

# The Abbott's Crucifix



by

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## INTRODUCTION

Following an accident on a notorious by-pass, Martin and his family are transported back in time to the sixteenth century.

In his earlier life the boy had received instruction at a nearby monastery. When, on the king's orders, the monastery had to close and its possessions forfeited, Martin helped the abbot to retain his valuable crucifix.

This was achieved at great risk to his own life, made more difficult by his jealous fellow pupil's attempt to thwart his efforts.

With the crucifix safely out of the king's clutches, Martin and his family are returned to the present, but Martin does not entirely forget his earlier life.

## The Accident

Martin sensed that something would happen. He had a strange feeling of having been at that guesthouse before. It was quite a pleasant feeling. Yet, when he asked his father about it, the reply was, 'No, son, we've never been here before. This place only opened to visitors last year. You can see it's nearly a new building.' Eleven-year-old Martin could see that, but the feeling was still there.

The Morley family had enjoyed their two days' stay at the guesthouse. Already it had a good reputation. The leaflets describing the house also gave information about the history of the site. Moorlea Guest House had been built on the site of an old Tudor farmhouse which had fallen into ruin.

Earlier still, it was thought that monks had lived there.

Martin, in particular, was interested in this information. At school he had been learning about the Tudors and how Henry the Eighth closed the monasteries. Now, as they prepared to leave, he was thinking about the people who had lived on that place hundreds of years earlier. What were they like?

Leaving Moorlea behind, Richard Morley drove his car onto the Oldbridge by-pass. It was a good straight road, but he could only drive slowly. Night was closing in, there was a drizzle of rain, and patches of fog made driving hazardous. Martin sat beside his father in the car, while his mother was in the back with his two young sisters. They had not been travelling long before it happened.

'Look out, Dad!' he yelled. 'You're going to hit him!' From out of the fog a figure had appeared. Right in their path, it was coming slowly towards them. With a cry of alarm Richard Morley swerved his car off the road where, with screeching brakes and sickening jolt, it hit a tree.

Shocked, bewildered and angry, Richard was first to speak. 'Whoever, whatever was that fool doing, walking in the middle of the road like that? Would have served him right if I'd run into him. Are you alright, Martin?' The boy did not respond. He was sitting quite still, a bemused expression on his face. The two girls were whimpering in the back but their mother soon assured Richard that they were not really hurt. 'What about you, Martin?' She leaned forward to query anxiously, 'Are you hurting anywhere?' When the boy did not speak Richard said, 'He'll be in shock. Must have had a bad jolt when we hit this tree. His side of the car took most of the impact.' He took a closer look at his son. 'Can't see any injuries though. What do you reckon that fellow was doing, causing us to end up like this? Did you see him?' he asked his wife.

'No, I can't say I did. I was beginning to doze until you swerved the car,' she replied. 'But if you and Martin saw somebody he must still be around somewhere.'

They undid their seatbelts and climbed gingerly out of the damaged vehicle. The girls were sobbing loudly. 'What are we going to do?' wailed nine-year-old Catherine.

'I'll phone for help in a minute, after I've helped Martin,' her father told her. Assisted by his parents, the boy got out of the car. He was able to stand but his father kept a tight hold on him. He looked so strange. When spoken to he remained silent. Though his eyes appeared to be looking at them, they felt he was not really seeing them. 'It's as if he's looking at somebody else,' his mother said in a frightened voice.

'Perhaps he's still seeing that fool on the road,' Richard volunteered. 'I wonder where he went to.'

At that point, a car pulled up behind them and the driver called, 'Looks like you're needing a bit of help.'

'You can say that again,' Richard replied wearily. 'We've just had a nasty experience.' He told him briefly what had happened.

'Well, as far as I can tell, you seem sober enough. But we will have to get the police, of course.'

'And an ambulance too,' Richard added. 'I think my family need to be checked over. The girls are making a lot of noise, but it's the lad I'm most worried about. He seems to have lost his voice altogether.'

'Right you are mate. I'll get them on my mobile. I should sit back in the car while you're waiting.' They took the man's advice. The night was cold and damp which, added to the trauma they were already in, caused them all to shiver. The drizzle seemed to be clearing the fog but, though they scanned the road, they could see nothing of the mysterious figure which had caused their accident.

The police and ambulance arrived simultaneously. It was apparent that no other vehicle had been involved. So, the question was what had caused the car to go off the road. 'Richard never drinks when he's driving,' his wife told them emphatically as the usual test became imminent.

'Well, we just have to make sure,' said the law. Of course, the test was negative.

'And he's a careful driver,' she insisted. 'When conditions aren't good, like tonight, he always goes slower.' The police agreed that, had the car been going fast, it would have suffered more severe damage, not to mention that to its occupants.

The paramedics were meanwhile attending to the children. When the young man who had helped them saw that things were under control, he said he had better be off. Richard thanked him for his assistance, whereupon the man offered a bit of consolation. 'Don't blame yourself too much, mate. Probably a patch of fog that looked like a person. Could have happened to anybody. Anyway, you're all O.K. so it could have been worse. 'Bye,' he called cheerily and drove away.

The sergeant regarded Richard quizzically. 'So, just what was it that caused you to go off the road?' When told it was a person, the policemen were unbelieving. 'Like that young fellow just said, it could have been a patch of

fog. We had a similar accident on this by-pass not long since where the driver thought he'd seen somebody. As that turned out though, he was well over the limit. Been having too long a session at the Silver Fox down in Oldbridge. Anyway, if anybody had been on the road tonight, they'd still be around, and we've seen nobody, neither alive nor dead.' His constable who had meanwhile been looking along the road was quick to confirm this. 'But I tell you it was a person we saw. Martin saw him first and shouted the warning. Then I saw him. He was straight in front of us.'

'It does seem strange,' the sergeant admitted. 'But can you tell us just what this figure looked like?'

'Hard to say whether it was a man or a woman. He had a man's build, but it were his clothes that seemed peculiar. Long dark dress tied round the middle with a sort of rope. On his head was an old-fashioned hood. If I didn't sound too ridiculous, I'd say we saw a monk. You know there were lots of them in time past. You probably learnt about them at school.'

'Oh yes, I enjoyed history. Wasn't it old Henry the Eighth who did away with the monasteries and turned the monks out? But that was hundreds of years ago. Not likely we see any now, at least not round here.'

'Funny though,' the constable intervened. Now I think of it, that fellow from Oldbridge you mentioned who had an accident here; it was a monk he claimed to have seen. He was under the influence though, and I reckon if a fellow's in that state he can imagine seeing anything.'

'What did your boy think it was?' the sergeant asked. 'You said he saw it first.'

'Martin hasn't said anything yet. He's still in shock. In fact, I'm really worried about him.'

Turning his attention to the boy in the ambulance, the sergeant prompted him gently. 'Martin, can you tell me, son, what happened? Your Dad says you saw a person in the road. He thinks the figure looked like a monk. What do you think?'

Slowly Martin turned his head to focus his gaze on the sergeant and, for the first time since the crash, words came from his lips. 'It was a monk,' he said clearly. 'It was Brother Nathan.' Then, as if the effort to speak had been too great, he slumped forward, clutching his head in both hands.

'I think we need to get this young man to hospital as soon as possible,' urged the paramedic.

From his straw pallet Martin looked up and smiled at the grey-clad figure beside him. 'Brother Fabian! Where am I? What happened?' he asked.

'Praise be, at last you are awake, my son,' the monk said kindly as he bent to look at the boy. 'You took a nasty fall from your horse. Two of our lay brothers were tending sheep on Moorside hill and saw you galloping by. Your horse stumbled on a grassy hillock, threw you and bolted away. It was fortunate the good brethren were at hand to bring you back to our infirmary. 'Twould have been a longer journey to convey you home.'

Martin gazed around at the bare stone walls and recognition dawned. 'Ah yes, the infirmary,' he said quietly. He was no stranger to Moorlea monastery. Because of his frequent visits he was well known to the monks. His parents too were friendly with them and often rode over to speak with the abbot.

'Do my parents know I am here?' the boy enquired.

'To be sure they do. Father Jerome dispatched Brother Anselm right away to tell them of your mishap. They would have been anxious, no doubt, to see your horse returning without you. But you have no broken bones, praise be, just some bruising v which will perchance feel sore for a day or two. The herbal compresses we applied should give some relief. So how do you feel now?'

'I feel hungry.' Martin raised himself to a sitting position and swung his legs from the pallet. The monk laughed. 'Tis plain to see you are well recovered. I will help you into your doublet and hose, then we will see what the refectory has to offer.'

After satisfying his hunger with a large helping of pigeon pie, the boy took a walk outside. Soon he saw his father coming to fetch him home. His squire accompanied him leading Martin's horse. When his father saw he was fit to ride he thanked Brother Fabian for attending to him and said they had better return home. 'Lady Cecily is anxious to see the boy,' he explained. Before they left, they called briefly on the abbot to thank him too for his help.

