

“Sylvia”

By Bessie Kyffin-Taylor

It was just one of those days when all the world seemed to go awry, or it appeared so. Probably, I was over-tired or worried, for war news and rationing were both beginning to leave their mark: war news, because one must wear a smile, no matter how long the casualty lists grew; rationing, because I was rapidly becoming worn out, perpetually struggling to feed us all somehow. All this is really not sufficient excuse for nerves at the point of breaking, as mine were; and I, for once, welcomed a severe attack of “flue,” followed by my doctor’s advice to go away for a couple of weeks to pick up. Without the “flue,” I should have felt compelled to ignore his advice in these strenuous times; but, triumphantly armed with that evil germ of “flue,” I felt I was justified in taking it.

As usual, I took my ticket for a little-known spot in Wales. I say “as usual,” because it was the one spot I loved best—a spot which will ever hold my happiest memories, as it holds some of my saddest.

I felt uplifted, invigorated, merely gazing upon my beloved mountains as the train ran down the long incline before it stopped at the station—names are unnecessary, so few people know it.

Alighting, I made my way to the old inn which stood in a large open square at one end of the village street—a street composed of little houses, about four nondescript shops, two better shops, and a post office. I did not care what the shops contained—I loved them all, and the people were my very good friends.

There was a tiny shop where I could buy a morning paper, as well as fishing tackle and flies; and there I paused, just to see if my friend, who dwelt there, remembered me. He did; so I went on my way, to receive the welcome I was always sure of from the good people at the inn. A bright fire was burning gaily in the sitting-room (always called mine) although it was June; for up here in the hills, evenings were chilly until perhaps August. I did not pause by the fire, my steps took me straight to the window, to gaze on a view which to me, has not an equal in this or any other country which I have seen.

I have stood at that window times uncountable. I have looked at these high mountains when they have been snow-covered; I have watched the mist and driving rain lashing down them until every trickling stream was white foam. I have watched them with tears in my eyes; I have stretched out my arms to them and laughed. I loved them, and the valley beneath them, as I have loved few things in this world; and this June evening, I think I loved them best of all, as they stood serene, steady, grand, far above the worries of the day; seeming, by their great peace, to sooth my jangled nerves, bidding me look up, be hopeful, and not cast down. A faint purple haze hung over them, giving promise of a glorious day to-morrow, and I watched until one or two stars were visible, and lights began to twinkle here and there from distant farms; then, with a sigh of happiness I turned to my evening meal, which I had entirely forgotten.

A peaceful night in my quaint bedroom found me early next morning, feeling already tons better, and quite ready for a tramp. I knew before I started, which way my feet would inevitably turn; I could not help it, up the valley following the little river up and up, I knew I must go, away from the cottages, past where the river narrows and falls in a mad rush for some twenty feet, up, and still up, until I reached the wild moorland, where I knew I should find a patch of mauve, *scented* orchids.

It has always been a source of wonder to me how such things as scented orchids came there, on that rough wild moor; but I always found them there in June, and revelled in their beauty and scent. I was not by this time, more than three miles from the village, yet I might have been a hundred, so still, so solitary was it. The crying of baby lambs, and the rushing sound of the river, now left below me, were all the sounds to break the silence, of the everlasting hills, and here I stayed for many hours, resting, idling, dreaming; the world, war, rations, all forgotten.

I supposed I dozed, for when I came back to earth, I found it was nearly four o'clock. Time I was moving I thought, and forthwith began to walk to the nearest farm, where I knew they would gladly make a cup of tea for me. Towards it I wended my steps, carefully carrying my bunch of orchids. The farm I wanted lay a little further up the mountain, off the beaten track, yet not far from a main, if somewhat rough road. I would have my tea, I thought, and return by the road, as being easier walking for my first day.

I got my tea, as also my welcome; and in a little kitchen, rough but homely, I rested and chatted.

"You are late to go down," said my friend of the farm, "are you not afraid?"

"Afraid!" I said. "Never, up here, and I love to go down to the village in the dusk, and watch the lights twinkle on the hills; but I will not leave it any longer, so 'Good night,' and very many thanks," and the farm door closed behind me.

How glorious it was, how serene! I couldn't leave it, I didn't care if I got back for dinner or not, the air was so pure, so clean. Some people would say like champagne, though, personally, I always consider that simile a slight on pure mountain air!

