

## CHAPTER VI

### EMLYN'S CURSE

Just before the wild dawn broke on the morrow of the burning of the Towers, a corpse, roughly shrouded, was borne from the village into the churchyard of Cranwell, where a shallow grave had been dug for its last home.

"Whom do we bury in such haste?" asked the tall Thomas Bolle, who had delved the grave alone in the dark, for his orders were urgent, and the sexton was fled away from these tumults.

"That man of blood, Sir Christopher Harflete, who has caused us so much loss," said the old monk who had been bidden to perform the office, as the clergyman, Father Necton, had gone also, fearing the vengeance of the Abbot for his part in the marriage of Cicely. "A sad story, a very sad story. Wedded by night, and now buried by night, both of them, one in the flame and one in the earth. Truly, O God, Thy judgments are wonderful, and woe to those who lift hands against Thine anointed ministers!"

"Very wonderful," answered Bolle, as, standing in the grave, he took the head of the body and laid it down between his straddled feet; "so wonderful that a plain man wonders what will be the wondrous end of them, also why this noble young knight has grown so wondrously lighter

than he used to be. Trouble and hunger in those burnt Towers, I suppose. Why did they not set him in the vault with his ancestors? It would have saved me a lonely job among the ghosts that haunt this place. What do you say, Father? Because the stone is cemented down and the entrance bricked up, and there is no mason to be found? Then why not have waited till one could be fetched? Oh, it is wonderful, all wonderful. But who am I that I should dare to ask questions? When the Lord Abbot orders, the lay-brother obeys, for he also is wonderful--a wonderful abbot.

"There, he is tidy now--straight on his back and his feet pointing to the east, at least I hope so, for I could take no good bearings in the dark; and the whole wonderful story comes to its wonderful end. So give me your hand out of this hole, Father, and say your prayers over the sinful body of this wicked fellow who dared to marry the maid he loved, and to let out the souls of certain holy monks, or rather of their hired rufflers, for monks don't fight, because they wished to separate those whom God--I mean the devil--had joined together, and to add their temporalities to the estate of Mother Church."

Then the old priest, who was shivering with cold, and understood little of this dark talk, began to mumble his ritual, skipping those parts of it which he could not remember. So another grain was planted in the cornfields of death and immortality, though when and where it should grow and what it should bear he neither knew nor cared, who wished to escape from fears and fightings back to his accustomed cell.

It was done, and he and the bearers departed, beating their way against the rough, raw wind, and leaving Thomas Bolle to fill in the grave, which, so long as they were in sight, or rather hearing, he did with much vigour. When they were gone, however, he descended into the hole under pretence of trampling the loose soil, and there, to be out of the wind, sat himself down upon the feet of the corpse and waited, full of reflections.

"Sir Christopher dead," he muttered to himself. "I knew his grandfather when I was a lad, and my grandfather told me that he knew his grandfather's great-grandfather--say three hundred years of them--and now I sit on the cold toes of the last of the lot, butchered like a mad ox in his own yard by a Spanish priest and his hirelings, to win his wife's goods. Oh! yes, it is wonderful, all very wonderful; and the Lady Cicely dead, burnt like a common witch. And Emlyn dead--Emlyn, whom I have hugged many a time in this very churchyard, before they whipped her into marrying that fat old griever and made a monk of me.

"Well, I had her first kiss, and, by the saints! how she cursed old Stower all the way down yonder path. I stood behind that tree and heard her. She said he would die soon, and he did, and his brat with him. She said she would dance on his grave, and she did; I saw her do it in the moonlight the night after he was buried; dressed in white she danced on his grave! She always kept her promises, did Emlyn. That's her blood. If her mother had not been a gypsy witch, she wouldn't have married a Spaniard when every man in the place was after her for her beautiful

eyes. Emlyn is a witch too, or was, for they say she is dead; but I can't think it, she isn't the sort that dies. Still, she must be dead, and that's good for my soul. Oh! miserable man, what are you thinking? Get behind me, Satan, if you can find room. A grave is no place for you, Satan, but I wish you were in it with me, Emlyn. You must have been a witch, since, after you, I could never fancy any other woman, which is against nature, for all's fish that comes to a man's net. Evidently a witch of the worst sort, but, my darling, witch or no I wish you weren't dead, and I'll break that Abbot's neck for you yet, if it costs me my soul. Oh! Emlyn, my darling, my darling, do you remember how we kissed in the copse by the river? Never was there a woman who could love like you."