'We shall be expecting Martin to be here again for his studies in two days' time,' said Father Jerome. 'That is if he is sufficiently well recovered. I am pleased to say his teacher gives me good reports about his progress.'

Martin said pleasantly, 'I will be well enough, Father. I like coming here and I enjoy my studies with Brother Nathan.'

### Bad News for the Monastery

Martin's brown head bent over the desk. He dipped his quill in the ink and wrote his name carefully on the parchment. 'Well done, my son,' exclaimed the young monk sitting on the wooden bench beside him. 'Your penmanship is coming on apace. With a little more practice, it will soon be as good as mine.' The eleven-year-old boy looked up at his teacher and smiled.

Sitting at another desk was Stephen, a big, red-headed lad, almost two years older than Martin. Hearing those words of praise given to the other boy he scowled and pulled a face at him. The monk then went over to look on Stephen's desk and a frown crossed his face. 'Your writing will get better if you try harder,' he said.

The monk who taught the boys was Brother Nathan. He was a clever, kindly young man. Besides teaching them to write he had them study books, Scripture and Latin. The boys rode over to the monastery two or three times a week for instruction. Their homes were in different directions, so they did not ride together. Martin was the son of a knight, Sir Richard Morley, and his wife, the Lady Cecily. They lived at the fine old manor house of Moorlea, about three miles from the monastery. Stephen Barlow's father was a rich merchant. He had a new house just outside the town.

Next day when the boys arrived for lessons Brother Nathan told them sadly, 'We must cut short our studies today. When we finish, the abbot wishes to speak with you in his room. He has bad news, I fear.'

Father Jerome, the abbot, was head of the monastery. He was a grey, elderly man, tall and lean. He wore the same kind of long robe and hood as the other monks. He had sandals on his feet like they had. But around his neck was a chain with a large silver cross.

'Peace be with you, my sons, and pray be seated,' he said wearily when the boys entered his room. His thin pale face had a tired look. 'The news I must tell you, alas, is not good. We have been told that our monastery will soon be closed, along with all other such houses in the land. The order comes from Thomas Cromwell who has been given power to do so by King Henry himself. So, you will no longer be able to come here for instruction when it happens.'

'Why has this to happen, Father?' enquired a puzzled Martin.

'It is said that the monks in some places have become lazy and selfish. They are not doing good works like monks used to do. They think only of getting richer themselves instead of giving to the poor who need it. They eat rich food and drink good wine. Another thing is they do not bother to pray or attend all the church services as they should.'

'But this monastery is not at all like that,' said Martin. 'Everybody here works hard and says all their prayers. You never turn people away if they come for help.'

`That is quite true. At this very moment Brother Fabian is treating a child in the infirmary. Her poor mother did not know how to deal with the sore on her leg. It was getting worse before she brought her here. But now the good brother's herbal treatment is helping it to heal. Both mother and child will be given a basin of good broth too, for we fear they do not have enough to eat at home.' The abbot gave a deep sigh. 'We do what we can here, but it seems all monasteries are not the same.'

`Couldn't Thomas Cromwell just close the bad ones then and leave the good ones alone?'

A half-smile flickered over the abbot's pale face. 'A good thought, my son, but that would be difficult to carry out. And there is another reason why the king is wanting them all closed.'

His face grew serious as he continued. `King Henry, the eighth of that name, hopes to get richer himself by so doing. His plan is to claim the monastery lands, buildings, and everything in them as his own. The money they make will buy him the rich things he has always enjoyed - fine palaces, magnificent clothes, and plenty to eat and drink.'

`Then I think the king is a greedy man. Indeed, he will be a robber if he steals the monasteries,' Martin said hotly.

The red-headed Stephen had kept quiet while the younger boy spoke. Now he turned to Martin with a sly grin. 'You would call our king a robber,' he said. `That is very serious talk. You could find yourself in the Tower of London if he got to know.'

`Well, I do think it would be wrong to take the monks' things. What do you think, Father?' Martin appealed to the abbot.

`We must have a care what we say, my son. It is not wise to speak ill of King Henry. Since he has made himself Head of the Church in England, he has power to do what he likes with churches, monasteries, abbeys and such places. Any thoughts I have on the matter must be kept to myself. '

`But where will you go if you are turned out of here?' the boy asked.

`Some of us may find work labouring on other people's land. Or some may go to live and work in the town. As for myself, I am too old and weak for farm-work. I may leave England and return to France. It is possible I could enter a monastery in that country. I lived there when I was young and still have friends there. But until the changes come, we will carry on here as before. Just tell your fathers what I have said.' He gave them his blessing and the boys went to get their horses from the field.

`Hurrah,' Stephen cried. 'I'm glad this old monastery is going to close. Won't it be great when our lessons stop. I'm fed up with books, this silly old Latin, and everything Brother Nathan tells us. What is more, I don't like him!' `Oh, I shall be sorry when it closes. I like coming here and I like Brother Nathan,' Martin said stoutly.

`Of course, you would,' the other boy spoke angrily. He aimed a vicious kick at Martin's leg. Then he grabbed his arm and gave it a twist. 'We know you are good with a pen. But how can you use your fists? What about showing me?' he snarled, putting up his own fists threateningly.

'I don't want to fight you,' Martin told him. He was scared because Stephen was much bigger and stronger. He didn't like fighting anyway.

'Oh, what a coward you are,' Stephen taunted. 'I thought your father was a brave fighting man in the wars.'

'He was that, and my grandfather too.'

'Well, they will be disappointed that you are not brave like them.'

Martin tried to ignore the last remark. He went to get on his horse, but Stephen pulled him back. 'I'll show you how to fight,' he cried. 'Take that to begin with.' He gave him a blow to the face which nearly knocked him over. 'And that,' he shouted, giving a harder punch. Martin fell on his back. He was just struggling to his feet as Brother Nathan came into the field.

Coming up to the boys he said sternly, 'I thought the wars ended some years ago. You had better be on your way home, Stephen.'

Without saying another word, the big lad mounted his horse quickly and rode away. Seeing that Martin's lip was bleeding badly, the monk told him to go back into the infirmary to have it treated. 'Brother Fabian is best at tending such hurts,' he said.

When Martin was ready to go home Brother Nathan walked with him to his horse.

'I don't mind my mouth hurting,' the boy mumbled. 'But I mind if I'm called a coward. Stephen called me one because I didn't want to fight him.'

'Then I think he is the cowardly one for wanting to fight a younger boy.'

'He said I wasn't as brave as my father because he fought in the wars. I would like to be as brave as him, but I don't think I want to kill anybody.'

'There are other ways of being brave, my son, besides killing and fighting. But do not worry. England is at peace now the Tudor kings are ruling us, so we have no need to fight.'

Brother Nathan's words made the boy feel happier. He thought what a peaceful place the monastery was and how hard-working the monks were. As he rode away, he could see one had come into the field to milk a cow. Another was scattering corn for the fowls. Some were digging in the garden and others were out in the meadow making hay. On the hills two monks were tending sheep. Two more were walking down to the dam to catch fish for supper. He knew there were others working inside the house. The monks made their own bread, brewed their own ale and cooked their own food. Brother Nathan was working on a new book, painting some of the letters in bright colours to make it beautiful. 'What a pity such a place as this has to be closed,' he said to himself, and felt sad again.

### At Moorlea Manor House

‘My dear boy, what have you been doing to yourself?’ The Lady Cecily's blue eyes widened in alarm as she saw her son's bruised cheeks and swollen lip. Her kind face, framed by the close-fitting hood which covered her fair hair, looked at him anxiously.

‘Tis nothing, mother. Brother Fabian put on a salve which he makes himself. It is wondrous soothing. Already my face feels much better.’ Martin was her only son, and she did not like to see him hurt. She had had two other boys, but they had died of the sweating sickness when they were babies. Now she had only Martin and his sisters, Catherine and Mary. She was just about to ask her son how he had come by his injuries when her husband came into the room. ‘Oh, so you have been in a fight, I see,’ Sir Richard exclaimed. ‘Do you want to tell us about it?’

‘No, it doesn't matter. In truth I am not much hurt.’

‘Well, I suppose all lads have to give and take knocks as they grow up,’ said the knight.

‘You did a lot of fighting, didn't you father, in the wars? Did you kill anybody?’ ‘Yes, I admit I did. Those Scots were a wild lot. If we hadn't shot them with our arrows or stuck them with our spears, they would have cut us to pieces. But we won the battle and killed their king. That was twenty years ago. And a long time before that your grandfather was at Bosworth battle. He helped King Henry's father to win the crown.’

Martin admired his father greatly. The knight was big and strong, with dark hair and eyes. He was an expert horseman, good at jousting, hunting and hawking. He hoped his son would be good at these sports when he was older. The boy could already ride well and liked to shoot at the target with his bow and arrows. But his father was pleased to see that Martin enjoyed his studies too. Sir Richard and Lady Cecily sometimes rode over to the monastery to ask how he was getting on. They were good friends of the abbot and his monks.

