

child, had lived a curious inner life of her own. But as the years went on and nothing but the grim, sad realities of life confronted her, Christian grew less eager and hopeful, and those bright visions which had haunted her growing girlhood had faded into grayness.

As she sat alone of an evening—for she had many solitary hours—her work would lie untouched on her lap, as her thoughts strayed to her childish past, and then rested heavily on the monotony of her present life, and her eyes would smart with unshed tears at the bitter contrast.

‘In those dear old days I was never lonely,’ she would say to herself; ‘how could I be lonely when I had mother? I daresay many girls would not have thought it much of a life,’ she went on; ‘we were so poor after father’s death, and mother was such an invalid, and it was such a dull, poky little house, with no garden, and only Betty to do everything; and yet how happy we were!’ And here was a lump in Christian’s throat as she remembered how bright the little parlour had looked with its cheerful fireside and the dear invalid smiling a welcome as she entered: ‘I am so glad it is you, darling; I thought, perhaps, it might be your Aunt Caroline or Adelaide.’

And then that chapter of her life had closed, and Christian, who had grown thin with fretting, had become the inmate of her aunt’s house.

Mrs. Fordham was her father’s sister, and was indeed her only near relative; she was the well-endowed widow of a wealthy stockbroker, who had left her sufficiently well provided with the good things of this life. She had only one daughter, and lived in a handsome house in Mandeville Street; and it was felt by Mrs. Fordham’s friends that she was acting both wisely