So he moaned on, rocking himself to and fro on the legs of the corpse, till at length a wild ray from the red, risen sun crept into the darksome hole, lighting first of all upon a mouldering skull which Bolle had thrown back among the soil. He rose up and pitched it out with a word that should not have passed the lips of a lay-brother, even as such thoughts should not have passed his mind. Then he set himself to a task which he had planned in the intervals of his amorous meditations--a somewhat grizzly task.

Drawing his knife from its sheath, he cut the rough stitching of the grave-clothes, and, with numb hands, dragged them away from the body's head.

The light went out behind a cloud, but, not to waste time, he began to feel the face.

"Sir Christopher's nose wasn't broken," he muttered to himself, "unless it were in that last fray, and then the bone would be loose, and this is stiff. No, no, he had a very pretty nose."

The light came again, and Thomas peered down at the dead face beneath him; then suddenly burst into a hoarse laugh.

"By all the saints! here's another of our Spaniard's tricks. It is drunken Andrew the Scotchman, turned into a dead English knight. Christopher killed him, and now he is Christopher. But where's Christopher?"

He thought a little while, then, jumping out of the grave, began to fill it in with all his might.

"You're Christopher," he said; "well, stop Christopher until I can prove you're Andrew. Good-bye, Sir Andrew Christopher; I am off to seek your betters. If you are dead, who may not be alive? Emlyn herself, perhaps, after this. Oh, the devil is playing a merry game round old Cranwell Towers to-night, and Thomas Bolle will take a hand in it."

He was right. The devil was playing a merry game. At least, so thought others beside Thomas. For instance, that misguided but honest bigot,

Martin, as he contemplated the still senseless form of Christopher, who, re-christened Brother Luiz, had been safely conveyed aboard the Great Yarmouth, and now, whether dead or living, which he was not sure, lay in the little cabin that had been allotted to the two of them. Almost did Martin, as he looked at him and shook his bald head, seem to smell brimstone in that close place, which, as he knew well, was the fiend's favourite scent.

The captain also, a sour-faced mariner with a squint, known in Dunwich, whence he hailed, as Miser Goody, because of his earnestness in pursuing wealth and his skill in hoarding it, seemed to feel the unhallowed influence of his Satanic Majesty. So far everything had gone wrong upon this voyage, which already had been delayed six weeks, that is, till the very worst period of the year, while he waited for certain mysterious letters and cargo which his owners said he must carry to Seville. Then he had sailed out of the river with a fair wind, only to be beaten back by fearful weather that nearly sank the ship.

Item: six of his best men had deserted because they feared a trip to Spain at that season, and he had been obliged to take others at hazard. Among them was a broad-shouldered, black-bearded fellow clad in a leather jerkin, with spurs upon his heels--bloody spurs--that he seemed to have found no time to take off. This hard rider came aboard in a skiff after the anchor was up, and, having cast the skiff adrift, offered good money for a passage to Spain or any other foreign port, and paid it down upon the nail. He, Goody, had taken the money, though with

a doubtful heart, and given a receipt to the name of Charles Smith, asking no questions, since for this gold he need not account to the owners. Afterwards also the man, having put off his spurs and soldier's jerkin, set himself to work among the crew, some of whom seemed to know him, and in the storm that followed showed that he was stout-hearted and useful, though not a skilled sailor.

Still, he mistrusted him of Charles Smith, and his bloody spurs, and had he not been so short-handed and taken the knave's broad pieces would have liked to set him ashore again when they were driven back into the river, especially as he heard that there had been man-slaying about Blossholme, and that Sir John Foterell lay slaughtered in the forest. Perhaps this Charles Smith had murdered him. Well, if so, it was no affair of his, and he could not spare a hand.

