

CHAPTER XIV

JACOB AND THE JEWELS

Cicely's journey to London was strange enough to her, who never before had travelled farther than fifty miles from her home, and but once as a child spent a month in a town when visiting an aunt at Lincoln. She went in ease, it is true, for Commissioner Legh did not love hard travelling, and for this reason they started late and halted early, either at some good inn, if in those days any such places could be called good, or perhaps in a monastery where he claimed of the best that the frightened monks had to offer. Indeed, as she observed, his treatment of these poor folk was cruel, for he blustered and threatened and inquired, accusing them of crimes that they had not committed, and finally, although he had no mission to them at the time, extracted great gifts, saying that if these were not forthcoming he would make a note and return later. Also he got hold of tale-bearers, and wrote down all their scandalous and lying stories told against those whose bread they ate.

Thus, long before they saw Charing Cross, Cicely came to hate this proud, avaricious and overbearing man, who hid a savage nature under a cloak of virtue, and whilst serving his own ends, mouthed great words about God and the King. Still, she who was schooled in adversity, learned to hide her heart, fearing to make an enemy of one who could ruin her, and forced Emlyn, much against her will, to do the same. Moreover, there were worse things than that since, being beautiful, some

of his companions talked to her in a way she could not misunderstand, till at length Thomas Bolle, coming on one of them, thrashed him as he had never been thrashed before, after which there was trouble that was only appeased by a gift.

Yet on the whole things went well. No one molested the King's Visitor or those with him, the autumn weather held fine, the baby boy kept his health, and the country through which they passed was new to her and full of interest.

At last one evening they rode from Barnet into the great city, which she thought a most marvellous place, who had never seen such a multitude of houses or of men running to and fro about their business up and down the narrow streets that at night were lit with lamps. Now there had been a great discussion where they were to lodge, Dr. Legh saying that he knew of a house suitable to them. But Emlyn would not hear of this place, where she was sure they would be robbed, for the wealth that they carried secretly in jewels bore heavily on her mind. Remembering a cousin of her mother's of the name of Smith, a goldsmith, who till within a year or two before was alive and dwelling in Cheapside, she said that they would seek him out.

Thither then they rode, guided by one of the Visitor's clerks, not he whom Bolle had beaten, but another, and at last, after some search, found a dingy house in a court and over it a sign on which were painted three balls and the name of Jacob Smith. Emlyn dismounted and, the door

being open, entered, to be greeted by an old, white-bearded man with horn spectacles thrust up over his forehead and dark eyes like her own, since the same gypsy blood ran strong in both of them.

What passed between them Cicely did not hear, but presently the old man came out with Emlyn, and looked her and Bolle up and down sharply for a long while as though to take their measures. At length he said that he understood from his cousin, whom he now saw for the first time for over thirty years, that the two of them and their man desired lodgings, which, as he had empty rooms, he would be pleased to give them if they would pay the price.

Cicely asked how much this might be, and on his naming a sum, ten silver shillings a week for the three of them and their horses, that would be stabled close by, told Emlyn to pay him a pound on account. This he took, biting the gold to see that it was good, but bidding them in to inspect the rooms before he pouched it. They did so, and finding them clean and commodious if somewhat dark, closed the bargain with him, after which they dismissed the clerk to take their address to Dr. Legh, who had promised to advise them so soon as he could put their business forward.

When he was gone and Thomas Bolle, conducted by Smith's apprentice, had led off the three horses and the packbeast, the old man changed his manner, and conducting them into a parlour at the back of his shop, sent his housekeeper, a middle-aged woman with a pleasant face, to make ready

food for them while he produced cordials from squat Dutch bottles which he made them drink. Indeed he was all kindness to them, being, as he explained, rejoiced to see one of his own blood, for he had no relations living, his wife and their two children having died in one of the London sicknesses. Also he was Blossholme born, though he had left that place fifty years before, and had known Cicely's grandfather and played with her father when he was a boy. So he plied them with question after question, some of which they thought it was not to answer, for he was a merry and talkative old man.