I wandered slowly along, humming a little song, drinking in the beauty, until a tempting gate seemed to call forcibly for a halt, and I took my favourite position on its top rail, for just five minutes. Five minutes passed, and then another five, and still I lingered, gazing at the pink light in which the setting sun had bathed the mountains. As I gazed, I heard the distant creaking of wheels, as if some lumbering cart or van was coming up the winding hill. I will just wait until it comes.

I heard the creaking coming nearer and nearer; and the stamp of horses' feet as if they strained pulling up the hill, louder and clearer; until I found myself saying, "One more corner, then I can see them and go." A whip cracked, as a slowly-moving caravan hove in sight.

Two figures walked beside it, a man and a woman, seemingly silent, probably tired. Up the hill they came, a few baskets dangling at the sides of the caravan, the door of which stood open.

Now they had nearly reached me, so nearly that I could speak to them. Slowly they passed me.

"Good night," I called, but neither answered me. They moved on, unseeing, apparently unhearing.

"Rough road," I said again. No answer was vouchsafed to me. They were past me now, just past me, and I turned to watch them, going along a bit of straight road.

There was nothing on the road! No slow-moving caravan, no straining horses, no man, no woman; the road, clear and white in the falling dusk, was empty—save for myself. Yet they had been there, I had seen them, spoken to them, and now they had gone, gone without a sound; but, as the thought crossed my mind, I was startled by two pistol shots, which rang out clearly, echoing and re-echoing among the hills, and then silence, deep silence, as if the mountains held some secret which they would not share.

I found I was trembling, cold and scared! What did it all mean? Where or what was that caravan? Who were that man and woman who could vanish so completely and so swiftly? I

could not answer, but my walk back developed into a run, so eager was I to find myself once more back in the village, amongst friends.

Later that evening, the doctor of the little village paid me a visit, but chaffed me upon my absentmindedness, though he ended by asking me if I didn't feel well, and ordering for me a hot drink. Presently I revived, and ventured to ask him if he had ever met a caravan on a lonely road in the hills?

He met my question by another:

"Have you seen it?"

"I have," I replied; "and if you promise not to certify me as insane, I will tell you about it," and then and there I told him my story.

He listened in silence until I finished, and then said:

"I am unable to explain it; but if you are not tired, I will tell *you* a story."

I give his story as he told it to me, only adding:

"I am not the only person who saw and heard the caravan, nor am I the only person who believes it still lumbers up the mountain road as the dusk falls."

"I will not tell you the story in my own words, my friend," said the doctor, as he lit his pipe. "I would rather tell it as it was written down by my great grandmother, who, I believe, got the story from one of those who lived in it. She wrote it, and a friend of hers later re-wrote it from her facts; wrote it, he always said, because even to-day, as you have proved, the remembrance of that tragedy still remains with us. It is many years ago, and who can tell for how many more years, someone, with a more sensitive nature than others, will see and hear the lumbering caravan. Maybe some will, as you did, speak to the man or woman, meeting with nought but silence—the silence of those long gone, and yet whose spirits live at times amongst their old haunts."

"But now, my story, for the time is getting on."

Many years ago, on such a fine day as this, a gaudily painted caravan was jolting slowly on its way along one of the most beautiful lanes in Wales, lending a picturesque touch of colour to an already lovely scene. High mountains towered on every side some of them with their grand crests bidden in a faint-hanging mist, which only served to give them the touch of mystery which the unseen always lends. Foliage was at its greatest beauty. Banks and fields were gay with wild flowers, hedges sweet with wild roses and honeysuckle.

The heat was intense, dust lay thick on the roads. The mountain rills and little torrents, so rushing and racing in the winter when the snows melted, were quiet now, and only the winding river at the foot of the hill moved on, though even that was in a sluggish way, as if it would rather hang about in pools without making an effort to glide along over the stones towards the sea.

All nature was drowsy; the cattle under the trees idly flicking the flies with their tails, stood, as if even that necessary labour were a toil.

Here and there a group of hay-makers rested under the hedges, glad of the respite, and the only thing which seemed bent on getting along was the slowly-moving caravan. It was evidently the leader of a band of gypsies, for a long way behind it, one caught a glimpse of the roof and little chimney of another caravan.