Now, when at length the weather had moderated, just as he was hauling up his anchor, comes the Abbot of Blossholme, on whose will he had been bidden to wait, with a lean-faced monk and another passenger, said to be a sick religious, wrapped up in blankets and to all appearance dead.

Why, wondered that astute mariner Goody, should a sick monk wear harness, for he felt it through the blankets as he helped him up the ladder, although monk's shoes were stuck upon his feet. And why, as he saw when the covering slipped aside for a moment, was his crown bound up with bloody cloths?

Indeed, he ventured to question the Abbot as to this mysterious matter while his Lordship was paying the passage money in his cabin, only to get a very sharp answer.

"Were you not commanded to obey me in all things, Captain Goody, and does obedience lie in prying out my business? Another word and I will report you to those in Spain who know how to deal with mischief-makers. If you would see Dunwich again, hold your peace."

"Your pardon, my Lord Abbot," said Goody; "but things go so upon this ship that I grow afraid. That is an ill voyage upon which one lifts anchor twice in the same port."

"You will not make them go better, captain, by seeking to nose out my affairs and those of the Church. Do you desire that I should lay its curse upon you?"

"Nay, your Reverence, I desire that you should take the curse off," answered Goody, who was very superstitious. "Do that and I'll carry a dozen sick priests to Spain, even though they choose to wear chain shirts--for penance."

The Abbot smiled, then, lifting his hand, pronounced some words in Latin, which, as he did not understand them, Goody found very comforting. As they passed his lips the Great Yarmouth began to move, for the sailors were hoisting up her anchor.



"As I do not accompany you on this voyage, fare you well," he said. "The saints go with you, as shall my prayers. Since you will not pass the Gibraltar Straits, where I hear many infidel pirates lurk, given good weather your voyage should be safe and easy. Again farewell. I commend Brother Martin and our sick friend to your keeping, and shall ask account of them when we meet again."

I pray it may not be this side of hell, for I do not like that Spanish Abbot and his passengers, dead or living, thought Goody to himself, as he bowed him from the cabin.

A minute later the Abbot, after a few earnest, hurried words with Martin, began to descend the ladder to the boat, that, manned by his own people, was already being drawn slowly through the water. As he did so he glanced back, and, in the clinging mist of dawn, which was almost as dense as wool, caught sight of the face of a man who had been ordered to hold the ladder, and knew it for that of Jeffrey Stokes, who had escaped from the slaying of Sir John--escaped with the damning papers that had cost his master's life. Yes, Jeffrey Stokes, no other. His lips shaped themselves to call out something, but before ever a syllable had passed them an accident happened.

To the Abbot it seemed as though the whole ship had struck him violently behind--so violently that he was propelled headfirst among the rowers in the boat, and lay there hurt and breathless.

"What is it?" called the captain, who heard the noise.

"The Abbot slipped, or the ladder slipped, I know not which," answered Jeffrey gruffly, staring at the toe of his sea-boot. "At least he is safe enough in the boat now," and, turning, he vanished aft into the mist, muttering to himself--

"A very good kick, though a little high. Yet I wish it had been off another kind of ladder. That murdering rogue would look well with a rope round his neck. Still I dared do no more and it served to stop his lying mouth before he betrayed me. Oh, my poor master, my poor old master!"

Bruised and sore as he was--and he was very sore--within little over an hour Abbot Maldon was back at the ruin of Cranwell Towers. It seemed strange that he should go there, but in truth his uneasy heart would not let him rest. His plans had succeeded only far too well. Sir John Foterell was dead--a crime, no doubt, but necessary, for had the knight lived to reach London with that evidence in his pocket, his own life and those of many others might have paid the price of it, since who knows what truths may be twisted from a victim on the rack? Maldon had always feared the rack; it was a nightmare that haunted his sleep, although the ambitious cunning of his nature and the cause he served with heart and soul prompted him to put himself in continual danger of that fate.