‘And how did you get on with your studies today?’ Lady Cecily asked.

‘I was sorry they were cut short,’ replied Martin. ‘The abbot had to take some time to speak with us. He was very sad because the monastery has to close. When that happens, I shan't be able to go for my lessons anymore. I shall miss Brother Nathan teaching me.’

‘So what I have been hearing is true,’ Sir Richard exclaimed. ‘I had hoped it was but an idle rumour, but now it seems this is not so. What a pity those good monks have to be turned out of the place.’

‘And all those lovely things in the church will belong to the king: the silver cups, plate, candlesticks and all other ornaments,’ said Martin.

'Oh, how dreadful!' His mother stared at him in disbelief 'It seems the king is a changed man these days. I remember seeing him when he was young. He was married to the good Queen Catherine at that time. He was handsome and jovial. Everybody liked him then. It is since he married the Boleyn woman that he is different. People say, though, that he is not pleased with her now. He may get rid of her too and marry another wife.'

'Shh ... my dear. We must be careful of what we say. King Henry is a powerful man. Those who disagree with him can soon find themselves in prison - or worse,' Sir Richard warned.

'You are right, my husband. I remember what happened to the good Sir Thomas More only last year. And he had been the king's friend at that.'

'We must do nothing to upset the king. We are happy living here in this fine old house. We would hate to be turned out if we did anything to displease him. Our king's father, the seventh Henry gave my father some of this land for helping him in the crown. But kings can take as well as give. Now Martin, I think you are in need of fresh air. You look somewhat pale. How about coming with me for a ride round the estate. I want to see that our tenants' farms are in good repair.'

The boy's face brightened. He had been worrying a little about his father's remarks. He remembered telling the abbot that the king was a robber. Stephen had said that it could get him into trouble. But now he was going out with his father he forgot his worries.

Sir Richard Morley was good at looking after his tenants. Since he was not away fighting, he spent most of his time on the manor. He owned a lot of land with farms and cottages. He tried to see that the people who lived in them were well treated by the stewards who helped him.

Lady Cecily was a busy person too. She had lots of servants in the house to do cooking, baking, washing and cleaning. But every day she went round them all to see the work was being properly done. She talked with them to make sure they were happy in their work. Sometimes she took Catherine and Mary with her on the rounds to let them see how things should be done. All the servants were fond of Lady Cecily and her family.

## The Crucifix

In the monastery the monks were gathered together for a meeting.

'We must be making plans for what to do when we are forced to leave,' the abbot told them.

'I shall try to get work with an apothecary in the town. With my knowledge of herbal medicines I may be wanted,' said Brother Fabian.

'We are used to working on the land and with animals. Perhaps we can ask for work on some of the big farms,' said Brother Thomas.

Brother Anselm suggested, 'Some of us could go to the town and work in the houses of those rich merchants. I am told they can employ servants in their kitchens.'

'There might be building work too. New houses have to be built and old ones repaired,' Brother Francis spoke hopefully.

'These are all good ideas,' agreed Brother Dominic. 'But I fear there may be enough servants and workers already at these places. It is said there are many people out of work in the town. Only last week did we have a family at the gate begging for food because the man had no work. It may come to pass that we shall be begging too.' The monk seemed very downhearted.

'We can only try our best,' the abbot told them. 'I myself have plans for leaving England. As some of you know, I lived in a monastery in France many years ago. I still have friends there. And now I have a very good reason for wanting to go back.'

The monks looked at him questioningly. After a brief pause, he continued.

'You see this crucifix which I wear around my neck. It is the cross of Saint Theresa and very, very precious.' He took the large silver cross in his fingers and held it up for them to see. There were jewels of red, blue, green and gold set into the silver. know you have all seen it before, but I have never told you how I came to have it. I would like to tell you now.

This crucifix does not belong to our Moorlea monastery as does the valuable silver we have in our church. It was when I was leaving France to come here that my old abbot gave it to me. Or rather I should say he lent it. You see, it really belongs to the monastery in France. He wanted me to have something to remember them by. But he said that, if I ever thought I could not keep it safely, he would wish it to go back to the monastery in France where it belonged. Alas, that good old abbot has since died, but I must carry out his wish and take it back. You must know that when Thomas Cromwell's men come to take our possessions, they will take the crucifix too. They will see it is of great value. If I try to hide it here, they will be sure to find it, so it is best to move it right away.' 'Then let me go to France with you, Father,' begged Brother Nathan. 'You should not be travelling alone.'

Father Jerome agreed to this. He would be glad to have someone help him on the journey. It was twenty miles to the coast. Then they would have to find a boat that would take them to France.

The monks talked for a long time about what they should do. It was agreed that some could leave as soon as they wished and try to find work. But most of them said they would stay until forced to leave. After all, the animals needed feeding and the cows had to be milked. Nobody wanted to leave the peaceful place which had been their home for so long a time.

The abbot said that, as head of the monastery, he would be staying with them for as long as he was able to.

'But what about the crucifix, Father? If those men come and it is still here, they will tear it from your neck,' cried Brother Nathan.

'I think there might be a way to prevent that. Come into my room this evening after Vespers and we will make plans. And now it is time we went about our duties. A blessing on you all.'

That evening the monks assembled in their church for the service of Vespers. When it ended the abbot talked with Brother Nathan in his room.

'Tell me about your pupil,' he said. 'Is Martin Morley a trustworthy boy?

You will know him better than I do so are better able to judge.'

'That is easy to answer, Father,' Brother Nathan replied. 'Martin is the younger of my two scholars but he is the one I would trust. The other boy, Stephen, I would trust not at all. Why do you ask?'

'We may need Martin's help then if he will agree to give it. I have an idea how to keep the crucifix safe while we stay here. We could ask the boy to hide it in that old house of theirs. There must be many old nooks and crannies at Moorlea Manor where nobody goes these days.'

'Martin is a clever boy. No doubt he can keep it safely until we are ready to leave,' said the young monk. 'He is due to come for instruction again in two more days so we can put it to him then.'

Martin was excited to be told about the crucifix and was eager to help the monks. Stephen had not arrived that morning. They thought he was staying away because of the fight. So, Brother Nathan and the abbot had Martin to themselves. He would do his lessons after they had talked.

'We shall not be disobeying the king's orders,' Brother Nathan explained. 'He is claiming all things that belong to the monastery here, and I fear all that silver in the church will have to go. But Father Jerome's crucifix does not belong here as he has just explained.'

'Oh yes, I see that,' Martin said brightly. 'I wonder when those men will come. Do you think I should take the crucifix today?'

'I do, my son, the sooner the better. Thomas Cromwell's men could be here any day now. I will wrap it up well in a leather pouch. Then, while you are at your studies, I will put the pouch in your satchel. It will be best to tell no-one where you hide it, not even your father. For if it should be found at Moorlea Manor it will go hard on him. He would be charged with taking the king's property, even though we explained it wasn't his. Sir Richard might then be put in prison and his house and land given to someone else.'

`It is a lot we ask of you, Martin. You do not have to help us if you are afraid.' Brother Nathan had noticed the boy's face pale a little at the abbot's words.

`I will hide it safely. There are lots of places I can think of in our house,' he replied.

`Then may Our Lady bless you, my son. And now you had better go with Brother Nathan to do your studies. He tells me. what a good penman you are already.'

As the abbot spoke there was a slight noise outside his door. When Brother Nathan opened it, they caught a glimpse of a red head disappearing round the corner. 'There's Stephen Barlow,' exclaimed Martin\_ 'Do you think he was listening to us?'

`Indeed, I do think he might have been doing so.' The monk's face looked suddenly grim. 'He is a boy we must be watching.'

When they reached their study room Stephen was already seated at his desk, the Latin book open in front of him. He was flushed and spoke hurriedly. 'I thought it best to learn my Latin until you came, Brother Nathan. Sorry I am late. I had to do an errand for my father. And I am sorry too for what I did to Martin,' he said meekly.

`Well, let us get on with our Latin. I shall see how much you have learned while you have been waiting for us.' The young monk was not fooled by Stephen's pretended apology. He knew he was not a truthful boy and felt uneasy about the crucifix. If the lad had heard it was to be hidden in Moorlea Manor, he may cause trouble.

Martin was worried too. When they were doing their writing, Stephen looked slyly across at him and smirked. Martin wondered how long he had been listening at the abbot's door and how much he had heard.

When their studies were finished, he was allowed to go home at once. Stephen sulked when he was told to remain a while longer. 'It is because you were late that I must keep you a little longer,' said the monk. 'Martin can go because he came early. The reason he hadn't begun lessons was that Father Jerome had to speak with him.'

So it was that Martin reached home without trouble. The leather pouch containing the crucifix was safe inside his saddlebag. He had already decided where to hide it.