"Aha!" he said, "you would prove me before you trust me, and who can blame you in this naughty world? But perhaps I know more about you all than you think, since in this trade my business is to learn many things. For instance, I have heard that there was a great trying of witches down at Blossholme lately, whereat a certain Abbot came off worst, also that the famous Carfax jewels had been lost, which vexed the said holy Abbot. They were jewels indeed, or so I have heard, for among them were two pink pearls worth a king's ransom--or so I have heard. Great pity that they should be lost, since my Lady there would own them otherwise, and much should I have liked, who am a little man in that trade, to set my old eyes upon them. Well, well, perhaps I shall, perhaps I shall yet, for that which is lost is sometimes found again. Now here comes your dinner; eat, eat, we'll talk afterwards."

This was the first of many pleasant meals which they shared with their host, Jacob Smith. Soon Emlyn found from inquiries that she made among

his neighbours without seeming to do so, that this cousin of hers bore an excellent name and was trusted by all.

"Then why should we not trust him also?" asked Cicely, "who must find friends and put faith in some one."

"Even with the jewels, Mistress?"

"Even with the jewels, for such things are his business, and they would be safer in his strong chest than tacked into our garments, where the thought of them haunts me night and day."

"Let us wait a while," said Emlyn, "for once they were in that box how do we know if we should get them out again?"

On the morrow of this talk the Visitor Legh came to see them, and had no cheerful tale to tell. According to him the Lord Cromwell declared that as the Abbot of Blossholme claimed these Shefton estates, the King stood, or would soon stand, in the shoes of the said Abbot of Blossholme, and therefore the King claimed them and could not surrender them. Moreover, money was so wanted at Court just then, and here Legh looked hard at them, "that there could be no talk of parting with anything of value except in return for a consideration," and he looked at them harder still.

"And how can my Lady give that," broke in Emlyn sharply, for she feared

lest Cicely should commit herself. "To-day she is but a homeless pauper, save for a few pounds in gold, and even if she should come to her own again, as your Worship knows, her first year's profits are all promised."

"Ah!" said the Doctor sadly, "doubtless the case is hard. Only," he added, with cunning emphasis, "a tale has just reached me that the Lady Harflete has wealth hidden away which came to her from her mother; trinkets of value and such things."

Now Cicely coloured, for the man's little eyes pierced her like gintlets, and her powers of deceit were very small. But this was not so with Emlyn, who, as she said, could play thief to catch a thief.

"Listen, Sir," she said, with a secret air, "you have heard true. There were some things of value--why should we hide it from you, our good friend? But, alas! that greedy rogue, the Abbot of Blossholme, has them. He has stripped my poor Lady as bare as a fowl for roasting. Get them back from him, Sir, and on her behalf I say she'll give you half of them, will you not, my Lady?"

"Surely," said Cicely. "The Doctor, to whom we owe so much, will be most welcome to the half of any movables of mine that he can recover from the Abbot Maldon," and she paused, for the fib stuck in her throat. Moreover, she knew herself to be the colour of a peony.

Happily the Commissioner did not notice her blushes, or if he did, he put them down to grief and anger.

"The Abbot Maldon," he grumbled, "always the Abbot Maldon. Oh! what a wicked thief must be that high-stomached Spaniard who does not scruple first to make orphans and then to rob them? A black-hearted traitor, too. Do you know that at this moment he stirs up rebellion in the north? Well, I'll see him on the rack before I have done. Have you a list of those movables, Madam?"

Cicely said no, and Emlyn added that one should be made from memory.

"Good; I'll see you again to-morrow or the next day, and meanwhile fear not, I'll be as active in your business as a cat after a sparrow. Oh, my rat of a Spanish Abbot, you wait till I get my claws into your fat back. Farewell, my Lady Harflete, farewell. Mistress Stower, I must away to deal with other priests almost as wicked," and he departed, still muttering objurgations on the Abbot.