The first one was gaily painted in reds and blues, the little windows were closely curtained with spotted muslin, and any brass that was visible shone like burnished gold. Two strapping grey horses drew it, the driver walking beside them. He was a splendid-looking man, probably about thirty years of age, dark, clean-shaven, broad-shouldered and muscular, dressed in riding attire, with breeches and gaiters, a blue flannel shirt with a low collar, showing a strong brown

throat and neck. He wore a slouch hat, and swung a little switch, though he seldom used it on his horses.

The rest of the gipsies must have been far behind, or resting within the caravan, save one other—a girl—who sat on the steps at the back of the caravan, her chin resting in the palm of her hand, her eyes fixed steadily on the long road they had just traversed.

She was dressed in a dark skirt, worn and patched, and a blouse which had once been pink—now washed and faded to a shade of yellow—her hair was dark, though, where the sun touched it, it seemed almost red, her eyes were dark, a mixture of grey and green, darkly lashed, her face a perfect oval—colourless, except for the brown tinge of sun-burn, her little hands burnt nearly tan-colour, were bare of the usual gipsy rings.

She seemed lost in a dream, and the voice of the driver speaking to her, caused her to give a sudden start.

“Sylvia,” he said, “why don’t you come and sit in front and see the glorious view, and the road we are going?”

“Because,” answered the girl, with a faint smile, “I prefer to try and look along the road I have come.”

“Always the same,” the man muttered, “always trying to search into the past. Why on earth can’t you give it up, Sylvia, and be content with the future?”

“The future,” said the girl, sadly, “holds nothing for me—the past, everything—if *only* I could remember! How long is it Jim, since I first began to live in a caravan? I seem to dimly remember some other life once, and I *know*, I *feel*, I was not always here.”

“I do not know,” answered Jim. “I had been in Australia and news from England brought me home, and I joined this tribe, because I was soon penniless—you were not here then. I was obliged to go away again shortly. I was away six months, and when I came back, you were here—a little girl of ten or so—and here you have been ever since, and you must be seventeen or eighteen now. Mother Alison expects you to marry her son, Jake, you know—are you going to?”

“No! never!” replied Sylvia. “I hate his coarse ways, I hate his jokes, his talk, his ignorance—everything about him—but I suppose Mother Alison will torment me until I give in,” she shuddered.

“Do you remember if Jake was here when you came, Sylvia?”

“I don’t know,” answered the girl, putting her hand to her head in a dazed way. “I forget—I was ill at first, and when I grew strong, I had forgotten. I don’t think I was called ‘Sylvia’ always,” she went on. “Some other name glimmers in my mind sometimes. I must not bother” she added. “I am happy, and even Jake is good to me. He says he has much to make up to me. I don’t understand what he means, but he is generally kind—except if he tries to make love to me, then I hate him, and Alison is unkind to me then. Where are we now, Jim?”

“I am not sure, answered the man, “but in any case it’s time we had a rest and some tea.” He called to his horses, who obeyed his voice and drew up. He and the girl seated themselves on the bank to await the arrival of the rest of the band.

They sat in silence for a few minutes, and then Sylvia rose, saying:

“I can hear them coming, Jim, they must be near, I heard Molly laugh I’m sure.”

“No doubt,” answered Jim, “since she seldom does anything else—useless baggage,” he added.

“Jim!” said Sylvia, in amazement. “I thought you were fond of Mollie. Alison says you love her, and that you are all she thinks about.”

“They are wrong then,” said the man, vehemently. “I care less than nothing for lazy Mollie; women and woman’s love are not for me, either now, or ever. My life was spoilt years ago by a

dastardly black lie, and for all my careless life of freedom, I am only a hunted animal, never knowing the moment I shall be called upon to pay the penalty for a wrong that was not rightly laid at my door. But never mind little girl, don't look so woebegone, I'm happy enough under the skies, sunshine or stars, and if sooner or later my freedom ends, well—I must know that at least I leave no woman to suffer.” And lighting a cigarette, he moved carelessly away to his horses, to pat and caress them—his chums, perhaps his safe confidants.

And Sylvia, with white face and eyes burning with tears she dare not shed, gazed after him, with an aching heart, murmuring to herself:

“Ah! my love! my bonny brave lad! what is it that darkens your life, and with it, mine? For you love me, Jim; I feel you do, yet, there is some shadow on your life, and because of that you treat me as you do—one day kind, the next cold as ice to me, and my heart is breaking for you, yet I can only be silent.”

There was not time for brooding however, for two other caravans now lumbered up.

