BOOK 1: THE LUCINDA TRILOGY

LUCINDA: NAILS OF THE CRUCIFIXION

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LUCINDA:

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CHAPTER ONE

Early June, 2013 AD

Jacinta stood in the shadow of a doorway. She was watching a figure twenty yards away, clearing litter from the entrance to her premises. In spite of it being summer, an unseasonable, raw wind blew across the run-down street of grey, Victorian buildings, bringing with it the occasional flurry of rain or hail. The pavements were cracked and uneven. The cobbled road was still littered with last night’s rubbish of fast food containers, plastic cups, empty beer cans and potato chips. Council cleaners seldom came here. The street played host to the kind of shops one might expect in such a seedy area: a pawn-broker, an adult sex shop, several small fast food businesses, their front facades in need of paint, a massage parlour, a bar. Jacinta made a wry smile as she continued to examine the tall, slim woman, with a green bandana tied round her head. She had finished sweeping the litter into the gutter; she had straightened up and was now leaning on her broom. So this is the person, thought Jacinta, whom my masters have selected to save the world from destruction. She seemed an unlikely choice to Jacinta. She wondered what was special about this woman. For a moment, Jacinta felt a pang of envy. She had been in the business for years and had never been called upon to do anything particularly significant or historic. And yet, here was this unknown entity in front of her, probably just scraping a living from what she did, about to be plucked from obscurity and sent off to fight the ungodly Fallen Lords of the Paths of Darkness. Jacinta sighed. She had given all her strengths and talents in the service of the Path of Purest Light for forty years but she had little to show for it. And what thanks had she received? None, really, apart from a few nods and smiles in her direction, an occasional pat on the head. She had done nothing really tangible that
she could boast about to her grandchildren; if she had any, which she
didn’t. But she had to admit to herself that she was fit only to be a
plodding foot soldier. Her talents had nothing particularly remarkable
about them. Foot soldiers were, of course, needed to keep the cogs of
the machine going, so I suppose in that way I am important. But this
nonentity of a girl in front of me, in spite of her appearance, had to be
someone quite special. If I play my cards right, thought Jacinta, I may
still leave this world with a bang. She knew she didn’t have much
time left to her on the planet. That was one of the disadvantages of
being a psychic and an energy intuitive. You knew roughly when
your time was up.

Jacinta glanced at her watch. It was about eight in the evening and,
with the thick cloud overhead, the June night was closing in. Not
much daylight left but that did not matter. It was probably best,
actually, to wait until it was darker: just in case somebody was
watching. She drew back more deeply into the shelter of the doorway,
wrapping her coat closely around her. She took a packet of cigarettes
and a lighter from a pocket. She lit a cigarette and drew deeply on it.
Jacinta seldom smoked but she had never been able to kick the habit
when on an assignment. She really did feel it calmed her nerves
although her doctor had said that was nonsense. Her mind went back
to that time forty years ago when she had received a knock on her
door. That was when it had all started for her. She had been thrilled to
be part of the Path of Purest Light. She had had great expectations
but, as the years had rolled by, some disillusionment had set in. She
had naively thought that she would be involved in heroic deeds but
these had not happened. But now, as a minder to this ‘girl’,
opportunity might present itself after all. She would have to say
something to her, though, about the way she dressed. Jacinta thought
it important to dress smartly and present a good image to the public.
She herself liked classically cut suits of skirt and jacket with
comfortable brown shoes with no more than a slight heel. But this woman she had been watching for some time now was sloppily clothed in flared jeans and a long, woollen cardigan that reached to her knees; not to mention that awful bandana she was wearing. Jacinta dropped her half-smoked cigarette on to the pavement and crushed it with the toe of her shoe. She slipped a mint into her mouth and stood sucking it for a moment, savouring the strong flavour. The young woman had disappeared inside although she had left the broom leaning against the railings. Jacinta was about to step out of the doorway and cross the street when she stopped. A man had appeared from nowhere and was now ringing the bell. She swore under her breath and stepped back. She saw the door open and a brief conversation took place. Then the man disappeared inside and Jacinta had to wait for another half an hour until he emerged. By this time, she was shivering with the unseasonable cold. He looked left then right, before scuttling down the street with his hands pushed deeply into his pockets, his coat collar pulled up round his ears.

Jacinta now crossed the street and went up to the door. It had the usual peeling paint of most doors on that street and a dull, deep brown colour that was useful to obscure the grime. A tarnished, brass push-bell was to the side of the door. Above it was placed a small white plastic plaque, with two large words etched in black: PSYCHIC LUCINDA, with a phone number below the name. Underneath the phone number, there were some more letters, very small and half obscured with dirt. Jacinta rubbed the plaque with the sleeve of her coat: (OFFICE HOURS: MONDAY – FRIDAY, 4 – 10 PM, STRICTLY BY APPOINT. ONLY). She wondered what this Lucinda did during the earlier part of her day. When given this assignment, Jacinta had been provided with little background information, except name and address of the woman in question and what to say to her. Well, she would find out these other details soon enough. Jacinta was
LUCINDA

the sort of person that others opened up to easily; as well as being quite good at reading a person’s mind, provided that person had not established his or her protective firewalls. Which, of course, the vast majority of people hadn’t.

Jacinta pressed the bell once then stood back expectantly. She heard muffled footsteps and the door opened.

“Lucinda?” Jacinta asked, needlessly.

“Yes. Have you an appointment?”

“No, I’m afraid I don’t.”

“Well, you will have to make one and then come back. I’m busy at the moment.” She leaned out of the doorway and stabbed a finger at the sign. “Read that, idiot.” She tried closing the door but Jacinta already had her foot in the way. “I can give you a slot at four o’clock tomorrow if that suits you.”

Jacinta did not move. She stared at Lucinda. “The only appointment you have now is with your tea pot and jam sandwich. Then at nine you have a client. Am I right?” Lucinda flushed slightly. Jacinta sensed the girl’s firewalls being activated. “So whilst you have a cup of tea, maybe we can also have a chat. It’s very important.”

Lucinda nodded and opened the door wider. She turned and, without a word, led Jacinta down a short, dimly lit passageway to a door at the end. She opened the door and ushered her guest in. The room had muted wall lighting with just a small, round table and a few straight-backed wooden chairs as furnishings. The walls were covered in dark drapes and the ceiling was painted crimson. Hidden speakers relayed, very softly, some kind of New Age music, the kind of music that jarred on Jacinta’s nerves.