"Now, I think the time has come to trust Jacob Smith," said Emlyn, when the door closed behind him, "for he may be honest, whereas this Doctor is certainly a villain; also, the man has heard something and suspects us. Ah! there you are, Cousin Smith, come in, if you please, since we desire to talk with you for a minute. Come in, and be so good as to lock the door behind you."

Five minutes later all the jewels, whereof not one was wanting, lay on the table before old Jacob, who stared at them with round eyes.

"The Carfax gems," he muttered, "the Carfax gems of which I have so often heard; those that the old Crusader brought from the East, having sacked them from a Sultan; from the East, where they talk of them still. A sultan's wealth, unless, indeed, they came straight from the New Jerusalem and were an angel's gauds. And do you say that you two women have carried these priceless things tacked in your cloaks, which, as I have seen, you throw down here and there and leave behind you? Oh, fools, fools, even among women incomparable fools! Fellow-travellers with Dr. Legh also, who would rob a baby of its bauble."

"Fools or no," exclaimed Emlyn tartly, "we have got them safe enough after they have run some risks, as I pray that you may keep them, Cousin Smith."

Old Jacob threw a cloth over the gems, and slowly transferred them to his pocket.

"This is an upper floor," he explained, "and the door is locked, yet some one might put a ladder up to the window. Were I in the street I should know by the glitter in the light that there were precious things here. Stay, they are not safe in my pocket even for an hour," and going to the wall he did something to a panel in the wainscot causing it to open and reveal a space behind it where lay sundry wrapped-up parcels,

among which he placed, not all, but a portion of the gems. Then he went to other panels that opened likewise, showing more parcels, and in the holes behind these he distributed the rest of the treasure.

"There, foolish women," he said, "since you have trusted me, I will trust you. You have seen my big strong-boxes in my office, and doubtless thought I keep all my little wares there. Well, so does every thief in London, for they have searched them twice and gained some store of pewter; I remember that some of it was discovered again in the King's household. But behind these panels all is safe, though no woman would ever have thought of a device so simple and so sure."

For a moment Emlyn could find no answer, perhaps because of her indignation, but Cicely asked sweetly--

"Do you ever have fires in London, Master Smith? It seems to me that I have heard of such things, and then--in a hurry, you know----"

Smith thrust up his horned spectacles and looked at her in mild astonishment.

"To think," he said, "that I should live to learn wisdom out of the mouth of babes and sucklers----"

"Sucklings," suggested Cicely.

"Sucklers or sucklings, it means the same thing--women," he replied testily; then added, with a chuckle, "Well, well, my Lady, you are right. You have caught out Jacob at his own game. I never thought of fire, though it is true we had one next door last year, when I ran out with my bed and forgot all about the gold and stones. I'll have new hiding-places made in the masonry of the cellar, where no fire would hurt. Ah! you women would never have thought of that, who carry treasure sewn up in a nightshift."

Now Emlyn could bear it no longer.

"And how would you have us carry it, Cousin Smith?" she asked indignantly. "Tied about our necks, or hanging from our heels? Well do I remember my mother telling me that you were always a simple youth, and that your saint must have been a very strong one who brought you safe to London and showed you how to earn a living there, or else that you had married a woman of excellent intelligence--though it is plain now she has long been dead. Well, well," she added, with a laugh, "cling to your man's vanities, you son of a woman, and since you are so clever, give us of your wisdom, for we need it. But first let me tell you that I have rescued those very jewels from a fire, and by hiding them in masonry in a vault."

"It is the fashion of the female to wrangle when she has the worst of the case," said Jacob, with a twinkle in his eye. "So, daughter of man, set out your trouble. Perchance the wisdom that I have inherited from

my mothers straight back to Eve may help that which your mothers lacked. Now, have you done with jests. I listen, if it pleases you to tell me."