The first, hung all over with baskets and chairs, made, so thought the simple-minded villagers, by the gipsies; in reality, turned out of factories, probably in other countries by the hundred.

A man was leading the horses: a man with a dark, sinister face, though handsome in a rough, uncouth style, and by his side danced his sister Mollie—almost fair for a gipsy, with saucy blue eyes, up-turned nose, add merry mouth.

No dark-browed gipsy this, but a laughing, merry hoyden, who thought the world a good place to play in, and whose greatest trouble was the frequent whippings from her grandmother, for what she called “the lazy idle life” the girl led. If a fire was to be made, Mollie would be sitting threading gay beads, to hang round her pretty neck; if there was washing to be done, Mollie would be away in the woods gathering flowers; never at hand if there was work to be done her mother said, though pretty Mollie was far the best hand at selling a basket, or persuading a bony and angular spinster that a hard, unyielding basket-chair “would be cosy, lady, to nurse your babies by the fire, some day.”

Only one person in all the tribe could ever induce Mollie to abandon her own pleasure and do a turn for someone else: Jim alone achieved this, and to him she gave a dog-like devotion and obeyed his every word.

It was quickly decided to pitch their tents and remain where they were for the night, and each one was soon busy with his or her allotted task—all but Mollie, who vanished as usual, leaving who would to do her share.

Tea was soon over, and the men slouched off to pitch tents, water the horses, and make ready for the night; and Alison, “Mother Alison,” as the tribe called her, lit a short pipe, and watched from under her low-beetling brows that the others did their work properly. Mollie's mother did the lion's share, and to all appearance was the most fitted for it—tall, strong, muscular, big capable hands, arms which many a man might envy, and a hard, unprepossessing face, from which the coarse black hair was tightly dragged in uncompromising severity. She worked swiftly and in silence, and when all was done, turned to Sylvia, and in a harsh voice told her to “get baskets and begone to the village to sell them.”

The old dame, with her pipe, raised her head at this, and said in questioning tones:

“Is't wise, think you, 'Liza?

“Tut!” answered the other. “We may as well face it, Gran, 'tis many years now, and it's as well to know for certain—let the child go.”

Sylvia who was used to their abrupt conversations and never joined in, picked out a few of the prettiest baskets, and made her way down to the village, nestling peacefully below them.

From his work with the horses, Jake saw her, and called out:

“Where art thou going to, lass?”

“To sell baskets,” answered the girl. “Wish me luck, Jake. Something tells me I’ll have good luck this evening.”

Muttering to himself, “Mother must be mad,” Jake turned and swung himself up the caravan steps.

“Mother!” he cried. “Ar’t mad to send the girl to the village, after all these years? Must thee tempt Providence in this way?”

“Easy, son, easy,” answered the woman. “The girl’s mind has gone, never to return—it never has done, it never will—but this one test I must and will have, for thy safety, then I can rest. The girl will never remember, and thou, lad, ar’t altered in eight years. She will not be gone long, and it is worth it for my peace. Begone to your work, and be ready for some love-making when the girl returns. I’d be best pleased to see thee wed, and some of her fine lady ways knocked out of the girl.”

The man slunk out without further question.

Sylvia went happily on her way all unknowing that she was the object of discussion, and hoping she would meet with a little kindness instead of the usual roughness, and slamming of doors in her face. Half-dreamily she wandered on until she reached the little village.

A long, straggling street—one or two poor-looking shops and a couple of decent-looking inns was all it consisted of, and at the further end, it seemed to terminate in a high stone wall, into which were set a massive pair of wrought iron gates with coat of arms in gold and blue, and a little way inside stood a neat-looking black and white lodge. A yard or two from the gates was a quaint door in the wall, which now stood open.

Sylvia, peering in, saw a pretty patch of garden and an old lady with very white hair asleep in a chair, with a black cat on her knee.

As Sylvia looked, she awoke from her nap, and, catching sight of the girl, cried out:

“What do you want? Who are you? Aye! dearie me, dearie me! it’s gipsies, and me asleep! Come here, girl, I hate gipsies, but you don’t look bad and I want a basket.”

“Which will you have?” asked the girl. “There, there, I never could choose anything in a hurry. I must chance your being honest. Come inside and put them on the table.”

“What a pretty kitchen,” said Sylvia. “Do you live here alone?”

“Aye! alone now,” said the dame, “unless my lady sends for me to the Castle.”