“I see you use a crystal ball,” said Jacinta, pointing to the glass object in the centre of the table.
Lucinda shrugged her thin shoulders. “It’s old fashioned, I know, and not necessary but people expect something like that. I also use cards and palm of the hand, whatever my clients like.” She motioned Jacinta to take a chair and sat on one herself. “It matters little to me. I couldn’t care less what method the client requests.” She tossed her head in a dismissive manner. Jacinta felt herself being scrutinised. She knew her mind was being probed by a high energy but, with her firewalls activated, the woman in front of her would be wasting her time.

“How about yourself? How do you deal with clients?” asked Lucinda.

Jacinta smiled at her. “I don’t work with clients. At least, not in the way you do.” Jacinta felt that probing again.

“Oh?” said Lucinda. “What do you do then with your psychic talents?” She said it in a sneering manner, as if she did not believe that Jacinta’s skills were up to much.

Again, Jacinta felt her mind being probed; only this time the energy had been ratcheted up to a much higher level and she struggled to maintain her firewalls.

“I work for the Path of Purest Light,” she replied. God! This girl’s energy was powerful! “I don’t know if you have come across them at all?”

Lucinda nodded her head. She undid the green bandana she was wearing and allowed her thick, auburn hair to fall to her shoulders. “Yeah, I have heard something about them. Just a bunch of fucking, silly do-gooders, if you ask me. I wouldn’t bother giving them five minutes of my time.” She stood up and went behind one of the wall drapes. “Would you like a cup of tea?”

“Thank you that would be nice.” replied Jacinta. H’m, the girl’s language needed cleaning up. She wondered if Lucinda used such swear-words with her clients. This request she would have to make of
Psychic Lucida was going to be difficult, she could see that. She heard a kettle being boiled and the scrape of china. “What’s business like at the moment?” she asked.

“I’m doing alright. Can’t complain. I have a steady trickle of clients.”

Jacinta heard tea being poured then Lucinda appeared with two steaming cups. She placed these on the table then went back for milk, sugar and a plate of jam sandwiches. She waved her hand over the table. “Help yourself to whatever you want.”

There was something about the way Lucinda spoke that alerted Jacinta. “You are not very happy though, are you? You’re a bit frustrated with things at the moment.” Jacinta peered at the girl over her cup of tea.

Lucinda gave a little smile, then it was gone. Another toss of her hair. “No, I guess I’m not. It’s become a bit boring and mundane, telling people about their unhappy, little lives. Having to cut out all the big stuff like what diseases they will get, when their marriage will break up, when they are likely to die and how.” Again that impish, little smile. “I had a client once, a woman, who demanded to know everything about her life. So I told her.”

“What happened then?”

“It was a big, bloody mistake on my part. The woman committed suicide.”

“Oh dear!” said Jacinta sympathetically.

“In the note she left, she blamed it all on me. Said I had told her things I had no right to reveal. Of course, she didn’t realise that what I had told only had the potential to occur, that certain things at any rate she could change if she made different choices.” Lucinda took a gulp of tea then bit into a sandwich, scooping away a dribble of raspberry with a finger. “She ran out of the room, sobbing hysterically, before I could explain all this to her.”
"I see."

"The police came knocking on my door but it all fizzled out in the end. They did ask me to do some forensic work for them. You know, finding missing people, solving murders and the like."

Jacinta was starting to understand why the Path of Purest Light was interested in this girl. "And did you?"

Lucinda nodded. "Yes, for a while I cooperated with the bastards. They gave me to understand that, if I did, they would overlook possible charges against me." Lucinda’s eyes slid from Jacinta’s face and looked past her, beyond her. "My success rate was 98% but the pressure got too much for me and I withdrew. Didn’t see why I should be spending my time solving crimes that the fucking cops should have been doing. They didn’t give me a moment’s peace; ringing me day and night for every little misdemeanour that Joe Public committed. Trouble is the police knew they were on to a good thing." She paused and looked back at Jacinta. "So I changed my name to Lucinda, re-located myself and began a new life.” She stood up and walked behind Jacinta. Her voice now had a hard edge to it. "That’s enough, for the moment, about me. Why don’t you tell me why you have come to see me? I could extract the information from your simple, little mind myself, if you would prefer."

“Oh, really?” Jacinta did not turn to face the psychic but she stiffened her body, suddenly alert to this new, unfriendly tone.

“Yes, you haven’t told me your name but it is Jacinta, isn’t it? To be honest with you, Jacinta, I could blow your brains out if I wanted to. Fry them up hotter than your frying pan could. Your firewalls are not strong enough nor embedded deeply enough to keep me out.”

“I now realise that,” said Jacinta quietly.

“You are a small time, energy intuitive working for this Purest Light crowd, aren’t you? Running their errands, passing messages and the like.”
Jacinta nodded. The scorn coming from Lucinda hurt her deeply. “It may not be much but it’s work that has to be done by somebody.”

Jacinta felt a hand on her shoulder. “Let’s be clear about this,” said Lucinda. “Whatever you have come to ask me, the answer is no. I have no intention of getting mixed up in these silly, psycho-battles and feuds that go on in psychic space.”

“You haven’t heard what I have come to you about,” replied Jacinta.

Lucinda came back around and sat down again, facing her unwelcome visitor. “I’m waiting to hear. I’ll give you five minutes. Then, if you are not out of my room, it will be fry-up time.”
CHAPTER EIGHT

It took Lucinda a few moments to become accustomed to the subdued lighting of the room. She was alone but felt herself being watched. In the centre of the room there was a single, large, crimson-coloured cushion. The walls of the room were lined with heavy, dark-coloured drapes whilst the ceiling was coloured black with painted silver stars. On the floor, a large triangle had been drawn in red; in the centre was the crimson cushion. Lucinda had already alerted her firewall and, as she stood motionless at the side of the room, she explored for any psychic activity that might be attempting to enter her mind.

“Welcome, Lucinda!” said a voice in her head and gradually an image formed itself. “You were instructed to come alone but you disobeyed. Please explain yourself.”

“I will explain; but, first, tell me who you are,” replied Lucinda.

“I am a Higher Entity, sent to prepare you to meet a Lord of the Path of Purest Light, an occasion that few humans in the history of this world have been honoured with. You are a Special One but even such a person must obey.”

“I am sorry if I have offended. However, I have been sent on a mission that I know little about and for which I have received few instructions,” replied Lucinda. “I think if I am to travel on this journey then I must be allowed some freedom to make up my own mind on certain matters. So I have taken the liberty to bring a companion to this safe house. He knows of my task and is trustworthy. For the time being, I will not use him because his psychic powers are still untested. But, if sometime in the future I need his help, then I will use him.”

“That remains to be seen,” whispered the Higher Entity. “For the moment he can remain; but if he becomes a threat in any way to the
success of your mission, he will be removed. That is the price that must be paid for having brought him into possession of the knowledge that you already have - and the greater knowledge that you soon will have.”

