

"Partant pour La Syrie." Her guitar lay across her lap and the thin fingers twined and twisted a couple of broken strings. She had not risen to open the door for me as usual, but I had entered on hearing the feeble "Come" which answered my knock.

I saw that her cheeks were rosy, as she looked up at me, and the veins about her chin and temples showed dark and distinct. Her eyes, too, were dark and brilliant, but seemed to look past and through me.

"I have been trying this old air," she said, "but (with a slow sigh and long gaze at the music) twilight has fallen."

"Dear Miss Davenport, you are ill," I exclaimed, as I held her hot hand. "Let me stay with you till Monday."

She made no answer; hardly even seemed to hear me. I left her immediately, as there was no time to lose if I would return to town and obtain my mother's permission. There was some difficulty in impressing mamma with the urgency of the case, but she consented at last, only insisting that I should be accompanied by our old nurse, Betsey.

It was a problem how the cottage could accommodate such an increase of inmates, but Betsy declared she could stow herself away anywhere, and proceeded to fill a basket with a wonderful assortment of scraps of flannel, camphorated spirits, jelly and what not. She was about to load my restive patience with yet another straw, by setting up a quest for a pot of goose-grease, when mother came, laughing, to my rescue and sent us off without it. Betsy lamented the lack of her favourite remedy all the way out. She was sure Miss Davenport was in for a heavy cold, in which case there was nothing more efficacious. With goose-grease and flannel she would like to see the cold she could not cure. As a matter of fact, nothing would have terrified her more.

"Many's the time, Miss Una, when you was little and that subject to croup as I never knew the night you might not start up on me, crouin' like I don't know what. Many's the time I've saved you with them two blessed things," etc., etc., with particular instances in point.

We found Miss Davenport very weak and ready to do anything we thought fit. She shewed no surprise at our presence, and treated Betsy as if the sight of her there was quite familiar. She slept feverishly all that night, but appeared more like herself next morning, though making no effort to leave her bed.

VI.



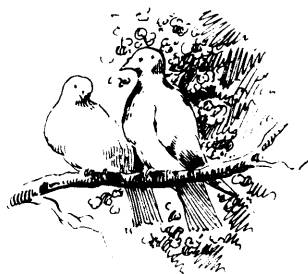
"HEN we had 'settled her up,' in Betsy's parlance, she called me to her and said: 'Una, child, when I was your age, I thought myself surrounded by more friends than I could count, but now, after a long life, not one of all that circle is here, and you, whom I have only known half a short summer, you are my only friend.'"

I pressed her hand and tried to tell her that none could have held her friendship more dear than I; but she hardly listened, and went on to say: "I should like you to know what my life has been. My father was a wealthy man; I his only daughter. I do not remember my mother at all, or any other relatives. My father built the house which once stood here for a summer residence, that he might be nearer a large lumber business. Every day he used to ride off through the Tanneries to it. He never discussed his affairs with me, and to this day I am ignorant of them. But I know we were considered wealthy; that, when it suited my father's whim, the house used to be filled with visitors. Amongst them all I had admirers, but did not care for any till—"

Here her voice sunk to silence.

After a time she recollected herself and asked me to bring her the two miniatures from the other room.

She lay still a long time looking at them, while varying expressions passed over her face.



"This is a portrait of myself at your age, Una, and this other is the artist of both pictures. He was a Captain Falkland—Owen Falkland was his name. Of good family, he had no fortune except his pay. My father, whom I had never before seen otherwise than quiet and courteous, was furious when we spoke to him of our mutual regard. He denied Owen the house, and forbade, with dreadful anger, my ever again holding any intercourse with Captain Falkland. From what he let fall in the unreserve of wrath, it appeared he had formed a plan of taking me home to England and introducing me to society there, when I, for my part, was to form an alliance which should commend itself to him. He was a man of unbounded ambition, and quite expected me to make a brilliant match.