“It must be very lonely,” said Sylvia, gently. “It is so, too lonely for me at times, and I weep over the old days—long since gone, and my bonny bairn—the light of my eyes.”

“Had you a child?” asked Sylvia.

“No, no, none of my own, but my own in all but name—but there, I’m a stupid old woman, talking to a gipsy girl, but sometimes it is so silent, I feel I must speak. Sit you down, I’ll get you some tea; you have a gentle, sweet face.”

“Who lives at the Castle?” asked Sylvia, as she drank the tea the old lady made for her.

“Only her ladyship—poor dear lady!”

“Is she ill?” asked Sylvia.

“No, no, not ill, except in mind. She has scarcely spoken since the awful thing happened.”

“Can you tell me about it?” questioned the girl.

“Yes, I suppose I can,” said the old lady, who was not averse to a gossip when anyone would listen. “Anyway, I can try, though it’s a gruesome tale.”

“Old Sir John Ffoulks was alive then, and it was always a grief to his wife that they had not a son to come after them; but when Sir John died, he directed by his will that his two nephews—the sons of his younger brother, should live in turn for twelve months each at the Castle, and that my lady was to decide in four years which would more fitly inherit.

“It could not be decided by seniority, as they were twins. They drew lots as to which should come on the first visit, and it fell to Lionel.”

“Well,” continued the old lady, “Mr. Lionel Troy came, but somehow he did not seem to get on with the people. He lacked the qualities which make men loved: he was weak-spirited, nervous on a horse, did not care for shooting, and preferred an afternoon at the White Arms drinking and playing cards, to a day after the hounds, and he grudged every rabbit and bird shot by anyone but his own pals, and *they* were a queer lot. He wasn’t straight even in his dealings with poachers, but uses dirty underhand methods of catching them, and was bitterly disliked in consequence.

“Mr. Max came next, and his first twelve months was a very different thing. He was all that his brother was not—genial, frank, manly, generous, a thorough sportsman—his worst fault being his hot, uncontrollable temper; and though strict, he was just, and not too hard on the men who snared a few rabbits to feed big families with.

“The terms of the will were, unfortunately, well known, and gossip among the villagers caused a feeling of bitter jealousy to spring up between the brothers.

“Well, Mr. Max’s first visit came to an end, and Mr. Lionel’s second year began; but just at this time, a niece of her ladyship came home from India—her husband died there, and my lady offered a home to her, and her little girl aged ten. Ah! my bonny baby, how sweet she was! my little Chrystabel,” and the old dame paused to wipe her eyes, not seeing that the mention of the child’s name had brought a strained look to her guest’s face, and that, with dilated eyes, she was breathlessly hanging on every word, with white Lace and quivering nerves.

“That year was a better one for Mr. Lionel, he was softer, more lovable, and was trying hard to win favour; and the reason was little Chrystabel. He adored the child, and her soft baby-fingers could lead him anywhere. Indeed folks began to say he would win through his love of the little girl; but, just getting near Christmas, he lost ground again, through a bitter time with the poachers; and he got one fellow—a stranger—locked up for a month; and it came out that the fellow was a skilled poacher, and was catching game for a man who was ill and couldn’t work, and whose wife and little ones were starving. Feeling ran high in the village against Mr. Lionel, and all felt he had lost.

“The morrow was the day for Mr. Max to return; and by some chance, through deep snow, Mr. Lionel was delayed, and the brothers met. It was late at night when Mr. Max came, and little Chrystabel, whom he had never seen, had gone to bed. Had she been about, with her sweet face, perhaps the tragedy would never have happened, but the two young men met in the library—met as enemies, and in bitterest spirit. They were heard with voices raised, and using angry words. Mr. Lionel was twitting his brother for being a saint,’ and poor Mr. Max lost his temper, and called Mr. Lionel ‘a sneaking cad,’ who tried to curry favour; and then there was a scream—a pistol shot, and someone burst into the room to find traces of a fierce struggle—an open window, Lionel dead on the floor with a bullet through his heart—and silence.

“The police were sent for, and evidence seemed all to point to poor Mr. Max as his brother’s murderer and a warrant was issued for his arrest, and a search for him was made; but in vain, he had gone, as if the earth had swallowed him, and the most awful thing was, that when, some

hours later, I went to see my baby, to see if the disturbance had awakened her, she was not there! Not a trace of her could be found, and never has been.