So, having first invoked the curse of Heaven on him if ever he should breathe a word, Emlyn, with the help of Cicely, repeated the whole matter from the beginning, and the candles were lighted ere ever her tale was done. All this while Jacob Smith sat opposite to them, saying little, save now and again to ask a shrewd question. At length, when they had finished, he exclaimed--

"Truly women are fools!"

"We have heard that before, Master Smith," replied Cicely; "but this time--why?"

"Not to have unbosomed to me before, which would have saved you a week of time, although, as it happens, I knew more of your story than you chose to tell, and therefore the days have not been altogether wasted. Well, to be brief, this Dr. Legh is a ravenous rogue."

"O Solomon, to have discovered that!" exclaimed Emlyn.

"One whose only aim is to line his nest with your feathers, some of which you have promised him, as, indeed, you were right to do. Now he has got wind of these jewels, which is not wonderful, seeing that such things cannot be hid. If you buried them in a coffin, six foot

underground, still they would shine through the solid earth and declare themselves. This is his plan--to strip you of everything ere his master, Cromwell, gets a hold of you; and if you go to him empty-handed, what chance has your suit with Vicar-General Cromwell, the hungriest shark of all--save one?"

"We understand," said Emlyn; "but what is your plan, Cousin Smith?"

"Mine? I don't know that I have one. Still, here is that which might do. Though I seem so small and humble, I am remembered at Court--when money is wanted, and just now much money is wanted, for soon they will be in arms in Yorkshire--and therefore I am much remembered. Now, if you care to give Dr. Legh the go-by and leave your cause to me, perhaps I might serve you as cheaply as another."

"At what charge?" blurted out Emlyn.

The old man turned on her indignantly, asking--

"Cousin, how have I defrauded you or your mistress, that you should insult me to my face? Go to! you do not trust me. Go to, with your jewels, and seek some other helper!" and he went to the panelling as though to collect them again.

"Nay, nay, Master Smith," said Cicely, catching him by the arm; "be not angry with Emlyn. Remember that of late we have learned in a hard

school, with Abbot Maldon and Dr. Legh for masters. At least I trust you, so forsake me not, who have no other to whom to turn in all my troubles, which are many," and as she spoke the great tears that had gathered in her blue eyes fell upon the child's face, and woke him, so that she must turn aside to quiet him, which she was glad to do.

"Grieve not," said the kind-hearted old man, in distress; "'tis I should grieve, whose brutal words have made you weep. Moreover, Emlyn is right; even foolish women should not trust the first Jack with whom they take a lodging. Still, since you swear that you do in your kindness, I'll try to show myself not all unworthy, my Lady Harflete. Now, what is it you want from the King? Justice on the Abbot? That you'll get for nothing, if his Grace can give it, for this same Abbot stirs up rebellion against him. No need, therefore, to set out his past misdeeds. A clean title to your large inheritance, which the Abbot claims? That will be more difficult, since the King claims through him. At best, money must be paid for it. A declaration that your marriage is good and your boy born in lawful wedlock? Not so hard, but will cost something. The annulment of the sentence of witchcraft on you both? Easy, for the Abbot passed it. Is there aught more?"

"Yes, Master Smith; the good nuns who befriended me--I would save their house and lands to them. Those jewels are pledged to do it, if it can be done."

"A matter of money, Lady--a mere matter of money. You will have to buy

the property, that is all. Now, let us see what it will cost, if fortune goes with me," and he took pen and paper and began to write down figures.

Finally he rose, sighing and shaking his head. "Two thousand pounds," he groaned; "a vast sum, but I can't lessen it by a shilling--there are so many to be bought. Yes; £1000 in gifts and £1000 as loan to his Majesty, who does not repay."

"Two thousand pounds!" exclaimed Cicely in dismay; "oh! how shall I find so much, whose first year's rents are already pledged?"

"Know you the worth of those jewels?" asked Jacob, looking at her.