Lucinda bowed her head. “I accept your words,” she said. But she was beginning to wonder if her hasty actions in telling Joe about her mission would now place him in great danger.

“Proceed to the centre of the Triangle of Eternity and be seated,” continued the Higher Entity. “In a few moments, three Guardians will appear and occupy the three points of the Triangle. They will ensure that communication with the Lord of Purest Light will not be received elsewhere. These are dark days, Lucinda. It is essential that your mission is not revealed to the Fallen Lords of the Paths of Darkness. Secrecy is paramount.”

“What do the Fallen Lords want to do?” asked Lucinda as she made her way to the cushion in the centre of the Triangle. She sat down on it with her legs crossed beneath her.

“The powers of the Fallen Lords are great. They seek to destroy all that is pure and good and work for the elimination of wisdom. They will attempt to disrupt the mission we have planned for you. But all this will be explained to you in due course. Please now wait.”

The Higher Entity faded. Lucinda wondered what Joe was doing. She sat up straight on the cushion and closed her eyes. She focused inside herself, summoning up her calmness and courage to deal with whatever was now to follow. She lowered her firewalls, feeling that it was safe do so in this place. She wanted her mind to be completely open and with no psychic obstructions to whatever communications might come along. She drew in a deep breath and released it slowly. She felt strength within her that had not been there before. Slowly, she opened her eyes. She was astonished to see that, at each point of the red triangle, there stood a figure. Where they had come from, she
could not say; certainly she had heard nothing whilst her eyes were closed. Each man was dressed in a long, black skirt made of some heavy material with a white jacket covering the upper body and arms. Their feet were bare; their heads were shaved and glistened in the soft light as if they had been anointed with some kind of oil. Suddenly, perhaps following a silent command, each man knelt on the floor with his buttocks resting on his heels. Each man’s arms rested lightly on his knees, eyes facing forwards. Lucinda became aware of an extremely strong energy emanating from them. The air around her vibrated with some form of an electro-magnetic force field that she sensed was spreading over her. She now felt as if she was cocooned in a bubble of it. The vibrations subsided but she could still feel the energy humming quietly like an electric generator in the background.

A voice came into her head. She recognised it as that of the Higher Entity that had spoken to her when she had first entered the room.

“Lucinda,” it said, “soon you will be in the presence of Inannah, one of the three Lords of Purest Light. She will explain to you the purpose of your mission: please pay close attention to what she says. After she has spoken, you may ask whatever questions you wish. Her energy is very powerful and at first you may feel overwhelmed. But do not be concerned as she will adjust her vibrations to the frequency that suits you. Please inform me when you are ready to be in communication with this Lord.”

Lucinda was surprised that the Lord was of a female form. She had fully expected this Spirit Entity to be in the form of a male. She felt nervous and was aware of tightness in her throat and stomach. She began to breathe deeply and slowly, suddenly mindful of her frailty in the face of this unknown but dangerous mission, that the Lords were asking her to undertake. They clearly believed in her but, at this moment, she did not share that feeling. How possibly could she, an obscure, young psychic from a run-down area of London, have the
necessary strengths and resources to defeat all the forces of darkness that were apparently on the point of engulfing the world and bringing about its destruction? Lucinda inhaled deeply once more, breathed out and closed her eyes.

“I am ready to receive communication from Inannah, Lord of the Path of Purest Light,” she whispered.

Lucinda cleared her mind of all unnecessary thoughts, opening it up to receive Inannah. She first became aware of a pinpoint of light. This gradually grew larger and brighter until she felt that she was staring into the full face of the sun. With the light, there was an intense psychic energy generated that buffeted her mind so that she desperately wanted to raise her firewalls to cut it off. But she resisted that temptation and remained open to the psychic battering. The pain of this gradually eased. With the passing of it, Lucinda felt a great elation flowing through her. Then, through the light, an image of a face appeared, at first small as if she was viewing it from a distance, then growing larger, at the same time shutting out much of the light so that Lucinda felt less dazzled.

“Greetings, Lucinda, I am Inannah, one of three Lords of the Path of Purest Light,” it said, in a strange, high-pitched, sing-song voice. “I have been sent to explain and guide you on the task that we have set for you.”

Lucinda was unsure how she should address the Spirit Entity. She felt a mixture of awe, humility and embarrassment. “Hello, Lord Inannah,” the words came stumbling out in a very inadequate way, “I am honoured to be in your presence.”

Inannah smiled at her, tilting her head forward slightly. “And it is an honour to meet you, Lucinda - finally.” Her countenance took on a more serious expression. “We had hoped to have met you two years ago. But for some inexplicable reason, you refused our offer to join the Path of Purest Light.” She was silent for a moment. “It is unusual,
in fact I would say almost unheard of, for an invited psychic to refuse
such an offer.” There was another pause. “I regret to tell you that we
hoped we could find some other person to undertake the task we have
in mind. It’s quite clear to us that you are not the ideal candidate. Last
time, we sent a Higher Entity to contact you. Your refusal brought
great humiliation to that Entity. So this time, instead, we have sent a
human Energy Intuitive, rather than expose an Entity to such
profound embarrassment again.”

“May I ask why you do not consider me to be the ideal
candidate?” said Lucinda, feeling a little humiliated herself.

“There’s no doubt that you are a very gifted psychic. That’s not
being questioned. It’s your attitude that’s the problem. You tend to be
too selfish and self-centred for a follower of the Path of Purest Light.
There is an unwillingness to work as part of a team, if required to do
so. So we sought all corners of the world to find an alternative to you.
But amongst all the millions of your fellow human beings, we came
to the unfortunate but inescapable conclusion that only you have the
qualities and resources needed to accomplish the task.” Then Inannah
smiled. “But now that you are here, let us put all that behind us.
Throughout the world’s history, from before the time of the ancient
Babylonians to today, there have emerged only a handful of Special
Ones such as you. These have appeared at times of extreme crisis,
such as occurs now, to ensure that the human race continues to evolve
in wisdom and spirituality.”

“It puzzles me, Lord Inannah, that a human being is required to
help you in such a crisis when your powers are so great,” said
Lucinda. She then added, her voice sounding puzzled, “And what
powers do I possess that no one else has?”