A sudden sharp scream brought the old lady to a stop, and she jumped up, to see her guest fall suddenly, heavily, hitting her head on the fender.

“Oh! what is it?” moaned the girl. “I—” When she opened her eyes some moments later, after a violent shaking by the old lady, “Something seems to have happened to my head—What were you telling me? Oh, I know. I remember, a library—men—fighting—what does it all mean? Tell me quickly—has that library got red walls with big gold birds on them? Is there a rug with a big bear’s head on it? Tell me—tell me.”

Trembling in every limb, the old lady nodded.

“Yes, yes. Who are you? How do you know?” she whispered. “My old eyes fail, but there was something in your voice which held me from the first.”

“Take me to the house,” said the girl. “I must see the house. I *must* remember, but it is all so dim.”

“We will go,” said the old lady, “but I am weak and frail.”

Together they set out, and as they neared the castle the girl shuddered, and gazed.

“Take me quickly to that room,” she said, and the old lady led her through a side door along endless passages, and at the entrance to a fine hall she stopped abruptly.

“Go yourself,” she said. “See if you know.”

And slowly the girl crossed the hall and turned the massive handle of a door, and entered. As she did so, the old lady turned on the lights and flooded the room with a soft glow; and, with a low cry, the gipsy girl sank down on the floor.

“It is,” she sobbed. “I am right. I remember the room. Two men—one I knew, the other I did not. I had left my dolly, and crept down in my night-gown with bare feet to get it. They never heard me, and I stood at the door. I can see it all again,” she sobbed. “A window flung open, a rough man entering, who shouted something about paying back, and raised a pistol he had in his hand, there was a shot, and Mr. Lionel fell; the other man never moved, never saw me, but the man with the pistol saw me, and called out: ‘God! a child!’ and I felt a fearful knock on my head, and never remembered again—until now. I found myself in a gipsy caravan later; was told I had been ill, and had always lived there; and life has been one long struggle to remember.”

“Oh! where is my mother—my grannie? Does anyone know me?”

Silently, with the tears pouring down her withered cheeks the old lady put her into a chair and went away telling her to remain; some twenty minutes after, she returned, bringing a frail, white-haired lady, probably not more than forty years of age but looking many years more.

“Will you speak to this girl, please, Lady Maud?” asked the old woman.

Lady Maud turned to the girl.

“Speak, girl; who are you?” she gasped. “Who are you with my Chrystabel’s eyes and voice?”

“I am your little girl. O! mother! mother! try to remember me!”

And there in the old library every detail of the tragedy was gone into, and at last the blame was laid at the right door.

“Must I tell?” sobbed the girl. “It was Jake—I remember now, but he has been good to me—must I tell?”

“I fear so,” answered her mother, “for poor Max is homeless and suspected until you do. It must be done now—at once. Come, dear.”

* * *

A few hours later a carriage drew up by the gipsy encampment, where quiet and peace seemed to reign. A wood fire was burning, and round it sat, or lay, the gipsies.

Old Mother Alison, smoking her pipe, was holding out her skinny hands to the blaze; Jake and his mother were sitting, talking in low tones; Jim, lounging gracefully, silently smoking, and pretty Mollie was twanging two strings of a worn-out banjo.

With a low cry, Sylvia sprang into the midst of them.

“Oh! my friends,” she cried, “I did not mean to harm you. I have remembered, and I had told all before I realized all that it meant. Forgive me! Forgive me!”

One quick glance at his mother, and Jake rose to his feet and suddenly clasped the girl to his breast.

“I forgive you, Sylvia. Mother!” And the woman stood before him, rigid as stone.

Into the circle stepped the uniform of the law, but too late! There were two quick shots, and Jake and his mother had gone before a Higher Judge.

And Sylvia was clasped quickly in the arms of the man whose loyal love for her, and those who had sheltered him when a hunted suspected murderer, had always prevented him saying a word to bring sorrow on the girl he worshipped.

Old Mother Alison lit another pipe, muttering—

“It was in the stars. I knew it. None could avert their destiny. Go! Get from my sight all of you,” and dismissed them with a wave of her skinny hand.

* * *

Years have gone by, but the natives tell a story of how, when coming to their homes late at night, over the hills, they hear the creaking and lumbering of a caravan, and see it coming along with a man and woman walking beside it.

The vision lasts but a few moments, then—two clear pistol shots ring out, waking the echoes of Snowdonia.