"Nay; the half of that, perhaps."

"Let us say double that, and then right cheap."

"Well, if so," replied Cicely, with a gasp, "where shall we sell them? Who has so much money?"

"I'll try to find it, or what is needful. Now, Cousin Emlyn," he added sarcastically, "you see where my profit lies. I buy the gems at half their value, and the rest I keep."

"In your own words: go to!" said Emlyn, "and keep your gibes until we

have more leisure."

The old man thought a while, and said--

"It grows late, but the evening is pleasant, and I think I need some air. That crack-brained, red-haired fellow of yours will watch you while I am gone, and for mercy's sake be careful with those candles. Nay, nay; you must have no fire, you must go cold. After what you said to me, I can think of naught but fire. It is for this night only. By to-morrow evening I'll prepare a place where Abbot Maldon himself might sit unscorched in the midst of hell. But till then make out with clothes. I have some furs in pledge that I will send up to you. It is your own fault, and in my youth we did not need a fire on an autumn day. No more, no more," and he was gone, nor did they see him again that night.

On the following morning, as they sat at their breakfast, Jacob Smith appeared, and began to talk of many things, such as the badness of the weather--for it rained--the toughness of the ham, which he said was not to be compared to those they cured at Blossholme in his youth, and the likeness of the baby boy to his mother.

"Indeed, no," broke in Cicely, who felt that he was playing with them; "he is his father's self; there is no look of me in him."

"Oh!" answered Jacob; "well, I'll give my judgment when I see the father. By the way, let me read that note again which the cloaked man

brought to Emlyn."

Cicely gave it to him, and he studied it carefully; then said, in an indifferent voice--

"The other day I saw a list of Christian captives said to have been recovered from the Turks by the Emperor Charles at Tunis, and among them was one 'Huflit,' described as an English señor, and his servant. I wonder now----"

Cicely sprang upon him.

"Oh! cruel wretch," she said, "to have known this so long and not to have told me!"

"Peace, Lady," he said, retreating before her; "I only learned it at eleven of the clock last night, when you were fast asleep. Yesterday is not this same day, and therefore 'tis the other day, is it not?"

"Surely you might have woke me. But, swift, where is he now?"

"How can I know? Not here, at least. But the writing said----"

"Well, what did the writing say?"

"I am trying to think--my memory fails me at times; perhaps you will

find the same thing when you have my years, should it please Heaven----"

"Oh! that it might please Heaven to make you speak! What said the writing?"

"Ah! I have it now. It said, in a note appended amidst other news, for--did I tell you this was a letter from his Grace's ambassador in Spain? and, oh! his is the vilest scrawl to read. Nay, hurry me not--it said that this 'Sir Huflit'--the ambassador has put a query against his name--and his servant--yes, yes, I am sure it said his servant too--well, that they both of them, being angry at the treatment they had met with from the infidel Turks--no, I forgot to add there were three of them, one a priest, who did otherwise. Well, as I said, being angry, they stopped there to serve with the Spaniards against the Turks till the end of that campaign. There, that is all."

"How little is your all!" exclaimed Cicely. "Yet, 'tis something. Oh! why should a married man stop across the seas to be revenged on poor ignorant Turks?"

"Why should he not?" interrupted Emlyn, "when he deems himself a widower, as does your lord?"

"Yes, I forgot; he thinks me dead, who doubtless himself will be dead, if he is not so already, seeing that those wicked, murderous Turks will kill him," and she began to weep.

"I should have added," said Jacob hastily, "that in a second letter, of later date, the ambassador declares that the Emperor's war against the Turks is finished for this season, and that the Englishmen who were with him fought with great honour and were all escaped unharmed, though this time he gives no names."

"All escaped! If my husband were dead, who could not die meanly or without fame, how could he say that they were all escaped? Nay, nay; he lives, though who knows if he will return? Perchance he will wander off elsewhere, or stay and wed again."