“Yes, our powers are indeed great but are, nevertheless, limited in
certain areas,” replied Inannah. “The task we need to undertake can
only be accomplished by a human. We can guide and assist but these
count for nothing without a person to carry through the work required. That is why we have scoured the planet and sent the Higher Entities into all the cities, towns and countryside to seek out that person with the most powerful psychic mind, combined with other essential attributes and qualities. As I mentioned before, at this time of impending crisis, Lucinda, that person is you.” The Spirit Entity paused and contemplated the figure of Lucinda. Her shoulders had dropped so she was now sitting in a more hunched position on the cushion, as if already feeling the weight of the task ahead. Although, if the truth be known, it was because she was a little tired of sitting up so straight. “Indeed, the assignment will be hazardous and difficult. A successful outcome cannot be guaranteed but we cannot contemplate failure. To do so would remove all hope and mean the end of the world. The Fallen Lords and followers of the Paths of Darkness, who are in constant battle with the Light, will triumph and their reign will be without end.” She paused. “As for your own unique powers, you will be informed of that later.”

Lucinda saw Inannah reach a hand out towards her. She felt as if a puff of air had brushed across her face. “You may already feel the burden, my child, but do not fear because I and all the followers of the Path of Purest Light will be with you, to encourage you and to sustain you as you fight for the future of your world.” Inannah paused again. “Are you ready to continue on your journey?”

Lucinda looked up at the Spirit Lord: she saw beauty, compassion and strength within the Entity; and also a capacity for anger. She decided that now was not a good time to negotiate any special perks for the job she was being asked to do. “I am ready to begin,” she said resolutely. “Tell me what you want of me.”

“First, I must give you the background to your task,” said Inannah. “It is important that you understand it. As you know, two thousand years ago a man called Jesus Christ was nailed to timber in the shape
of a cross by the Roman and Jewish authorities, on a hill outside Jerusalem called Golgotha. This punishment was in response to what was perceived as his challenge to their temporal and spiritual powers. This man had exceptional prophetic and psychic capability, perhaps the greatest your world has ever known.” The Spirit Entity broke off from her explanation for a moment. Lucinda had a feeling that communication in this form was a strain for the Entity. “As a result of his death and subsequent spiritual resurrection, a world-wide movement called Christianity was established by his followers. After his death on the Cross, his followers took down his crucified body and placed it in a tomb. His body had been nailed to the timber with four great, iron nails: one in each heel of the palms and two driven through his feet.” She paused again for a moment, contemplating the small figure before her. “At first, these nails were discarded amongst the rocks of Golgotha, as those followers were in a hurry to remove his body before the authorities intervened. But a Roman Legionnaire, a secret follower of this Christ, saw the nails abandoned in the dirt and retrieved them. It is not necessary to recite in detail the subsequent history of these nails, except to say that eventually they found their way to the first Christian Roman Emperor, Constantine, in Byzantium in the Fourth Century after Christ’s death. Legend has it that the four nails were incorporated by the Emperor into the bridle of his war horse. As a result of absorbing the power of Christ whilst being driven through his flesh and bones, these nails became objects of great energy. This energy grew in strength over the centuries. As a result, whoever possessed all four nails and forged them into the sign of a cross would wield unlimited power and have world domination.” Inannah broke off again, as if to allow the importance of her words time to be absorbed by Lucinda. “The Emperor Constantine went into battle thinking that he was omnipotent. However, unknown to him, the four crucifixion nails had been secretly exchanged for four similar
nails by a Coptic monk in the Emperor’s household. This monk, a holy and devout person, did not wish one man to have complete control and domination of the world; and, in doing so, make himself Christ-like. He wanted to ensure that the nails would never be united again. But they were holy relics and symbols of Christ’s agony and death - he could not, therefore, discard or destroy them. Instead, it is said that he divided them into two groups. One group of two nails was passed into the safe keeping of other Coptic monks living in the barren desert of Egypt. For hundreds of years, it was not known what happened to the other two nails. It was then discovered that they were stolen by a group of Northmen from Sweden when on a trading mission to Constantinople in the eighth century. Today, these nails have passed into the possession of a powerful follower of the Paths of Darkness. We believe that he is seeking out the remaining two nails so that he may unite them again. If this should occur, the reign of the Fallen Lords over this world will have begun. By doing that, Dark will overcome the Light and, because the human race is a mixture of Light and Dark, the seeds of destruction of the human race will be sown.” Inannah stopped speaking and gazed at Lucinda. She was once again sitting upright with her eyes closed and her chin slightly tilted upwards. The Spirit Entity smiled with satisfaction. She could feel Lucinda’s psychic powers growing stronger as she spoke. “Have you any questions you wish to ask me before I continue?”

“I understand, Lord Inannah, what you have said about these nails. But what is that to do with me? What is my part in all of this?” whispered Lucinda softly, not wanting to break the dream-like state she was in.

“We are not certain where the two nails that were left in the safe keeping of the Coptic monks are now situated. They may still exist in the deserts of Egypt; or the nails may have been sent for safety reasons to Skellig Michael, that island in the Atlantic Ocean not far

LUCINDA
from where you are now. St. Fionan invited Coptic monks to help him establish a monastery on that island in the sixth Century, seeking to draw on their expertise and experience from the establishment of remote monasteries in Egypt. There are stories that the nails went with them.”

“Skellig Michael, as the remotest monastery in Western Europe, would indeed have been an ideal location for their safe keeping,” murmured Lucinda. “Protected by the steep mountain sides and the wild, Atlantic Ocean, no one need know they were there.”

“Indeed - so your task is to find these two crucifixion nails, to determine their precise location,” directed Inannah. “Once you have found the nails, we shall then instruct you what to do with them.”

“Please advise me, Inannah, on the first steps I should take on this quest,” sighed Lucinda.

“Amongst all Energy Intuitives, you possess the greatest ability to go back in time. However, so far you have only witnessed the events of the past from outside the event taking place. To accomplish this task, you will need to be there within the event itself.”

Lucinda drew in her breath. “Shit it! Have I that ability?” she exclaimed. “Am I really able to travel back in time?”

“That is the one almost unique ability that you have, Lucinda. And it is the one psychic power that you have yet to unlock from within yourself,” replied the Spirit Entity. “Your first step then is to unlock this power, to release it. Your second step is to go back in time to that period when the Coptic monks were setting out for Ireland to answer the call of St. Fionan - and to determine the answer to the question: are the crucifixion nails in Egypt or on Skellig Michael?”

“And my third step?” asked Lucinda although she already knew the answer.

“Your third step is to locate the nails wherever they might be,” answered Inannah. “In the dry, barren deserts of Egypt or the wild,
mountain fastness of Skellig Michael. Once found, you are to retrieve them. As I have already said, you will then be given instructions on what to do with them.”

“When should I start on this journey?” Lucinda asked.

“As soon as you have prepared yourself but time is of the essence. Each day of delay gives the Fallen Lords more opportunity to discover our plans,” said Inannah. “I must warn you that such time travel is dangerous and will drain your psychic energies. You must ensure sufficient energies remain to allow you to move back to the present.”

“And if my energies are insufficient?” asked Lucinda, a little worriedly. “What will happen?”