In an unguarded moment, when his tongue was loosed with wine, he had placed himself in the power of Sir John Foterell, hoping to win him to the side of Spain, and afterwards, forgetting it, made of him a dreadful enemy. Therefore this enemy must die, for had he lived, not only might he himself have died in place of him, but all his plans for the rebellion of the Church against the Crown must have come to nothing. Yes, yes, that deed was lawful, and pardon for it assured should the truth become known. Till this morning he had hoped that it never would be known, but now Jeffrey Stokes had escaped upon the ship Great Yarmouth.

Oh, if only he had seen him a minute earlier; if only something--could it have been that impious knave, Jeffrey? he wondered--had not struck him so violently in the back and hurled him to the boat, where he lay almost senseless till the vessel had glided from them down the river! Well, she was gone, and Jeffrey in her. He was but a common serving-man, after all, who, if he knew anything, would never have the wit to use his knowledge, although it was true he had been wise enough to fly from England.

No papers had been discovered upon Sir John's body, and no money. Without doubt the old knight had found time to pass them on to Jeffrey, who now fled the kingdom disguised as a sailor. Oh! what ill chance had put him on board the same vessel with Sir Christopher Harflete?

Well, Sir Christopher would probably die; were Brother Martin a little less of a fool he would certainly die, but the fact remained that this monk, though able, in such matters was a fool, with a conscience that would not suit itself to circumstances. If Christopher could be saved, Martin would save him, as he had already saved him in the shed, even if he handed him over to the Inquisition afterwards. Still, he might slip through his fingers or the vessel might be lost, as was devoutly to be prayed, and seemed not unlikely at this season of the year. Also, the first opportunity must be taken to send certain messages to Spain that might result in hampering the activities of Brother Martin, and of Sir Christopher Harflete, if he lived to reach that land.

Meanwhile, reflected Maldon, other things had gone wrong. He had wished to proclaim his wardship over Cicely and to immure her in a nunnery because of her great possessions, which he needed for the cause, but he had not wished her death. Indeed, he was fond of the girl, whom he had known from a child, and her innocent blood was a weight that he ill could bear, he who at heart always shrank from the shedding of blood. Still, Heaven had killed her, not he, and the matter could not now be mended. Also, as she was dead, her inheritance would, he thought, fall into his hands without further trouble, for he--a mitred Abbot with a seat among the Lords of the realm--had friends in London, who, for a fee, could stifle inquiry into all this far-off business.

No, no, he must not be faint-hearted, who, after all, had much for which to be thankful. Meanwhile the cause went on--that great cause of the

threatened Church to which he had devoted his life. Henry the heretic would fall; the Spanish Emperor, whose spy he was and who loved him well, would invade and take England. He would yet live to see the Holy Inquisition at work at Westminster, and himself--yes, himself; had it not been hinted to him?--enthroned at Canterbury, the Cardinal's red hat he coveted upon his head, and--oh, glorious thought!--perhaps afterwards wearing the triple crown at Rome.

Rain was falling heavily when the Abbot, with his escort of two monks and half-a-dozen men-at-arms, rode up to Cranwell. The house was now but a smoking heap of ashes, mingled with charred beams and burnt clay, in the midst of which, scarcely visible through the clouds of steam caused by the falling rain, rose the grim old Norman tower, for on its stonework the flames had beat vainly.

"Why have we come here?" asked one of the monks, surveying the dismal scene with a shudder.

"To seek the bodies of the Lady Cicely and her woman, and give them Christian burial," answered the Abbot.

"After bringing them to a most unchristian death," muttered the monk to himself, then added aloud, "You were ever charitable, my Lord Abbot, and though she defied you, such is that noble lady's due. As for the nurse

Emlyn, she was a witch, and did but come to the end that she deserved, if she be really dead."

"What mean you?" asked the Abbot sharply.

"I mean that, being a witch, the fire may have turned from her."

"Pray God, then, that it turned from her mistress also! But it cannot be. Only a fiend could have lived in the heat of that furnace; look, even the tower is gutted."

"No, it cannot be," answered the monk; "so, since we shall never find them, let us chant the Burial Office over this great grave of theirs and begone--the sooner the better, for yon place has a haunted look."

