am afraid," he added, "that my landlady will scarcely produce such nectar as the coffee at Kingston Villa."

"Anything will be welcome, my dear fellow," from Caryl, with the most intense good humour. "It is a terrible thing to have a sister who does not hesitate to drag one out at unseemly hours."

She gave a playful little pout.

"Who said last night that he wanted to be of the most industrious? And industry in England always begins with the dawn. Is it not so, Mr. Ryder?"

Guy raised his shoulders and laughed, not committing himself to any statement. In truth, the whole interview seemed so puzzling, that all ideas but those of astonishment had deserted him. Surely these two people could not be the same as those who yesterday received him with haughty anger, scarcely deigning to afford him even such slight information as Mrs. Brookes desired them to give? Yet here was Caryl smiling with languid complacency, and his companion all amiability.

"You see, I have much business on hand. Even to-day must Mrs. Brookes' investment be made. The responsibility is great—vast!" spreading out his hands as if to measure its magnitude. "By the way, my friend, have you yet negotiated that little business which devolves itself upon you?"

"No. It was impossible. The Bank was closed last night."