“You will be trapped in that time zone. And not even the combined powers of the Lords of Purest Light can return you.” The Spirit Entity gazed deeply into Lucinda’s eyes. “There is one thing I can give you now to help you on your journey back but it must only be used in the smallest of amounts. It is so powerful that if wrongly used it can destroy you. Do you understand?”

Lucinda nodded. “Yes, Lord Inannah, I understand.”

“I shall transfer to you part of my own spirit energy. You must store this safely within you, casting a psychic shield around it. Only remove that protection when it is absolutely necessary. This energy will be sufficient to return you from wherever you are in time. Open your mouth and be ready to receive it!” Still looking fixedly at Lucinda’s eyes, the Lord Inannah opened her mouth and exhaled two golden orbs of spirit energy. They passed across to Lucinda, entering through her mouth. She closed her lips and transferred the energies to safe places within her, covering them with protective shields. She could feel the orbs radiating warmth that was very comforting to her.

“I now must leave you, Special One,” breathed Inannah softly. “Continue your quest fearlessly and safely, Child of the Path of Purest
Light.” Her image began to recede into the distance and the white light faded until both disappeared. Lucinda was left sitting cross-legged on the crimson cushion still in a deep trance.

The familiar voice of the Higher Entity entered her head. “It is now time for you to depart,” it said briskly.

Lucinda gradually moved out of her trance state. She looked around: the three Guardians had already gone and she was alone in the room. She stood up and stretched the muscles of her stiff limbs and body. Taking a deep breath, she stepped out of the Triangle of Eternity. She went to the door and opened it. Standing outside and waiting for her was Culian.

“Follow me!” he hissed. He led her down the corridor to the door that opened on to the courtyard. As they approached, it opened and Lucinda and Culian went through the doorway into the yard. The night air felt warm with the now-clouded sky trapping in the heat remaining from the day.

Joe got up from the bench he was sitting on and came over to Lucinda. He took her hand. “Are you alright?” he asked in a concerned tone.

Lucinda nodded but before she could reply, Culian cut in. “There’s no time for talking now. We must go,” he said. “I’ll accompany you back to the main street.” He opened the door that led to the laneway and they stepped out. Lucinda and Joe stumbled after their guide up the narrow alley that was almost in pitch darkness as there were no street lights; and what moonlight there might have been was concealed behind the thick clouds. Culian left them at the junction of the lane with the main street, returning hurriedly down the alley.

There were small groups of revellers on the street but the buskers had gone and most people had retired to the bars and dance halls. Lucinda and Joe quickly retraced their steps to the Opel van parked at the end of the street, keeping where they could to the shadows cast by
buildings, where there was no glow from the street lights. They did not speak until safely seated in the vehicle with their seat belts buckled. As Joe started the engine and engaged first gear, Lucinda broke the silence.

“God! That was some experience! I actually met one of the Lords of Purest Light, it was so incredible,” she said. “She had this really weird way of speaking.” She began to imitate Lord Inannah’s voice but then she suddenly stopped. She cocked her head to one side as if listening. “Let’s get back to the cottage as quickly as possible,” she said hurriedly. “I have bad feelings - there are strong negative energies around here.”

As Joe steered the van into the street and headed back along the road they had come earlier in the evening, she continued: “I’m not sure if these energies are to do with us or if something has happened to Jacinta.” She turned her head around and glanced back through the rear window. She saw two headlights not far behind. “It must be us. I think we are being followed.” She looked at Joe. Even in the dim light of the van, Joe noticed the concern on her face. “I hope it’s not that fucking Ninth Master again,” she said.

“Don’t worry, if we are being followed I have an idea how to deal with them,” he said reassuringly although he did not feel as certain as he sounded. He pushed the accelerator towards the floor and the little van responded. However, the following lights crept closer. Joe swung the steering wheel to the left and the van careened up a narrow road. A fox crossed in front of them, its eyes glowing momentarily as it turned its head towards the van. Then it jumped onto the stone wall that lined the road and disappeared into the night. Joe automatically braked slightly and the van swerved, scraping against the stones before continuing on. For a moment, the headlights behind disappeared but then they reappeared.
“They are certainly after us,” muttered Joe, almost to himself. Suddenly, the right hand wing mirror shattered into pieces. “They are firing at us!” he shouted to Lucinda. “Get your head down!” He pressed the accelerator to the floor but the van had not been built for speed; the car behind was closing on them fast. Joe felt rather than saw the rear window splintering then the heavy thud of a bullet as it impacted on the steel sheet that separated the driver from the back of the van. He made another sharp turn to the left into a rutted laneway that had tufts of grass growing up the centre of it. The van crashed against one side of the lane, bouncing off onto the other side, but Joe kept it upright and heading up a hill. The car followed, its headlights now close behind. They dazzled Joe whenever he glanced in the rear-view mirror.

“Come on, come on!” said Joe under his breath, urging his van to make one more effort. “Just a little bit further!” As he spoke, the lane suddenly opened out into a wide, rough, gravelled area. At the far end, his lights picked out the line of a wooden fence. Joe drove straight towards this, with the other car just yards behind him. He felt more bullets strike the vehicle. Turning the steering wheel to the right and pulling on the handbrake, Joe spun the vehicle round away from the fence and the following car. The car shot past the van. Joe had a momentary glimpse of the driver of a silver Mercedes desperately trying to turn the vehicle at the last moment. But his efforts were to no avail. The car smashed through the fence and disappeared into the night. Joe switched off the engine and his headlights. There was darkness and silence all around them. Lucinda sat up in her seat, staring out into the blackness, feeling bewildered.

“What happened to them? Where did they go?” she asked.

Joe gave a short laugh of triumph. “That car, with whoever was in it, has plunged over a fifty foot drop into a disused quarry. What’s more, there is a pond of water in the quarry with a further fifty feet to
the bottom of it.” He looked at Lucinda, holding her eyes with his. “There’ll be no one walking out of that. And no one to know that there is a car at the bottom of that pond.”

Joe and Lucinda continued to stare at each other for a few moments longer. Then Joe said in a slow, matter-of-fact voice: “I don’t think we need call the police.”

Lucinda shook her head. “No, this is a war that is taking place for reasons the police would not understand. Let’s get back to the cottage.” She leant across to Joe and kissed him briefly on the cheek. “Thanks for rescuing us; I don’t quite know how you managed it.”

Joe smiled at her. He made no effort to return her kiss, intuitively knowing that it was a kiss of thanks rather than a signal for something else. He started the van and turned on the headlights. “I was quite a bad boy when I was fourteen and fifteen. There were too many of us for my mother to manage here at home so she sent me to my grandparents in Liverpool. At nights, we would steal cars and race them up and down some nearby streets.” He suddenly laughed as the memories came flooding back. “That’s where I learned to make those skid turns.” Joe put the van into first gear and slowly moved off, turning the van so that for a brief moment the headlights lit up the ragged gap in the shattered wooden fencing. “Little did I know that one day it would save my life – and yours.”