"Not till we have searched out their bones, which must be beneath the tower yonder, whereon we saw them last," replied the Abbot, adding in a low voice, "Remember, Brother, the Lady Cicely had jewels of great price, which, if they were wrapped in leather, the fire may have spared, and these are among our heritage. At Shefton they cannot be found; therefore they must be here, and the seeking of them is no task for common folk. That is why I hurried hither so fast. Do you understand?"

The monk nodded his head. Having dismounted, they gave their horses to the serving-men and began to make an examination of the ruin, the Abbot leaning on his inferior's arm, for he was in great pain from the blow

in the back that Jeffrey had administered with his sea-boot, and the bruises which he had received in falling to the boat.

First they passed under the gatehouse, which still stood, only to find that the courtyard beyond was so choked with smouldering rubbish that they could make no entry--for it will be remembered that the house had fallen outwards. Here, however, lying by the carcass of a horse, they found the body of one of the men whom Christopher had killed in his last stand, and caused it to be borne out. Then, followed by their people, leaving the dead man in the gateway, they walked round the ruin, keeping on the inner side of the moat, till they came to the little pleasure garden at its back.

"Look," said the monk in a frightened voice, pointing to some scorched bushes that had been a bower.

The Abbot did so, but for a while could see nothing because of the wreaths of steam. Presently a puff of wind blew these aside, and there, standing hand in hand, he beheld the figures of two women. His men beheld them also, and called aloud that these were the ghosts of Cicely and Emlyn. As they spoke the figures, still hand in hand, began to walk towards them, and they saw that they were Cicely and Emlyn indeed, but in the flesh, quite unharmed.

For a moment there was deep silence; then the Abbot asked--

"Whence come you, Mistress Cicely?"

"Out of the fire," she answered in a small, cold voice.

"Out of the fire! How did you live through the fire?"

"God sent His angel to save us," she answered, again in that small voice.

"A miracle," muttered the monk; "a true miracle!"

"Or mayhap Emlyn Stower's witchcraft," exclaimed one of the men behind; and Maldon started at his words.

"Lead me to my husband, my Lord Abbot, lest, thinking me dead, his heart should break," said Cicely.

Now again there was silence so deep that they could hear the patter of every drop of falling rain. Twice the Abbot strove to speak, but could not, but at the third effort his words came.

"The man you call your husband, but who was not your husband, but your ravisher, was slain in the fray last night, Cicely Foterell."

She stood quite quiet for a while, as though considering his words, then said, in the same unnatural voice--



"You lie, my Lord Abbot. You were ever a liar, like your father the devil, for the angel told me so in the midst of the fire. Also he told me that, though I seemed to see him fall, Christopher is alive upon the earth--yes, and other things, many other things;" and she passed her hand before her eyes and held it there, as though to shut out the sight of her enemy's face.

Now the Abbot trembled in his terror, he who knew that he lied, though at that time none else there knew it. It was as though suddenly he had been haled before the Judgment-seat where all secrets must be bared.

"Some evil spirit has entered into you," he said huskily.

She dropped her hand, pointing at him.

"Nay, nay; I never knew but one evil spirit, and he stands before me."

"Cicely," he went on, "cease your blaspheming. Alas! that I must tell it you. Sir Christopher Harflete is dead and buried in yonder churchyard."

"What! So soon, and all uncoffined, he who was a noble knight? Then you buried him living, and, living, in a day to come he shall rise up against you. Hear my words, all. Christopher Harflete shall rise up living and give testimony against this devil in a monk's robe, and afterwards--afterwards--" and she laughed shrilly, then suddenly fell

down and lay still.

Now Emlyn, the dark and handsome, as became her Spanish, or perhaps gypsy blood, who all this while had stood silent, her arms folded upon her high bosom, leaned down and looked at her. Then she straightened herself, and her face was like the face of a beautiful fiend.

"She is dead!" she screamed. "My dove is dead. She whom these breasts nursed, the greatest lady of all the wolds and all the vales, the Lady of Blossholme, of Cranwell and of Shefton, in whose veins ran the blood of mighty nobles, aye, and of old kings, is dead, murdered by a beggarly foreign monk, who not ten days gone butchered her father also yonder by King's Grave--yonder by the mere. Oh! the arrow in his throat! the arrow in his throat! I cursed the hand that shot it, and to-day that hand is blue beneath the mould. So, too, I curse you, Maldonado, evil-gifted one, Abbot consecrated by Satan, you and all your herd of butchers!" and she broke into the stream of Spanish imprecations whereof the Abbot knew the meaning well.

