

ing field, never to open her sweet eyes on this sad old world again.

It was because of that, and of how her mother had died, that Netta always felt a little unhappy in the autumn of the year. For though the woods were very beautiful, with their branches all orange and gold and the beech trees sending down shower after shower of copper-colored leaves on the vivid green turf of lawns whereon the pampas grass waved in the breeze tall white heads like the funeral plumes of a hearse, there seemed always a vague sadness and mournfulness in the air.

Her father was obviously restless and uneasy and depressed, and she could not help sharing at least some of his depression, though she busied herself more than ever—ere the winter should step in and prevent her—in the planting of bulbs and the putting in of cuttings and various other odds and ends of outdoor work in her own special walled-in garden, where the chrysanthemums these autumn days made a riot of gorgeous life and color beneath the dying splendor of the woods.

Once that autumnal anniversary time of decay and death had passed over, her father's sadness disappeared too, and Netta's heart began to lift relievedly with his own. And after that the months of winter seemed to fly, so short were the days, and so pleasant the long nights of reading and recreation together in the cheery glow of lamp and firelight.

As I have said, Netta had little society of her own age, and hardly any of her own sex beyond that of old Madame Ducros, who had been her governess, and (being a widow and childless and without friends) found still a welcome shelter and anxiety under the kindly roof of Castlederg. But she had hardly felt the need of any society—at least, not until after Godfrey Sutherland had gone away.

She was not sure, even then, that any other society but his would have been much of a help and a solace to her. As long as she had Godfrey, and her father, and the kind old Madame, and her garden, and the poor and needy of the neighborhood to visit and be good to, how could she be lonely? These evenings when Godfrey used to come to dinner—for though almost penniless, and with his estates, moreover, heavily mortgaged, there was no one in the neighborhood to whom her father extended a more hearty and generous welcome—staying afterwards to talk by the fireside or play a quiet game of whist with Madame and her father and herself—seemed periods of ideal joy and happiness and contentment now that Godfrey had gone.

What had they quarrelled about? It was hard to say—and indeed the word 'quarrel' seemed much too strong a word to apply to the estrangement that had gradually come between them. It began like the cloud no bigger than a man's hand, in a slight feeling of jealousy on Netta's own part. But there had never been even the shadow of jealousy or misunderstanding between them until Estelle Dumont, a school friend of Godfrey's sister, had come to stay with them at Castle Grange.

They had always made Godfrey so welcome at Castlederg, for in spite of his poverty Sir Victor, Netta's father, liked him incomparably more than any other young man he knew. He was so rich himself that he could well afford to overlook such a small fault as poverty in an otherwise charming and deserving young fellow, and Godfrey was so big and handsome and cheery and kindly—and Netta, as well as her father, had perhaps dreamed dreams.

Dreams were all they were ever destined to be, apparently, for with the coming of Estelle Dumont to his home, Netta and her father began to see less and less of their former frequent visitor. Perhaps it hadn't been altogether Godfrey's fault, she tried to think sometimes, for she herself had never been able to get on very well with Godfrey's only sister, Julia, who seemed to her a very vain and frivolous person, supremely irritating, too, from her want of tact and her cocksure and opinionated self-assertiveness.

She had tried to like her and be nice to her for Godfrey's sake; but Julia Sutherland had so plainly shown her contempt for the dullness and dreariness of

Castlederg—her first visit having unfortunately coincided with Sir Victor's autumnal period of mourning and depression—that, as she was fond of telling her brother and her friend Estelle 'wild horses would not drag her to that house of gloom again for any consideration.' Neither did Netta care very much for Julia's French schoolmate and companion, who—perhaps as a result of her chatterbox hostess's constant declarations against the deadly dullness of Castlederg and its occupants—seemed to hold herself distant and aloof from them in a degree highly uncomplimentary.

Of course, it was perhaps inevitable that Godfrey should devote a great deal of time these days to his domineering and insistent sister and her pretty little French friend—who, as well as being pretty, was by all accounts a great heiress also, and the daughter of a big Parisian banker. Well, Netta was an heiress, too, but perhaps a very dull and unattractive one (at least so she thought herself), as compared with the bright and vivacious little Parisienne, Estelle Dumont.

At any rate, during the latter's stay with them at Castle Grange, Godfrey did not spend one evening now for the half dozen he used to spend with the quieter and more home-loving folk at Castlederg. There was always some excuse or other—a dinner-party at Lord Vane's, a bridge-drive at Lady Verner's, a motor expedition up to Dublin or to Cork, for shopping and a theatre or two. Altogether his time seemed now greatly occupied, and his attention almost entirely devoted to his sister and her friend.

All this time Netta herself grew colder and colder to him—that is, on the few occasions on which he now vouchsafed to visit them. Once or twice, indeed, so sore was she made by his defection, she refused to see him at all on the plea of having a headache. And if it came to poor Netta soon as a considerable shock, it was not altogether so much of a surprise to be told by some of her neighbors, with a commiserating smile, that he had just started for Paris with his sister and fiancée 'for the wedding.'

'And you hadn't even heard of it, my dear?' one of the least kind and tactful of them had added, with uplifted brows, when poor Netta had not been able to conceal her surprise, if not actual dismay, at the news.

Ah, well, that little dream was all over! She had been weighed in the balance with the other heiress and found wanting.

Perhaps she had no real right to feel hurt or sore, but she did. She had liked Godfrey so much, and he might at least have told her—have given her, or her father, his friend—some little hint of what was afoot. Ah, well! her father at least wanted her, and loved her! For a time—a short little foolish space of time—she blushed hotly now to think of it—she had wondered and fretted a little as to what her father would think, what his feelings would be did another man—one other man—dare ask to take her from him. Poor father! he would have been lonely, more sad and lonely than ever, no doubt. And now he need not be—need never, never be! There was at least some comfort—nay, a great big plentiful store of comfort and satisfaction in that thought.

Her foolish, short-lived dream was over and gone, dead and buried for ever in her heart. And she must be content, would be content to stay with her father for all the time he should find need of her—that is to say, for the whole length of his days. She would have him, and dear old Madame, and her books, and her music, and her flowers—last, not least, her poor friends and neighbors, to think of and love and serve. But she would not have Godfrey—another woman would have whole claim on him now. And smile and chatter and put on a brave front as best she could, the thought still smote and stabbed her like a very sword-thrust in her heart.

And now the last of the red autumn leaves had fallen and been swept up and garnered by the gardener and his men to make leaf-mould for the blossoms of next year. The trees stood tall and brown and bare, the stars twinkled frostily, and a cold-looking crescent