### The Monastery is closed

Sir Richard called at the monastery a few days later to see the abbot. He had an offer to make. 'My son tells me you will soon be leaving here for France. A great pity. Orders from London must be obeyed, however. As your friend I would like to help you. Before you go to France travel arrangements will have to be made. These could take much time. So, until they are made, you and Brother Nathan are welcome to stay here with us at Moorlea Manor. If you wish I can help you with the travel too. I know a man who owns boats that sail to France. Next time I ride down there I will enquire when his boats sail. You can also borrow two of my quietest horses to take you to the coast. Some of my men will go with you and bring the horses back.'

There were tears in the abbot's eyes. 'How can I thank you, Sir Richard. Of course, I shall be glad of such help. Has Martin told you why we want to go to France?'

'He said you were going back to the monastery where you lived before. You have friends there, I believe.'

'Quite so. It seems the best thing for me to do. And Brother Nathan will no doubt be able to teach boys over there. He will be sorry not to have Martin though. He has been a good pupil.'

While they talked the knight had spoken no word about the crucifix. It was clear that Martin had done as the abbot had asked and kept quiet about it. Soon came the day they had all been expecting. Stephen and Martin were with Brother Nathan at their Bible study when suddenly they heard a commotion at the gate. A jingling of harness and stamping of hooves warned that a body of horsemen had arrived. A loud voice was demanding to see the abbot.

Brother Nathan got up quickly from the bench. 'Come, let us see what is happening,' he said., so the two boys followed him.

The abbot had come from his room and was limping slowly to meet the visitors. All the monks who were in the house came forward too as the gates were opened and the men rode into the yard. The riders were well-dressed and armed. The man in front looked very grand and important. His riding boots were of finest leather. Beneath his open coat could be seen a doublet of dark green velvet richly decorated. On his head was a large, flat cap in velvet of the same colour. It had a feather at one side. Martin noticed he wore a dagger in his belt and so did the other horsemen. They were followed by men on foot who looked to be servants. Behind them were more horses harnessed to carts.

'You know why we are here,' announced the leader. 'We must take everything we find inside the house and out. It will be loaded into the carts over there. All stores of food and drink both for yourselves and the animals.'

You won't be needing them any more for you are all to leave this very day. We shall collect everything from the kitchens, dormitory, infirmary, and all the other rooms and outhouses. Also, the treasures you keep in the church.'

'We are prepared to leave,' the abbot said calmly. 'But what about the animals? They cannot be left alone without food.'

'You may know there is a fair tomorrow near Moorlea town. The animals will be taken there to be sold. It will be quite a big fair with plenty of fanners ready to buy.' He jumped down from his horse and so did the other riders. The men on foot took the horses then and tethered them in the yard. 'Those fellows are used to handling animals,' the leader went on. 'They will stay here tonight and drive them to the fair tomorrow. In the meantime, they will load the carts.'

He gave orders for the rest of his men to follow him. They made their way to the storehouses and the servants carried the sacks of grain and barrels of ale into the carts. From bakehouse, brewery and kitchen they took all the pots, pans and bowls that the monks had used. They took the wooden trenchers from which they had eaten their food, spoons, knives, and drinking vessels.

Monks who had been working in the garden soon saw what was happening and fetched the others in from the fields. Soon all the monks were watching silently as their possessions were taken away to the carts.

'It is clear we cannot take everything today,' the leader said after a time. 'The tables, benches and beds will have to be left for now. In any case, there will be workmen coming later to get lead from the roofs and glass from the windows. That will all take time. But what we must do now is to clear the church of its treasures. The most valuable items are in there so that is most important.'

On hearing this two of the monks hurried quickly before him into the church. When the others followed, they saw Brother Anselm was holding the silver cross that had stood on the altar for as long as he could remember. Brother Francis was clutching a beautiful silver candlestick. 'Please don't take these,' they pleaded. But the leader made a sign to two of his men. They were strong, heavy fellows. It was easy for them to grasp the silver treasures and push the monks roughly away. When Brother Anselm made an attempt to get the cross back again the man's hand went to the dagger at his belt.

'It is of no use to resist, my brothers,' said the abbot quietly, taking Brother Anselm's arm. 'All we can do is pray for happier times.' He told Stephen and Martin to go back home. Their lessons in the monastery were now at an end. Taking Martin aside he told him that he and Brother Nathan would come later to Moorlea Manor as Sir Richard had invited them to. 'You must understand I have to stay here until all the brothers have departed peaceably. I would not want bloodshed at this sad time.'

Brother Nathan watched the boys go to their horses for the ride home. He wondered whether Stephen would start another fight. Happily, he did not. In fact, Stephen was looking quite pleased with himself as he turned to speak

to Martin. If the monk could have heard Stephen's words, however, he would not have been happy at all.

`I noticed the good abbot was not wearing his crucifix today. He must be hiding it from those men. If it is in the monastery, they will find it, no doubt. They are searching everywhere. But perhaps it is no longer in the monastery.' Stephen grinned craftily at Martin and gave him a knowing wink which made the younger boy feel uneasy. 'Well, don't look so glum,' he said. 'It is Moorlea Fair tomorrow. Are you going? I shall be going with my father. There will be lots to see besides watching those animals sold, I shall enter the archery contest and win,' he bragged. 'But I don't suppose you are any good with a bow and arrow. Better with a pen, aren't you?' He gave a mocking laugh which Martin ignored.

From their horses the boys looked back on the busy scene. Some of the monks had started to leave, mostly in twos or threes, but some were walking alone. They were going in various directions, some towards the town and others to country places. In the monastery yard men were piling their possessions into the carts.

`I wonder if those men have found the abbot's crucifix yet,' said Stephen. `Somehow I think they have not.'

Martin said nothing but rode home quietly. The rest of the day he spent in archery practice.

It was quite late in the day when the abbot and Brother Nathan arrived at Moorlea Manor. The elderly Father Jerome could only walk slowly because of his lameness. Lady Cecily had told her servants they would wait for supper until they could see the monks approaching. So, by the time they appeared, everyone was hungry.

The household was large but most of its members ate together in the long dining hall. Sir Richard and Lady Cecily sat on chairs at the head of the table. Martin sat at the right side of his father while Catherine and Mary were at their mother's left. Nearest to the family were seated their friends and chief helpers. The two monks were given places with them. Lower down the table, along both of its sides, the rest of the household sat on wooden benches.

Served on pewter dishes, the roast venison smelt and tasted good. So did the pork and pigeon pie. There was fruit and sweetmeats for dessert, saffron cake, custards and marzipan. The knight, his lady and their friends drank wine. Other folk, including the children and the two monks, drank ale. There was plenty of food and drink for everyone.

Father Jerome gave a blessing when the meal was finished. Thanking Lady Cecily, he told her what a good supper she had given them. 'We never ate so much before,' he said with a smile. 'In our monastery we lived quite frugally as monks are supposed to do. But we know this is not so in other monasteries now.' That is one reason why the king is closing them, or so he says.'

The abbot told Sir Richard that the animals from his monastery were to be sold at the fair next day. Hearing this, Lady Cecily exclaimed, `Ah yes, it

will be Moorlea Fair tomorrow. What with all the excitement of today I had almost forgotten. I think it would do us good to go to the fair. Martin does not seem happy now the monastery is closed. The fair may cheer him up. Catherine and Mary would like to go too, I am sure. They have been inside the house so long. What say you, my daughters?'

The two girls smiled with pleasure. 'Oh yes, mother dear. It will be good to leave our sewing for a while. Perhaps I can buy some ribbons at the fair for my new dress,' said Catherine who was nine.

'I hope there will be jugglers and acrobats like we saw at the last fair,' added Mary. She was a year younger than her sister. They were both pretty girls, fair-haired like their mother.

'I would love to go to the fair too,' said Lady Cecily. 'What do you think, my husband?'

'I don't see why you should not, my dear,' Sir Richard replied. 'But you must have a few of my good men here to go with you. They will keep a close watch on you all to see that none of you comes to harm. I cannot be there myself as I have some business at the coast.'

### At the Fair and after

The day of the fair was bright and sunny. Lady Cecily, her son and daughters rode eagerly along the woodland paths to the place where the fair was held. They were escorted by six of Sir Richard's most trusted retainers. At last, they arrived at the wide, grassy space outside the town where a colourful crowd was gathered. All the people were in holiday dress. After making sure their horses and ponies were safe, the little party from Moorlea Manor mingled with the crowd on foot.

There was a play going on in one place which they stopped to watch. Then, to Mary's delight, they saw some gypsies juggling, also some acrobats. 'Aren't they clever? I wish I could do that!' she cried.

On another part of the green men were wrestling to see who was the strongest. Others were fighting with wooden staves and shooting with the longbow. A little crowd had gathered to watch the shooting. In the middle of it Martin saw a red head. It was Stephen's. When the men had finished their archery, it was the turn of the boys.