It was after midnight by the time they arrived back at the cottage. During the drive back, Lucinda briefly told Joe about her psychic meeting with Inannah. Joe escorted Lucinda to the front door. Lucinda opened it and then stood awkwardly at the entrance. She felt her heart pounding inside her chest, feeling Joe’s closeness, the warmth of his breath upon her cheek; but she was uncertain what to do. She was, she knew, one of the world’s most powerful psychics but she was afraid. She had known some lovers in her time but they had been mostly one-night stands: from visits to night clubs or pubs when
she had felt the need for a man. This used to be quite frequent as her high, psychic energy also translated into a high, libidinous drive. She would bring the selected man back to her flat. Occasionally, one night turned into a weekend or more rarely into a week or two. But her extraordinary psychic intellect and strange behaviours were difficult for the man in question to understand and accept. Inevitably he would leave. In recent months, she had become so disillusioned with men and sex that she had given up both. So she was unsure about relationships: the result of never being able to relate positively to men or them to her. She had sensed Joe’s desire for her after she had quickly dipped into his mind on the journey back from Lisserdaniel. She felt guilty about that. She had a cardinal rule that she never entered a friend’s mind without their express permission. But what was the point in starting another relationship? Like all the others she had tried, it was doomed from the start. Anyway, she had to focus now on her new job; a relationship would be a dangerous distraction. She pushed the door open fully.

“Goodnight, Joe,” she said. “I’ll see you tomorrow.” She went into the cottage, closing the door firmly behind her.
CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

Halfdan Blood-Axe leant against the tall, pine mast of his longboat as the vessel rose and fell beneath him according to the vagaries of the sea swell. He was in a black mood. His men knew this and kept away from him; irritating their leader when he was in such a dark humour could end with a split skull. They lay sprawled on the deck in groups, waiting for his next decision. Landing on this island was proving to be more difficult than Halfdan Blood-Axe had anticipated. He could not risk his boat being battered against the deep purple rocks that encircled the island. The oak hull, made up of sixteen long strakes attached by iron rivets and small metal plates to the frame and crossbeams, was already showing signs of wear and tear from its long sea voyage round the northern tip of Scotland and down the east and south coasts of Ireland. Battered by a number of summer storms, on several occasions it had been in danger of breaking up; only the skill and bravery of himself and the crew had saved the vessel. Before leaving Norway on this voyage, he had been assured that there would almost certainly be a cove with a sandy beach where he could run the vessel aground. It would have then been a simple job to land, catch the monk, obtain the information, by torture if necessary, and after that return to Dublin for a well earned rest before continuing back to Norway. Of course, if there was anything to pillage on this big rock, he would do that as well. But he doubted that there could be much in the way of treasure in such a place. He began to wonder for a moment, not for the first time, what was so important about a couple of rusty nails. He had, of course, heard some whisperings in the Great Hall back in Alsten but he had found through experience that there was no basis to most of the rumours that circulated around there. However, this time he had to give some credence to the rumours. Otherwise, why would he have been sent all this way to a big lump of
rock? He spat over the side of the longboat, watching for a moment the globule of spit floating away on the current. Then he concentrated once again on the problem of landing him and his men on Skellig Michael. He scrutinised the rocks in front of him, noticing how the waves broke on them, where there was the least back-wash; and then looked further up the shore to where the steps that led up to the top began. He gave a satisfied grunt. He had come to a decision and would carry out the first part of the plan himself. Over many years he had shown himself to be the strongest, fittest and swiftest man in Alsten; and he knew that was one of the reasons why he had been chosen for this particular voyage. The other reason he had been made leader, was his knowledge of the gälge language. His mother had been Irish and Halfdan Blood-Axe had spent much of his youth in the Viking city of Dublin. Now, here was his chance to prove once again that he was indeed the best man available. He strode towards the prow of the ship, not caring if he trod on any legs of the men sprawled across the deck. They scrambled to get out of the way.

“Bring me two of the longest ropes we have,” Halfdan Blood-Axe ordered, speaking to no one in particular. Olaf, his second in command, retrieved the ropes from the storage space below the deck and brought them to his leader. As he watched his leader tie two ends together, he thought he knew what Halfdan Blood-Axe had in mind.

“Let me swim ashore, Blood-Axe,” he said. “If I am lost, it will be of no importance.”

Halfdan Blood-Axe gave a loud laugh. “Olaf, you will be lost! That will not be of much importance except that I will have one less man to send into battle.” He hit the burly Norwegian’s head with his fist. “I already know about your courage but you do not have much skill in the water.” He turned and faced his crew. “If there is any man here who thinks he is a stronger swimmer than me, Halfdan Blood-Axe, let him speak out.” There was an uneasy silence. “Right, let me
tell you my plan.” He began tying one end of the extended rope around his waist. “When I get to the shore, I will tie this end to a rock. Olaf, select half of the men to follow, each with his spear. Use the rope to pull yourself on to the landing platform.” Blood-Axe knew that many of the thirty-two men remaining aboard the longboat were weak swimmers and some could not swim at all. He tied the other end of the rope round the long neck of the dragon-headed prow. Then, picking up the large, double-headed axe which was his favourite weapon, he lowered himself into the water. He did not notice the coldness of the Atlantic Ocean; in winter in Norway, each day he would swim in the lake or sea, breaking any ice that was there. He was impervious to the elements of cold and heat. He struck out for the rocks at the far end of the cove, allowing the strong swell to propel him forward so that he did not have to put too much energy into his swimming. As each swell passed beneath him and surged forward on to the rocks at the end of the bay, it broke with a roar and a cloud of spray. As the sea water sucked back in readiness for the next wave, Halfdan Blood-Axe could see the sharp, weed-covered rocks laid bare, ready to be battered by the next onrush of water. He laughed to himself. He enjoyed challenging Nature, pitting his strength and courage against the raw elements of water, wind, earth and fire. He knew that, one day, he would be defeated but he was determined that it would not be this day. He felt certain that on the day he had been borne, this present day had not been ordained as his death day. So he continued to swim in towards the rock-lined shore with great confidence. As he did so, he picked up the sound of that bell again, mixed in with the roar of the breaking waves. He allowed his gaze to run up the steps to where the monk still stood at the edge of the terrace, signally his defiance of Halfdan Blood-Axe. He allowed his eyes to linger there for a few moments. The Northman felt anger surge through his body at this display of contempt for him. He vowed
a long, lingering death for the Abbot. He began to think of what this might be. In spite of his deserved reputation as a fierce fighter, Halfdan Blood-Axe usually dispatched his victims with just one blow of his weapon. He respected his enemies and liked to give them a quick entry to the after-life, if they believed in one. But the fate of this monk would be different, even if he revealed the information immediately. He grunted in satisfaction as he decided on the fate of this monk. It was one he had never bestowed on an enemy.