Presently Emlyn paused and looked behind her at the smouldering ruins.

"This house is burned," she cried; "well, mark Emlyn's words: even so shall your house burn, while your monks run squeaking like rats from a flaming rick. You have stolen the lands; they shall be taken from you, and yours also, every acre of them. Not enough shall be left to bury you in, for, priest, you'll need no burial. The fowls of the air shall bury

you, and that's the nearest you will ever get to heaven--in their filthy crops. Murderer, if Christopher Harflete is dead, yet he shall live, as his lady swore, for his seed shall rise up against you. Oh! I forgot; how can it, how can it, seeing that she is dead with him, and their bridal coverlet has become a pall woven by the black monks? Yet it shall, it shall. Christopher Harflete's seed shall sit where the Abbots of Blossholme sat, and from father to son tell the tale of the last of them--the Spaniard who plotted against England's king and overshot himself."

Her rage veered like a hurricane wind. Forgetting the Abbot, she turned upon the monk at his side and cursed him. Then she cursed the hired men-at-arms, those present and those absent, many by name, and lastly--greatest crime of all--she cursed the Pope and the King of Spain, and called to God in heaven and Henry of England upon earth to avenge her Lady Cicely's wrongings, and the murder of Sir John Foterell, and the murder of Christopher Harflete, on each and all of them, individually and separately.

So fierce and fearful was her onslaught that all who heard her were reduced to utter silence. The Abbot and the monk leaned against each other, the soldiers crossed themselves and muttered prayers, while one of them, running up, fell upon his knees and assured her that he had had nothing to do with all this business, having only returned from a journey last night, and been called thither that morning.

Emlyn, who had paused from lack of breath, listened to him, and said--

"Then I take the curse off you and yours, John Athey. Now lift up my lady and bear her to the church, for there we will lay her out as becomes her rank; though not with her jewels, her great and priceless jewels, for which she was hunted like a doe. She must lie without her jewels; her pearls and coronet, and rings, her stomacher and necklets of bright gems, that were worth so much more than those beggarly acres--those that once a Sultan's woman wore. They are lost, though perhaps yonder Abbot has found them. Sir John Foterell bore them to London for safe keeping, and good Sir John is dead; footpads set on him in the forest, and an arrow shot from behind pierced his throat. Those who killed him have the jewels, and the dead bride must lie without them, adorned in the naked beauty that God gave to her. Lift her, John Athey, and you monks, set up your funeral chant; we'll to the church. The bride who knelt before the altar shall lie there before the altar--Clement Maldonado's last offering to God. First the father, then the husband, and now the wife--the sweet, new-made wife!"

So she raved on, while they stood before her dumb-founded, and the man lifted up Cicely. Then suddenly this same Cicely, whom all thought dead, opened her eyes and struggled from his arms to her feet.

"See," screamed Emlyn; "did I not tell you that Harflete's seed should live to be avenged upon all your tribe, and she stands there who will bear it? Now where shall we shelter till England hears this tale?"

Cranwell is down, though it shall rise again, and Shefton is stolen.

Where shall we shelter?"

"Thrust away that woman," said the Abbot in a hoarse voice, "for her witchcrafts poison the air. Set the Lady Cicely on a horse and bear her to our Nunnery of Blossholme, where she shall be tended."

The men advanced to do his bidding, though very doubtfully. But Emlyn, hearing his words, ran to the Abbot and whispered something in his ear in a foreign tongue that caused him to cross himself and stagger back from her.

"I have changed my mind," he said to the servants. "Mistress Emlyn reminds me that between her and her lady there is the tie of foster-motherhood. They may not be separated as yet. Take them both to the Nunnery, where they shall dwell, and as for this woman's words, forget them, for she was mad with fear and grief, and knew not what she said. May God and His saints forgive her, as I do."