The target at which they shot had circles on it, all at different distances from the centre. The aim was to get an arrow in the centre or as near to it as possible. The boys were allowed to shoot three arrows each. Stephen pushed his way forward for first turn. His first two arrows landed outside the centre ring but his last one was just inside. He was looking pleased with himself when the boys who followed him did not do as well. He thought he would be the winner.

'Why don't you have a go, Martin?' Catherine asked. 'You have been practising a lot.'

'Yes, I think I will,' her brother replied, stepping forward. Holding the longbow steady he fitted an arrow and took careful aim. It landed on the edge of the centre ring. His second was better still. It went just inside the ring, equally as good as Stephen's best. But his third shot was best of all. The arrow flew straight into the middle of the target. He was the winner, and the crowd clapped their hands. His mother and sisters were pleased, of course, as were his father's retainers.

They had been keeping a little distance from the family but were never far away. Now they came forward to clap him on the back. Everyone seemed pleased except Stephen. He scowled at Martin and hurried off.

Most people then made their way to the middle of the green to watch the baiting of a bull. The animal was chained to a strong post and several fierce dogs set on to attack it. The bull tossed some of the dogs away, but it was badly bitten by the others which jumped onto its neck. It could not move very well because of the chain. When it did manage to kill one of the dogs with its horns another dog was put in the dead one's place.

'I think bull-baiting is very cruel,' said Mary. 'I feel sorry for the bull.'

`So do I,' Catherine agreed. 'It hasn't a chance of winning when they bring fresh dogs to fight it. Can we go somewhere else now?'

`Yes, I don't much like it either,' said Lady Cecily. 'But the menfolk do. Just see them laughing and shouting when the bull is bitten. The poor creature is getting the worst of it. He will be killed in the end. But this could go on for some time yet. He is putting up a good fight. I think we have seen enough though.'

`Can we go look at the sheep and cattle that are for sale, Mother. 'The ones that belonged to the monastery?' Martin asked. 'See them over there in that enclosure.'

`A good idea, my boy. There seems to be a lot of people who are interested. Most of them will be farmers who have gone to buy.'

They walked towards the place where the animals had been put. Some of the cattle had already been sold and men were leading them away. The fowls, pigs and sheep were still waiting to be sold. As they drew near to watch, Martin wondered whether any of the monks would be there. He could not see any.

`Perhaps the brothers would be too sad to watch their animals going to someone else,' said Lady Cecily. 'I wonder who those men are who are looking after them. And that important looking one in the rich clothes. He seems to be in charge of everything.'

`Oh, they are the men who came to the monastery when we were at our studies. We saw them taking things into the carts. The big man with the green velvet cap was telling the others what to do. He is the chief, no doubt.'

Then suddenly Catherine tugged at her brother's arm. 'Look, Martin,' she whispered excitedly. 'A boy has just gone up to talk to that chief man. Isn't he the one who was in the shooting contest? I remember him by his hair. You beat him and I am sure he was not at all pleased.'

`Yes, that's Stephen Barlow,' Martin said grimly. 'He had lessons with me at the monastery but did not like to study. He was glad when the place closed.'

`It seems odd that the boy needs to talk with that man. I cannot think he is wanting to buy sheep, or anything else for that matter. Indeed, he does not look at all interested in the animals,' Lady Cecily remarked.

While his mother and sisters went to look at the sheep, Martin kept watching Stephen. He remembered Brother Nathan saying the boy ought to be watched. They felt sure he knew something about the abbot's crucifix and would make trouble for Martin if he could. Now, as Stephen talked with the velvet-capped man, he noticed they were moving a little way from the farmers so as not to be overheard. Then, to Martin's alarm, he saw Stephen pass his hand slowly around his neck and draw the shape of a large cross on his chest. After that he pointed a finger in the direction of Moorlea Manor House. A sickly feeling came over the young boy as it became clear what Stephen was telling the man. It was that the crucifix had been taken to the manor house. The man would say it was the king's property and therefore should have been given to him. If it was found in Sir Richard's house, that

knight would be in bad trouble. To act against King Henry was called treason and men were put to death for that.

When Stephen had finished talking the man patted his shoulder and went back to the animals. Then, as he turned to leave, Stephen saw Martin. He had not noticed him before. He strode up to him and grinned cheekily. In a mocking voice he said, 'Well, Robin Hood, you did have a bit of luck at that target. Don't suppose you could do it again though. Now I'm going to see those dogs finish off that bull. He should be nearly dead by this time.' He gave a wicked laugh and ran off.

'What a nasty, cruel boy,' cried Mary. 'He's looking more pleased with himself now though. He was quite sulky after the archery,' her sister remarked.

'That man he was talking to must have cheered him up,' added Lady Cecily. She was right, of course. But if the lady had known why Stephen was so cheerful, she herself would not have felt cheerful at all.

Along one side of the green stalls were set up with different goods on display. Lady Cecily bought new ribbons and laces for the girls and coloured sewing thread for the tapestry on which she was working. There was a stall selling food and drink, so she bought hot pies for all her party. A helper brought out chairs for them to sit on while they ate. The woman knew they had come from the manor house. Lady Cecily smiled her thanks. The pies tasted good and were washed down with drinks of ale.

The play which they had seen when they arrived was being performed again as they were leaving. It was a fine sight to see all the actors in fancy costumes, and some of the men dressed as women. Another sight they saw but did not like was the dead bull being dragged away from where it had been killed. The bodies of two dogs were taken away too. The grass where the baiting had taken place was red with blood.

Riding homeward through the woods they met three rough-looking fellows. Lady Cecily was thankful that they had Sir Richard's six strong men to protect them. Robbers would find it easy to steal from a woman and children travelling alone. But, with a stout escort such as they had, ruffians would not dare to try.

It was late by the time the party reached home. The abbot and Brother Nathan came out to greet them. They had spent the day quietly in reading, prayer and study, except for a short time walking in the garden to get fresh air and exercise. They asked about the fair and Mary told them proudly, 'Martin won the archery contest.'

'Indeed, then your brother is a talented boy. Good with a bow and with his pen too,' smiled the abbot. 'But he looks somewhat tired now.'

Brother Nathan noticed that the boy was pale and quiet. 'Is everything well with you, Martin?'

'Yes, thank you, Brother Nathan. We have had a busy day and I do feel a little tired. But I am glad we went to the fair.' He was thinking that, if he hadn't been there to see what Stephen was up to, he would not have been

warned to move the crucifix from the house. It did seem likely now that a search would be made. So, another hiding place had to be found.

When the household had retired for the night Martin slipped out of bed and put on his clothes. He went to a little cupboard in the corner of his room and opened the door. It looked to be empty. But when he pressed a tiny knob at one side a small part of the cupboard's back swung open. In the dark space behind was the leather pouch. Martin had discovered the trick of the cupboard when he was playing about one day. He had not told anyone about it because he thought it was good to have a secret of his own. He did not know whether his mother or father knew about it.

The boy was trembling and afraid as he took the pouch out carefully from its hiding place and closed the cupboard door. Then he crept softly down the stairs. He had to get outside but he knew the big main doors were always locked at night and the keys removed. But there was a small kitchen door that led into the garden at the back of the house. This door was locked by one of the kitchen servants and the key hung on a wooden peg behind it. Martin groped his way down the stone steps that led into the kitchen. It was dark and he could hardly see, but at last he found the door. He passed his hand around the top part of it and soon felt the cold metal key touch his fingers. He grasped it from the peg and felt for the lock. The door opened easily so he hurried through. It was good to see the moonlight shining on the garden after being in the dark kitchen. That would make it easier for what he had to do. So, after locking the door behind him and putting the key under a stone, he walked swiftly from the house.

He crossed the garden and walked to the waste ground beyond. There, looming silent and ghost-like in the moonlight, were the ruins of an ancient dovecote. It had lost its roof and part of a wall had fallen down. It had been a ruin for longer than Martin could remember. The new dovecote they used now was already built when he was born. Nettles and thistles were growing thickly amongst the ruins of the old one. No-one ever went there.

As he stood gazing up at the walls the sudden hooting of an owl made him start. He shivered and felt more afraid. 'I don't feel very brave,' he thought to himself 'Perhaps Stephen was right when he called me a coward. But I must think of my father, and the abbot who trusted me to look after his crucifix until he can take it to France. I must keep my promise to help him.'

High up, around the walls, Martin could see the holes where the doves had nested hundreds of years earlier. His idea was to hide the precious crucifix in one of the holes. Having decided on which one he had to skirt around thick clumps of nettles to reach the wall bottom. There were nettles all around the wall, with brambles and thistles growing amongst them. But by treading carefully and using a thick piece of wood he found lying around, he managed to make his way through. Then, plucking up his courage, he started to climb.