He began to swim more strongly towards the rocks, eager to bound up those steps and seize his victim. But now there were more immediate problems to focus on. He was nearing the line where the waves curled and broke on the flat rocks that were the landing place, releasing their pent-up energy in a violent rush of white foam, sound and cascading spray. Halfdan Blood-Axe felt a flicker of nervousness but he quickly suppressed it. He swam in with an onrushing wave and, as it swept him along on its crest, he seized the handle of his axe in a tight grip. The wave rushed against the rocks, hurling the Northman into them. Halfdan Blood-Axe thrust his axe into a cleft in the rocks but the blade missed and he was pulled deep down into the water, his body tossed about like a piece of driftwood. He felt the sharp rocks scraping and cutting deep gashes into his flesh but he ignored the pain. Kicking and struggling towards the surface, he was pulled back by the undertow. Fighting desperately now to reach the surface, he broke through, gasping for breath. Once again he was propelled forward on the crest of a wave. This time, the axe blade dug deep between two rocks and held firm. He fought against the powerful under-tow that threatened to suck him down again deep into the water. Holding tightly to the axe handle, he hauled himself out of the water and onto the landing platform. He lay there for a few moments, recovering his breath. He found a hand-hold in a hollow in the rock and gripped it tightly as he worked the axe head away from
where it was jammed between the rocks. The never-ending line of
waves continued to break over him but he knew he was now safely on
the island. The axe head became free and Halfdan Blood-Axe crawled
to the safety of the upper end of the landing stage. He stood up and
faced back towards where the longboat lay anchored in the middle of
the cove. He raised his axe high above his head and let out a mighty
shout of victory. His crew saw him standing triumphantly on the
island and raised their spears into the air in acknowledgement, roaring

Halfdan Blood-Axe untied the dripping rope from around his waist
and lashed it to a rock spike at the back of the cove. Then he waved
his hand in the air. Olaf, watching intently from the longboat, saw the
signal and immediately ordered the men he had selected to begin the
dangerous process of swimming to the island.

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When Abbot Eitgal saw that the longboat was unable to land the
Northmen directly on to Skellig Michael, he thought that the Lord had
answered his prayers and that the monastery would be saved from the
murdering, plundering Finngaill. Surely, now they would leave the
island. They must realise that such a small, isolated community would
have little in the way of treasure. He stopped ringing the bell. He was
about to turn away from the steps and go to tell the other monks the
good news, when he noticed that instead of sailing out of the cove, the
longboat had now anchored itself in the middle of the small bay. With
a sinking heart, he realised that the Northmen were determined to find
a way to land on the island. He watched as their leader leapt into the
sea with a rope tied round his waist. Eitgal now accepted that on this
day he should die. He still had a chance to flee to the sanctuary near
the summit of South Peak. But that would probably condemn them all
to death. Better that he should die a martyr in order that the rest of the
community would continue to live on this island that he loved so dearly. He saw other Finngaill leap into the sea and make their way to the landing platform, clinging to the rope and using it to haul themselves through the pounding surf on to the rocks. But even before the first of these had reached safety, he observed the man already on the island begin to run up the steps towards him, shouting and thrusting his great axe in the air. Eitgal’s natural instinct was to turn and run. With an effort, he subdued that urge and remained standing resolutely at the top of the steps. He felt sick with anxiety. He said a prayer to himself: 

\textit{Lord, into thy hands I commend myself. Grant me the strength to die with dignity and faith in you.}

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As Halfdan Blood-Axe bounded up the stone steps towards the monk still standing at the top, he fully expected the figure to turn and flee. So he was surprised that the abbot was still standing there as he gained the uppermost step. The monk stood quietly with his head bowed, covered by the hood of his cloak. His hands were folded together in prayer and his lips moved noiselessly. The Northman shouted at him and raised his axe high above his head as if to strike him. But the monk just lifted his head and stared at Halfdan Blood-Axe as he made the sign of the cross. With astonishment, Blood-Axe saw no fear in the eyes of the monk. With a roar of rage, he threw the monk to the ground. With his foot on the monk’s chest, he held the big axe to his throat. He spoke in Gailge.

“Tell me where the nails are and I shall spare you and your friends,” he growled, although he had no intention of sparing this monk.

So that was it, thought Eitgal to himself. He has come for the nails of the Crucifixion. The nails that he and all his predecessors had sworn to protect with their lives, if necessary, ever since Brother
Lazarus had brought them to the Skellig from Egypt over two hundred years previously.

“Kill me if you will,” whispered the abbot, “but you shall never have the nails.” He felt the foot of the Finngaill press so hard on his chest that a couple of ribs cracked. A sickening pain shot across his torso. “Never!” he repeated hoarsely. “Never!”

Halfdan Blood-Axe slowly released the pressure on the old monk’s chest. “Then we shall slay each of your monks, one by one, until you or they reveal the hiding place.”

Abbot Eitgal winced in pain as he slowly shook his head. “My monks know nothing. I am the only person who knows where the nails are concealed. And I shall never reveal that place even if that brings about their deaths.”

Blood-Axe turned to his men who had joined him. “One is missing. Why has he not come?” he shouted at them.

Olaf shook his head. “He was thrown against the rocks, hitting his head. He never came up again. The sea has claimed him.”

Halfdan grunted in annoyance. He could not afford to lose a man unnecessarily. He had already lost eight from the raids they had undertaken on the village in the bay and before that, the monastery up the river. Somehow, the Irish in the village seemed to have been warned of their coming and had been prepared. “Take some of the men and seek out the other monks,” he said to Olaf. “Find as many as possible and bring them to me, alive. The rest of you search these stone hovels for anything of value. Then destroy what you can.” He leaned down, took hold of Eitgal’s robe and dragged him to the top of the steps. He held him out over the cliff edge. “If I let go, I send you falling to your death, old man. Why not tell me about these nails and spare your life?”

Abbot Eitgal twisted his head round and looked down to the cove six hundred feet below him. He saw the dark rocks which would
smash his frail body to pieces. He turned back to face his assailant. “My body would die but I would rise to be with my Lord for all eternity,” he croaked.