"My poor Owen was more to me—is more to me—than any other being could ever have been, however endowed. We managed to correspond, and as we dared not risk discovery by employing messages, we invented a post-office of our own. Dear Una, you will smile when I tell you where it is. You have, doubtless, observed the swallows' nests in the bank by the roadside? Well, it was in one of these we hid our mutual vows and condolence, and corresponded regularly, without any one ever being the wiser, until autumn came. Yesterday was the anniversary of the day my father moved into town, and soon afterwards took me with him to Boston. He gave me no warning of his movements, and when again we returned to Montreal, we learnt that Captain Falkland's regiment had gone to India. Nothing more definite of his whereabouts could I discover—and that 'Glenhaven' was burnt to the ground. My father seemed much disturbed at the loss of the house, and it so unsettled him that he wandered about from one place to another incessantly. In answer to friends' enquiries, he began to say his health required change, and certainly it failed suddenly and rapidly.

"When he died I found myself penniless. I tried teaching for the means of subsistence, with but poor success. At last I came to this, the one little spot whose possession none will dispute with me."

She sank back exhausted and closed her eyes.

"But did you never hear from Captain Falkland after your father's death?" I enquired.

"Never. In those days postal arrangements were deficient and transportation of news precarious. I did write, and enclose a paper containing news of my father's death and bankruptcy, to different posts in India on the chance of Owen's regiment being stationed at any of them. But nothing ever came of it."

The slow tears rolled down the worn face, and the portrait of the handsome young officer in the gay uniform was raised to the quivering lips.

I stole out of the room.



VII.

NEXT day our patient was very feverish indeed. I abandoned all idea of leaving her. Betsy came running into the small kitchen, where she had left me stirring some concoction while she visited Miss Davenport.

"I b'lieve she's wandering, poor lady. To think of all her nerves must a'gone through, shut up by her lone in this wild place! I'm sure it's no wonder if she's taken leave of her senses. Miss Una, if you're not frightened, I wish you would find out what she wants. She keeps asking for you and talking of swallows' nests all of a tumble."

I left Betsy in more amenable company and went to Miss Davenport, whom I had not seen since taking a nap to replace my broken night's rest.

I found her excited, but in possession of her senses.

"Una," she said, as soon as she saw me, "an idea has seized me that I cannot shake off. I wish you would look in the old swallow's nest. Perhaps there may be something left in it. It is the first of a group of five, directly beneath a young birch, to your right as you leave 'Glenhaven.'"

Of course, I promised to go at once, hoping thus to soothe the excitement which was so bad for my poor old friend. On my way, my heart sank as I considered the disappointment which inevitably awaited her. Needless I ran along the path till I stood before the high wall of dull yellow clay, and then I saw how impossible it was to reach it from below. I must retrace my steps till, at some sloping point in the bank, I could gain the higher ground. The birch, which stood out distinct and clear against the sky from below, was only one of many others up here. Besides, it must have grown considerably since it sentinelled the trysting place of Miss Davenport and her lover. Therefore, some little time was absorbed in determining its exact locality. Having done so, I found that the roots of itself and companions had so grown as to impose a difficulty in reaching the nests. I had to lie down, holding on to a bush, while I leaned over the edge of the cliff and poked a long, straight branch, with a forked twig at the end, into the hole. A handful of twigs, leaves and dust rewarded my efforts. No shred of paper appeared amongst these. I threw them away and commenced a fresh invasion of the nest. I was becoming interested enough to feel a likelihood of suddenly striking on something more compact than the light *débris* as yet brought to view, when a voice, stern and vibrating startled me.

"What are you doing there, young woman?"

I looked up and saw "my old gentleman." Always erect and stately he now towered above me. His usual pallor was replaced by a bright colour, while his eyes had lost the dimness of abstraction and indifference and glowered at me with an intensity and fire that heightened the alteration in his aspect and made the appellation "old" seem all at once entirely absurd.

My schoolgirl skill in accounting for a truly ridiculous position, left me very much at the mercy of the experienced disciplinarian, and he soon possessed himself of the purport of my mission and its source.

"Young lady," he said, "I am certain there is nothing in that deserted nest. I will accompany you to your friend and myself inform her of the fact."

In vain I told him the lady was ill and could not see strangers. He waved me on authoritatively, and I was obliged to return with him to the cottage, supported by the hope that Betsy would be able to put him to rout. Showing the pertinacious visitor into the tiny parlour, I sought my tower of defence. But the wild hope of the sick woman lay watching at all the doors of sense, and a feeble voice cried, as I passed: "Come, Una, you must have something for me. Don't keep me waiting."

Then, before there was time to turn, I heard a quick stride in the narrow passage, followed by a