Though he was an agile boy Martin found the climb was very hard. It was difficult to get a good grip on the stones in some places for the walls had been smooth to begin with. People had used ladders to reach the nests when

they were in use so did not have to climb the walls. At last, he reached the hole he wanted. He took the pouch from his belt and put it carefully into its new hiding place. Martin was sure it would be safe there. It could not be seen either from outside or inside the ruin.

Climbing down again was as difficult as going up but at least he felt happier. He was nearly at the bottom when, in his eagerness to reach the ground, he lost his grip and fell with a bump, rolling face downwards into the nettles. As he struggled to get up, they stung his hands and face most cruelly and the brambles scratched at him. The pain from those stings made him wince. Only the thought that his task was accomplished prevented him from crying out.

Rubbing his smarting face, he hurried back to the house. He hung the kitchen door key on its peg again and went up to his room. He undressed and got into bed. Although he was very tired, he did not fall asleep for a long time. It was not only the nettle stings keeping him awake but also the thought of Stephen talking to that man at the fair. Would he make trouble? By the time Martin did fall asleep the rest of the household was waking up.

## The Search

Sir Richard Morley arrived home around mid-day. He had good news for the monks. There would be a boat sailing for France in a week's time. The knight had already made arrangements for them to be on it.

‘How can we thank you, Sir,’ said the abbot. ‘We shall be pleased to get away. You and your family have been good friends to us, but I fear England is not a good place for monks nowadays.’

‘That is very true. Last night I stayed at an inn where the talk was about such things. Travellers from the north told how folk up there are rebelling against the monasteries being closed. Not only that, but some are saying the taxes are too great. They are speaking against King Henry. From what I heard, he is not the well-loved king he used to be.’

‘Have any of the monks resisted the king's orders?’ Brother Nathan enquired.

‘I believe they have. They say some have been put in prison for doing so. They may even be hanged. You see, now that King Henry is Head of the Church, he has full power over them. And he has his army to support him. Then I heard some other news that everyone was talking about. Quite shocking news indeed.’ He paused for a moment before he continued. ‘Yes, this also concerns our king. He has just got married again to a lady called Jane. She is his third wife.’

‘Where is Queen Ann then? Has she been divorced too?’

‘Worse than that. She is dead. Her head was struck off with a sword on Tower Green!’

The two monks were speechless at this news, but horror showed in their eyes. Lady Cecily had entered the room just in time to hear about Queen Ann. ‘Oh, poor lady!’ she exclaimed. ‘I must admit I did not like Ann Boleyn, but I would not have wished her such an end. To think about her little girl being left without a mother is dreadful. But I suppose it was to be expected. King Henry is wanting a son to follow him on the throne and Ann did not give him one. Perhaps his new wife will. But just now it is Martin I am worried about.’

‘I was going to ask where Martin was. I thought he would be looking out to meet me when I returned. He usually does when I have been on a journey: So where is the boy?’

‘Alas, he is still in his bed. I fear he is not at all well. He is drowsy and wanting to sleep though the day is half gone. His face is flushed and feverish. There is a rash too which he seems to have been scratching. What a pity Brother Fabian is not at hand. He might have had a remedy.’

‘We will take a look at the boy if you will allow us to,’ the abbot offered. ‘Some of Brother Fabian's remedies are known to us and we would like to see Martin in any case.’

Lady Cecily was willing to agree. 'I will attend to my other duties then. I need to speak to the cooks. Then I must visit the bakehouse and brewery to make sure there will be plenty of bread and ale. Our servants are very good, but I do like to see for myself that all is well. Catherine and Mary are outside playing tennis, or so they pretend. The air should do them good. A pity that Martin is unable to join them.'

Sir Richard then spoke to the monks. 'Will you please tell Martin I shall come to him soon? I have business to discuss with my steward but that should not take long. Then I will be up to see him. If he is no better, I shall send to town for the physician.'

Father Jerome and Brother Nathan went up to Martin's room. He was awake. 'Oh, I am so glad you are here,' he said. 'Now we are alone I can tell you about the crucifix. At least, I can tell you that it is safe. But I would still rather not tell you where it is. That is because, when they ask, you can truthfully say you do not know. They are sure to ask. I know it,' Martin spoke quickly.

'Who are they? Who is going to ask? The monks were curious.

'The men who will come to search the house.' Martin explained what he had seen at the fair. He told them of Stephen talking with the chief man who had cleared the monastery. 'But do not worry. No-one but myself knows where your crucifix is hidden. I will tell you later, perhaps, when it is safe to do so.'

'What a thoughtful boy you are,' Brother Nathan exclaimed. 'But tell us, are you not well that you should still be abed? Have you not slept? And what have you done to your face? Your lady mother thinks you may be sickening for some malady.'

Before Martin could answer, the abbot turned to the young monk and gave a little chuckle. 'A malady? I think not. Unless I am much mistaken, that rash on his face is not at all serious though it will have been painful. Indeed, it is merely a nettle rash. I can see too that those scratches were not made by his fingers. Am I right, Martin?'

'Yes, Father, but I cannot tell you how I came by them. At least, not yet. Perhaps later.'

'There is one thing which worries me now concerning my crucifix.' Father Jerome was serious again. 'What if anyone asks you where it is? 'T'would be untruthful to say you did not know. I have never known you tell a lie and would not wish you to do so now on my account.'

'I have thought on that,' replied Martin. 'Now that mother thinks I am ill it should be easier. But please let her go on thinking so for a while longer. I will keep to my bed meanwhile.'

'Your father will be up to see you soon. He has arranged for a ship to take us to France, but he will tell you about it himself. We will leave you to rest now. Although you are not suffering from a serious malady, the state of your face is enough to make some people think so.'

The monks went downstairs and into the chapel to pray. Sir Richard was about to go see his son when he was told someone important wished to

Speak with him. Going to the door that led into the courtyard he saw a large body of mounted men. The foremost among them had a green velvet doublet and feathered cap to match. He dismounted and went up to the knight, saying, 'I am Master FitzHenry, under orders of Thomas Cromwell who is in the king's service as you may know. We have reason to believe, Sir Richard, that you have in your household two monks, Father Jerome and Brother Nathan, late of Moorlea Monastery.'

'That is so. What do you want of them?'

'I have been told that the abbot possesses a valuable crucifix which he wore in the monastery. As such it should have been handed over to us when we cleared the place. He was not wearing it then and we did not see it anywhere. I did not know it existed until yesterday. Then I was told it had been brought here and hidden in your house. What have you to say about this?'

'All I can say is that I know nothing about a crucifix. The abbot is in my house at this moment. You may speak with him and Brother Nathan too if you wish.'

'We may have to do more than that, Sir Richard. If it is not in the monks' possession, we must search the whole house, for it will be hidden somewhere. I have been given full permission to do so in the name of King Henry himself' He took from his pouch a scroll and held it for the knight to see. 'These men I have with me are experts at searching nooks and crannies of old houses like this one. Sometimes they find secret cupboards which even the owner did not know about. Of course, the owner of a house is always held to blame if something is found, whether or not he knew about it.' Master FitzHenry gave the knight a meaningful look and signalled the other men to dismount. Dividing them into two groups, he ordered one group to search the outbuildings while the rest were to follow him into the house.

He said he would speak firstly to the monks themselves. They found them in the chapel, kneeling at prayer. Their fingers moved slowly along the rosary beads as they prayed. 'Are you praying that your crucifix will not be found?' one of the searchers sneered mockingly. 'Get to your feet and I will see if it is hidden in your garment.' He inspected the clothes of both monks carefully, making sure that nothing was sewn into the hoods or hems of their long robes. 'It is clear the crucifix is hidden somewhere. Just tell us where it is and it will save a lot of time,' another man said.

'I do not know where any crucifix is hidden. Indeed, I am not aware there was one that belonged to the Moorlea Monastery,' the abbot told him truthfully. 'I have been told differently,' Master FitzHenry insisted. 'Come, let us get to work.'

They searched the chapel. Two of the men then went down into the kitchen and cellars. Two others searched in the bakehouse and brewery. They felt into the meal chests and flour sacks, and even into the ale barrels. They looked in all the cupboards, on shelves and under stairs. They tapped

on walls and floors. The servants were amazed. They wondered what was going on but did not dare to speak.

The dining hall and other ground floor rooms were being searched by other men. They paid great attention to the carved woodwork, pushing their fingers into places that might hold a secret spring to open a door behind. Yet, in spite of pushing and prodding, tapping and listening, they found nothing.

They looked into the chapel again and saw the monks still on their knees, the rosaries still in their hands. 'What are you really praying for all this while?' one of the searchers asked. He did not speak unkindly.

'We are praying for young Master Morley. Praying that he will soon feel well. His mother tells us he is very ill. He is flushed and feverish and has a painful rash. Lady Cecily lost two of her sons with the sweating sickness. She fears that Martin may be sickening for some terrible disease. He is the only boy she has left. Such a fine boy too,' Brother Nathan explained.

'His father has gone to see him now. He is most concerned,' said the abbot.