Blood-Axe laughed. “I admire your courage, monk,” he said. “Any other monk I have come across in my raids has grovelled at my feet, begging for mercy.” He pulled the abbot back from the cliff edge and threw him back down on the ground. Eitgal groaned from the agony of his broken ribs. The Northman paid no attention to his pain. He called out to the men ransacking the cells. “Is there anything of value to be found here?”

“It’s a miserable dump of a place, not like the rich pickings of the monasteries on the mainland,” one of them shouted back. “What madness of yours has brought us to this lump of rock? There is nothing worth taking up space on the longboat. Even the bread is mouldy and unfit to eat.” He threw a few loaves down to his leader. Halfdan kicked them away. Eitgal watched the loaves disintegrating and closed his eyes. If the Northman only knew it, those loaves were the most prized possessions of the community. In the daily celebration of the Eucharist, that bread became the body of Christ.

“This place gives me the creeps,” added one of the other men. “All these stone huts, perched on top of this wind-blown mountain. No man in his right mind would chose to live here. I say we get back on to the boat as soon as possible. No sense in hanging around.”

“We leave when I say so. And the madness is that of our King’s, not mine,” replied Halfdan Blood-Axe sharply. But he tended to agree with the man. It was unnatural to live in a place like this. There was an unearthly feel to the monastery, with its strange-looking stone buildings, clustered so tightly together that two men could not walk abreast on the paths between. And you could hardly walk a few paces without being in danger of falling down a cliff. He glanced up at the sky. The sun was hanging low on the horizon and the redness at the
edge of the world showed that the next day would be a fine, clear one. However, this monastery was a spooky place and he did not wish to be on the island when the light had gone.

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The abbot heard the Finngaill, who had gone in search of the other monks, return. He slowly opened his eyes, raising himself awkwardly up on one arm, afraid of what he might see. But he saw no sign of his comrades and he rested back on the ground with a sigh of relief. They were still safe then. He began coughing and when he put his hand to his mouth, he saw traces of blood.

“They are at the top of that mountain,” said Olaf pointing to the South Peak. “Stuck on a ledge but we can’t reach them. Two of the men fell to their deaths trying to get at them.”

Halfdan Blood-Axe swore violently. That was another three men gone from his crew of thirty-two with nothing gained but one old monk who seemed unafraid to die. There wasn’t even any plunder to be had. He was rapidly becoming tired of being on this rock. All for a couple of nails that quite possibly no longer existed. If he couldn’t get any more information out of the monk then that is what he would tell the king back in Norway: sorry, but the nails had rusted away, the sea air and all that. There was just a little pile of rust where the nails had been. Nothing he could bring back. But he would have one more attempt at getting the monk to talk. Halfdan Blood-Axe disliked losing. He strode over to where Eitgal was lying on the stony ground and gave him a kick. “Get up!” he shouted at him. “You are coming with us.” Blood-Axe turned to his second-in-command. “Olaf! Bring the monk down to the cove. Mind you don’t let go of him. He may still give me the information I want.” As the Northmen dragged Abbot Eitgal down the steps, Blood-Axe shouted to him: “I will give you the night to think it over. If, then, you do not tell me what I need
to hear, I will sacrifice you, monk, to our god Odin. I will carve the blood eagle into your scrawny back.”

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Lucinda, hidden in her small cave, had seen most of what had taken place. The Northmen searching for the other monks had passed so close to her hiding place that she could have reached out and touched them. She was relieved to see them return, empty handed. She waited patiently until she was sure that no Viking remained at the monastery. Then she squeezed out of the cave and slowly made her way down to the stone cells. The sea swells had quietened down and she could see the men swimming back to the longboat. The rope still remained in place so they must be planning to return, she thought. Lucinda could see no sign of Abbot Eitgal and so wondered if he also was being brought back to the vessel. Part of the cove was blocked from her view so she lay on her stomach and inched herself forward, keeping as low a profile as possible. As the whole of the cove came into view, Lucinda gasped with the shock at what she saw. At the right hand side of the cove, there was a large, black rock, flat-topped and separated from the island by a gap of several yards. Through this gap, the sea still churned green and white, although the swell had decreased. Standing on the rock, with his hands stretched out in the crosgigel position, was the Abbot. He faced towards the setting sun. The Northmen had abandoned him there, knowing that he would not be able to escape. Lucinda moved back from the cliff edge, sobbing quietly to herself. She stood up and walked down the steps to Christ’s Saddle and on to the South Peak. She could see Brother Killian peering round a rock corner high up towards the summit. She waved to him and slowly he descended to her.

“The Northmen have returned to their longboat,” she said to him.

“And what of the Abbot?” asked Killian. “Where is he?”
Lucinda shook her head, her eyes brimming with tears. “Come with me, I will show you.”

Brother Killian hesitated. “They won’t be back today, not now that darkness will soon descend,” she said reassuringly.

Brother Killian and Lucinda returned to the monastery and went to the top of the steps. Eitgal was standing in the same crosfigel position on the rock.

“How can they do this to that old man!” exclaimed Brother Killian angrily. “What has he done to deserve this? We must rescue him immediately.”

“The Northmen will be watching,” said Lucinda. “This is his destiny. Look at him! He is already on the way to his Lord. See how he shines in the sun’s rays.”

Killian knelt on the ground and crossed himself. The setting sun was pouring its gold and orange light on his Abba and it was as if he was aflame with God’s glory. “Glory to thee, thou Glorious Sun, glory to thee, thou Sun, Face of the God of Life,” he whispered.

Lucinda placed her hand gently on the monk’s shoulder. “Let’s return to the South Peak and bring the others down,” she said. “It would be the Abba’s wish that the life of the monastery continue, even as he lets go of his life.”

Together they walked back to the South Peak while Lucinda related to Killian all she had seen and heard. They called out to the other monks; one by one they made the dangerous journey from the summit back down to Christ’s Saddle. As they returned to the cells, Brother Killian told them what had happened when the Northmen arrived on the island. With dismay and grief, they watched the setting sun shine its last rays on the Abbot. To Lucinda’s amazement, he was still standing with his arms stretched out to either side. They thought they could hear the faint sound of his voice reciting a psalm. It seemed to Lucinda that he had not moved from when she had first
seen him. After gazing at the rock on which the Abbot stood, all their
eyes automatically shifted towards the entrance to the cove. Rocking
gently at anchor on the evening swell, the longboat was still a
menacing presence. The big dragon head carved at the end of the oak
prow, its wide, gaping mouth filled with long teeth, glared back at
them. In the gloom of dusk, they could just see the Northmen moving
about on the deck, preparing for the night. The sound of their voices,
deep and guttural and in a language the monks could not understand,
floated across the water. To the east, the moon was rising above the
Kerry mainland. It was almost full; the night would be clear and
bright. Tonight must be the night, said Lucinda to herself. Tonight, I
will learn more about these nails.