"Impossible," said old Jacob, bowing to her; "having called you wife--impossible."

"Impossible," echoed Emlyn, "having such a score to settle with yonder Maldon! A man may forget his love, especially if he deems her buried. But as he stayed foreign to fight the Turk, who wronged him, so he'll come home to fight the Abbot, who ruined him and slew his bride."

There followed a silence, which the goldsmith, who felt it somewhat painful, hastened to break, saying--

"Yes, doubtless he will come home; for aught we know he may be here already. But meanwhile we also have our score against this Abbot, a bad one, though think not for his sake that all Abbots are bad, for I have

known some who might be counted angels upon earth, and, having gone to martyrdom, doubtless to-day are angels in heaven. Now, my Lady, I will tell you what I have done, hoping that it will please you better than it does me. Last night I saw the Lord Cromwell, with whom I have many dealings, at his house in Austin Friars, and told him the case, of which, as I thought, that false villain Legh had said nothing to him, purposing to pick the plums out of the pudding ere he handed on the suet to his master. He read your deeds and hunted up some petition from the Abbot, with which he compared them; then made a note of my demands and asked straight out--How much?

"I told him £1000 on loan to the King, which would not be asked for back again, the said loan to be discharged by the grant to me--that is, to you--of all the Abbey lands, in addition to your own, when the said Abbey lands are sequestered, as they will be shortly. To this he agreed, on behalf of his Grace, who needs money much, but inquired as to himself. I replied £500 for him and his jackals, including Dr. Legh, of which no account would be asked. He told me it was not enough, for after the jackals had their pickings nothing would be left for him but the bones; I, who asked so much, must offer more, and he made as though to dismiss me. At the door I turned and said I had a wonderful pink pearl that he, who loved jewels, might like to see--a pink pearl worth many abbeys. He said, 'Show it;' and, oh! he gloated over it like a maid over her first love-letter. 'If there were two of these, now!' he whispered.

"Two, my Lord!" I answered; 'there's no fellow to that pearl in the

whole world,' though it is true that as I said the words, the setting of its twin, that was pinned to my inner shirt, pricked me sorely, as if in anger. Then I took it up again, and for the second time began to bow myself out.

"'Jacob,' he said, 'you are an old friend, and I'll stretch my duty for you. Leave the pearl--his Grace needs that £1000 so sorely that I must keep it against my will,' and he put out his hand to take it, only to find that I had covered it with my own.

"'First the writing, then its price, my Lord. Here is a memorandum of it set out fair, to save you trouble, if it pleases you to sign.'

"He read it through, then, taking a pen, scored out the clause as regards acquittal of the witchcraft, which, he said, must be looked into by the King in person or by his officers, but all the rest he signed, undertaking to hand over the proper deeds under the great seal and royal hand upon payment of £1000. Being able to do no better, I said that would serve, and left him your pearl, he promising, on his part, to move his Majesty to receive you, which I doubt not he will do quickly for the sake of the £1000. Have I done well?"

"Indeed, yes," exclaimed Cicely. "Who else could have done half so well----?"

As the words left her lips there came a loud knocking at the door of

the house, and Jacob ran down to open it. Presently he returned with a messenger in a splendid coat, who bowed to Cicely and asked if she were the Lady Harflete. On her replying that such was her name, he said that he bore to her the command of his Grace the King to attend upon him at three o'clock of that afternoon at his Palace of Whitehall, together with Emlyn Stower and Thomas Bolle, there to make answer to his Majesty concerning a certain charge of witchcraft that had been laid against her and them, which summons she would neglect at her peril.

"Sir, I will be there," answered Cicely; "but tell me, do I come as a prisoner?"

"Nay," replied the herald, "since Master Jacob Smith, in whom his Grace has trust, has consented to be answerable for you."

"And for the £1000," muttered Jacob, as, with many salutations, he showed the royal messenger to the door, not neglecting to thrust a gold piece into his hand that he waved behind him in farewell.