'We must continue our search, • sickness or not. I shall also need to speak to Master Martin. I suspect he may know something about the crucifix. Let us go to the bedrooms now.' Master FitzHenry led the way upstairs.

The monks looked worried again. It was clear that Stephen Barlow had mentioned Martin's name. He would have said it was actually Martin who had taken the crucifix from the monastery to Moorlea Manor, 'Martin will be asked what he has done with it,' said Father Jerome. 'How will he answer?'

'He said he had thought of a way. Never fear. He is a clever boy,' the younger monk replied.

Three of the searchers entered Martin's bedroom, Master FitzHenry and two others. The rest of the group went to look into the other upstairs rooms and attics. Sir Richard and Lady Cecily were sitting by their son's bedside. The boy was tossing and turning in his bed, moaning and whimpering. He was mumbling words that did not make sense. Lady Cecily began to weep. 'He was not well yesterday evening,' she sobbed. 'I thought he had just tired himself out at the fair. Now I know it was this sickness starting.'

'I am sorry the boy is not well, but I must question him all the same,' Master FitzHenry insisted. Looking at Martin's flushed face he said, 'I just want to know where you have put the abbot's crucifix. I have been told you took it from the monastery and brought it here. So where is it?'

Martin raised his head a little and stared vacantly at the man as if not seeing him. Then he clutched his face, rolled his eyes and gave a shudder. His head sank to the pillow and his mumblings began again. 'Want my . . . bow and arrows . . . must. beat. Stephen,' were a few words they could catch.

'What is he saying? Master FitzHenry was clearly interested.

'He is most likely thinking he is still at the fair. We went yesterday. He beat a boy called Stephen in the archery contest. But can't you see he is now delirious? She cried angrily. It is a physician he needs, not strange men in his room. And look at his poor red face. I pray it will not be the pox or

spotted fever.' She began to weep again as Martin continued to toss and turn, moaning all the while.

'Finish your search and be gone,' Sir Richard told them sternly. While Master FitzHenry had been questioning Martin the other two men had been making a thorough search of his clothes chest. One of them then went to the little cupboard in the corner. Lady Cecily's face turned pale as he opened the door and passed his fingers around the inside. He gave an excited cry as they touched the small knob and pressed it. 'There's something here,' he called to his chief. Seeing the space behind the back of the cupboard, Master Fitzhenry thrust his hand in eagerly. He drew it out empty. Blank disappointment showed on the faces of all three.

The men who had been looking in the other upstairs rooms came to say they had found nothing either. In the outbuildings nothing had been found.

'Could it be in the boy's bed?' one man said brightly.

'Would you like to search it then?' another of them asked. 'Remember he may be sickening for the pox.' All the men drew back.

'We will show you ourselves,' said Sir Richard. 'Turn back the covers, my dear, while I lift him up.' Lady Cecily did so, and Master Fitzhenry took a cautious step forward to look into the bed.

'It seems our search has been in vain,' he said wearily. 'And yet that lad seemed so sure of what he told me that I believed him.'

'May I ask who gave you this false information?' Sir Richard wanted to know. 'Well, as we have troubled you, Sir, you have a right to know. He was a boy who came to me at yesterday's fair. Said he had important news, so I listened. He said your son had taken the abbot's crucifix and hidden it in this house. He was a big, red-haired lad. I thought I had seen him once before. It must have been at the monastery that day I closed it.'

'It would be Stephen Barlow, a merchant's son,' said Lady Cecily, turning her tearful blue eyes to him. He had instruction from the monks and so did Martin. We noticed him talking to you at the fair when we were watching the animals being sold. Stephen is a troublemaker. He was angry because Martin beat him in the archery contest. No doubt he wanted revenge.

Martin was saying his name just now. Did you hear?'

'I did and it made me wonder. So, he told me the tale to get your son punished. And yet he should have known we would search the house and find nothing. Unless he thought we would punish him without doing a search.' Master Fitzhenry was clearly puzzled. 'But Martin is not to be punished and neither are you, Sir Richard.' Stephen Barlow is the one who should be for wasting our time. However, I think we have spent time enough on Moorlea Manor. There are many other such houses we have to close. So, I will waste no more time chasing one stupid boy. Good day to you both. I hope your son will recover.'

All the searchers looked pleased to be leaving Moorlea Manor and rode quickly away. 'Now I had better go for the physician,' Sir Richard said to his wife. 'He was in delirium when those men were here, though he has quietened somewhat now.'

`I did not like the look of him at all when that man was trying to question him. Perhaps those strangers being here when he was already ill made him worse. But I do think he is a little better now. He has stopped moaning and tossing about. He seems much calmer. Perhaps it is not a serious malady after all,' Lady Cecily said hopefully. As she looked down on her son, Martin opened his eyes and smiled.

`Can I have a drink of water, Mother? He asked.

'Of course, my dear,' she said happily. 'Do you feel better? We have been quite worried about you\_'

`I am just thirsty and tired now. But I would like to see Brother Nathan and the abbot before I go to sleep again.'

'I do not think we need the physician now Martin is himself again,' said Sir Richard, giving his son a knowing look. 'We will ask the brothers to come to you. They will bring you the water to drink\_ How glad we are, my boy, to know you are going to be well.'

### Away to Safety

Martin was sitting up in bed when the monks entered his room. He was rubbing his face which was still red and blotchy. 'Have those men really gone?' he asked.

'Indeed they have. We watched them riding away. Here is the water you wanted. I have also brought something to make your face less painful. It is still causing you discomfort, is it not?' Martin admitted that it was.

While he gulped down the water, Father Jerome drew from his robe some large green leaves. 'If you rub your face and hands with this plant the nettle stings will not be so keen. Brother Fabian told me the remedy some time ago. Of course, if the leaves could have been used at once, the worst pain would have been avoided. A pity that your stings were not treated at the time.'

'Perhaps you will tell us now how you came to be nettled so badly. Am I right in thinking it was something to do with the crucifix? Brother Nathan asked.

While Martin rubbed his face with the leaves, he told the monks how he had first put the crucifix in the cupboard. Then, feeling sure that the house would be searched, he had thought of a safer hiding place. He had climbed the old dove-cote wall, hidden the crucifix in one of the holes and started to climb down again. But he was in too much of a hurry. Before he reached the ground, he lost his grip on the wall and fell with his face in the nettles. 'Oh, my dear boy, what a brave thing to do. I am amazed that you dared to climb up that high wall. You could have killed yourself. And to think you did it for me - and for your father too! You knew he would have been in bad trouble if it had been found in the house. You are a clever boy and a very brave one, my son.'

'But Father, I did not feel at all brave when I was going through the dark kitchen and across the garden. When the owl hooted it made me jump. At the bottom of the wall, I was trembling and shivering before I began to climb. That was not being brave, was it?'

Brother Nathan spoke then. 'Do you remember that day at the monastery when Stephen wanted to fight? He called you a coward because you did not want to. That made you quite upset.'

'Yes, he said I was not brave like my father.'

'And I told you there are other ways of being brave besides fighting and killing. You have shown this by what you have just done. Indeed, you have been more than brave. You have shown courage. That is when you are feeling afraid but still go on to do what you know is right. Your father will be so proud of you when he hears the story.' The monk's words made Martin feel happy. To think of his father being proud of him made him feel good.

`Now there is this other matter we are eager to hear about,' said the abbot. 'Pray tell us what happened when those men searched your room.'

`They found the trick of the cupboard, sure enough. It was a good thing I had moved the crucifix. You should have seen their faces when it wasn't there,' Martin laughed.

`But did they not ask you where it was? What did you tell them?'

`They did ask but I did not tell them.' Martin explained how he had pretended to be in delirium. What he did say was not making sense. Even his mother and father thought he was very ill when he tossed about in his bed and made moaning noises. The man asking questions thought Martin did not understand them. He would not get a proper answer from someone so ill. 'I suppose it was as well that I fell into the nettles,' he said. 'It made my illness look more real. I had been rubbing my face all night, so I know it looked dreadfully inflamed. My poor mother was weeping over me and I was sorry to see her upset. But you should have seen those searchers when she said I might be sickening for the pox. How quickly they moved away! Martin laughed again and the monks laughed with him.

The boy thought he had better remain in his room until next day. Some food would be brought up to him. He had eaten nothing since the previous night. The monks prayed with him before going downstairs to eat supper with his parents. Because it was very late, they decided to wait until next day before telling the whole story to Sir Richard and Lady Cecily. As for Martin, no sooner had he finished eating than he fell into a sound sleep. After the day's exciting events and the previous night's adventure he was in need of sleep. By sunrise on the following day, he was feeling quite refreshed and hurried to join his family. The monks were already with them. Lady Cecily and her husband were most astonished to learn how Martin had tricked the searchers. 'I am sorry I caused you such alarm, dear Mother,' he told her. 'Though it was best that you should think he had not seen nettle rash before,' she said. 'No one I knew had ever fallen into nettles until now. There are many rashes children can get which are the beginning of a serious malady. I thought it was so in your case. And your acting was so good that I did not suspect otherwise.'

