

THE BANKER'S GRANDCHILDREN.

CHAPTER I.

THE BALL AT MAPLEWOOD.

The grand reception rooms at Maplewood house were thronged with elegant guests. There was everywhere a radiance of lights—a delicious perfume of perfume. From the orchestra came brilliant, entrancing music; there was a soft murmur of mingled voices in pleasant chat and laughter—gleaming of rich silken draperies, glittering of costly gems—rich dresses, beautiful women, elegant men and short there was all the appointments of a grand soiree.

It was eleven o'clock, and the whirl of the party was at its height, when Glencora Chessom, tired of the glitter of lights, the crash of gay music, and the bewitching mazes of the dance, permitted a gentleman, with whom she had been a partner in the last waltz, to lead her to the heat of the dancing-room to the delightfully cool quietude of the library.

It was October, and the soft, hazy, moon-like atmosphere, which had been so gay warm and golden with sunlight, was now aflood with silvery moonlight. The yellow tinted coppices lay untroubled in perfect stillness; but through occasional openings flashed sparkling jets of golden light from the softly gleaming surface of the Thames.

"What a lovely night! and what a chance, to escape from the barbarous crowd in there, out into this delightfully fresh air."

Miss Chessom said this as she sank into the seat to which her companion had conducted her.

Very charming was this superbly beautiful heiress. Glencora Chessom, grand-daughter of Philip Chessom, the wealthy London banker, and entertainer of this gay party at Maplewood. She was a splendid brunette; black glossy coiling hair, brilliant, liquid, restless, dark eyes—rich tinting of cream and crimson—an evening toilette of pure white crêpe over a shimmering train of gold-colored satin,—with elaborate, yet exquisite, gold ornaments, richly set with costliest pearls, upon her neck and arms, and in her ears. Her rich, shining dark hair was arranged in a regal style that well became her—a parure of pearls glistening among the jetty coils.

She was beautiful and fascinating, and though there was nothing of Madonna-like loveliness in her fair features, there was a great deal of bewitching brightness and brilliance, and a charming vivacity and piquancy in her manner. She was a born coquette; and just the sort of woman with whom, out of a hundred men, ninety-and-nine would fall madly in love.

To-night she was more than usually enchanting; and it was evident that the handsome gentleman who now seated himself by her side, was far from being indifferent to her charms.

"I am so awfully warm!" said the young lady, fluttering her fan vigorously. "Do look! There's that ugly little Rose Castlemaine leaning on Lord Crofton's arm. Rose, indeed! what a name for her, to be sure. Resembles much more one of those yellow maple leaves lying out yonder. Hideous, isn't she? Ah, here comes the stately Miss Wil-