`He did make a good recovery though after the men had gone,' Sir Richard told her with a knowing smile.

`Children can be quick to fall ill but are often quick to recover unless, of course, the malady is serious,' said Lady Cecily. 'I really thought Martin's was and am so thankful to see how I was wrong.'

Sir Richard then praised his son. 'We are very proud of you, Martin, for helping Father Jerome. You showed great courage in hiding the crucifix where you did. We are also proud that you did it by yourself so as to avoid trouble for me.' The boy glowed with pleasure at his father's words. He went outside to find his sisters. Perhaps he would join them in their tennis game.

Meanwhile the knight spoke with the monks about their journey to France. In five more days, the ship would sail. Sir Richard said he would provide

the horses he had promised. He would also send with them the six trusty men who had gone with his family to the fair. They would carry swords and daggers in case they were attacked. 'Though it is not likely to happen with such a show of strength. The sight of them will put off anyone thinking to try,' he said.

It was decided to start off at daybreak because they would travel only at walking pace. The monks were not used to riding horses. The party would stop at an inn about mid-day to have a meal and rest a while. Then they would push on to the coast. The ship was due to sail in the evening, and they should reach France on the following day.

'So our time in England will soon be spent,' said Brother Nathan sadly. I shall miss teaching Martin. Do you think he would like to study with me during these next few days? If so, I am willing to teach him.'

Martin was delighted to be told his lessons could continue, if only for a short while. On each of the remaining days he and Brother Nathan sat together in Sir Richard's small library. Since books could now be printed there were more to be had. The knight had bought a few but they were very costly. Only wealthy people could afford to buy them. The poor could not read in any case. Brother Nathan and Martin read from the Scriptures and studied the Latin. They also read from one of Sir Richard's new books. Martin was eager to improve his writing still further, so time was given to that.

The monk made a promise to his pupil. 'When the abbot and I are safely over the water and reach our monastery, I will write to you. The letter will take a long time to come, I do not doubt, but in this year of 1536 most letters do arrive, sooner or later.'

'So you will let us know you are safe and what you are doing. Oh, how glad I am that I have learnt to read and write. When I know where you are, I will write a letter too.'

'I shall be delighted to hear from you, my son. To see your writing will remind me of those days at Moorlea Monastery. It may be that I shall visit the place again one day, though that day could be far in the future,' he said wistfully.

The important task that remained to be done was to get the crucifix down from the dovecote. Sir Richard said he would lend a ladder. He did not want Martin to risk breaking his neck again. Martin thought that servants might see them carrying it. If so, they would wonder what they were up to. 'I am not afraid to climb the wall again,' he told his father. It was decided, however, that a ladder would be used this time. But getting the crucifix down would be left until the monks' last evening at Moorlea.

The next few days passed all too quickly. Then, as light began to fade on that last night, the two monks walked quietly from the house, through the garden and onto the waste ground. There they were joined by Martin and his parents. All were in their oldest clothes. Lady Cecily wore a dark hood and cloak over her other garments. They carried a ladder which they had brought from an outbuilding. 'Tis better to keep this secret matter within

the far-tidy,' said the knight. 'Even the most trusty servants might let some word of it drop if they were brought in to help.'

Seeing the thick mass of nettles around the wall bottom he took out his sword. A few hard swishes and there was space for the ladder to be propped up. It did not reach as high as the hole where the pouch lay hidden. 'I will be able to climb that last part,' said Martin. This he did, while hearing his mother's voice urging him to be careful. He reached into the hole and drew out the abbot's leather pouch. Carefully he climbed down onto the ladder and was soon safely on the ground again. 'That was a more comfortable landing than last time,' he laughed, handing the pouch to the abbot. Father Jerome took out the jewelled crucifix and showed it to the knight and his lady. 'The cross of Saint Theresa,' he said reverently before putting it back into the pouch. 'Thanks to your son, we are able to take it back to where it belongs.'

As they carried the ladder back to the outhouse Lady Cecily said, 'I am so glad the crucifix did not fall into the hands of King Henry's men. I will tell you something now that I did not speak of earlier. It is not important really, but Martin might like to know.' Looking at her son, she said, 'When they were searching your cupboard, I almost cried out aloud. You see, I knew about the secret space at the back. For a moment I thought you might have hidden it there if Stephen had been telling the truth.'

'As it happened, he was telling the truth for once, but it did him no good. He is such a spiteful boy. But how did you know about the cupboard, Mother?' 'Like you, I found it quite by chance. It was empty even then. Perhaps your grandmother or some other lady kept her jewels in it at one time. We shall never know.'

Before going to their beds, the family went into the chapel with Brother Nathan and the abbot. Thanks were said for the safe recovery of the crucifix. The abbot then prayed for a safe journey on the morrow. He also asked a blessing for the Moorlea family, especially Martin who had helped him.

Next morning men and horses were ready in good time. To Martin's delight his father was allowing him to go too. Sir Richard knew it would please the boy to see the brothers safely on their ship. Except for their rosary beads, the monks had brought no possessions from the monastery so had nothing to carry, apart from the abbot's crucifix. He kept this still in the pouch and wore it beneath his robe so it could not be seen. Sir Richard had a small gift for the monks. It was one of the new books he had bought. 'Just to remind you of us at Moorlea,' he said simply.

When they were ready to leave, Lady Cecily and her daughters came out to wish them well. They handed over a large leather bag containing food. 'Tis but humble fare,' the good lady told them. 'Some bread, cold beef and fowl, and venison pasty. You will be having a meal at the inn before you reach the coast. This is to be eaten later. You will be many hours on the water and perhaps many more to the monastery. This should help you on the way.'

The monks thanked the kind lady and gave her and the little girls a final blessing before moving off.

The ride to the coast went as planned. Around mid-day they stopped at an inn where everyone ate a good meal. The monks were pleased to get down from their horses for a while. The abbot was feeling rather stiff though he did not complain. He was only too pleased that things were going well.

There were other travellers on the road, but no-one troubled them.

They arrived at the coast about an hour before the ship was due to sail. It was the first time in his life that Martin had seen the sea. Neither had Brother Nathan nor some of the men with them ever seen it. They gazed in wonder at the wide expanse of silvery-grey water. It stretched further than they could see. They watched the white-capped waves creeping up to the shore to break and fall back again. There were small boats pulled up to the shore and bigger ships anchored a little way out in the water. Martin was interested in what he saw. The whole scene was new to him. He liked the smell of the sea too. They walked along the shore, breathing in the fresh, salty air.

Soon it was time to see the ship's captain. Sir Richard had told his party to meet him inside the Mermaid Tavern. This was on the shore and easy to find. The captain was already there. He was a strong-looking man about the age of Martin's father. The hair beneath his cap was black and so was the short beard on his chin. His face was tanned from the salt sea air. The hands which held his tankard were huge and rough. When he saw the party from Moorlea Manor he knew at once who they were. They fitted the description Sir Richard had given him. He rose from his seat to grasp the monks' hands. His grip was so strong it made the brothers wince. He asked them all to sit and have a drink while he told them about his ship.

'It's that big one out there,' he said, pointing through the open door to the furthest one. 'She's called the Sea Queen and a fine vessel she is. She will get you over there without trouble. We should have a calm passage, I think. But even if the sea gets rough the Queen's sailors will know how to handle it' The captain spoke in a different way from the people at Moorlea, but they could just manage to understand him.

'Have you been to France before, Sir?' Martin asked.

The captain threw back his head and laughed loudly. 'Have I now! Aye, young mister. I've been sailing on boats and ships since I was not much older than you. Crossed to France and back more times than you could count. Been on longer voyages besides. To Spain and Italy mostly.' Martin stared at him wide-eyed. He truly was impressed.

The captain finished his ale in one long drink. He put the empty tankard back on the table, saying, 'Now it's time for my passengers to go on board. Here comes my trusty oarsman. Those strong arms of his will row us out to the ship in quick time.'

In the doorway stood another sailor. He was younger than the captain but just as big and strong. He smiled at them broadly and his teeth showed

white against the dark skin of his face. His long black hair was tied at the back in a plait. On his head was a close-fitting cap of red and white. All his clothes were old and worn, the shoes so full of holes that most of his toes were showing. Martin noticed a gold ring fixed in one of the man's ears. He also a long scar down one side of his face.

Sir Richard's men finished their drinks and, together with Martin and the monks, followed the sailors outside. They made their way to a small boat waiting on the shore. Father Jerome and Brother Nathan were helped into it by the captain while the younger sailor took up the oars. The farewells were said, and the abbot gave Martin a final blessing as the boat pushed off Pax vobiscum,' he called. Knowing his Latin, Martin was able to tell the men that it meant 'Peace be with you.'

The strong young sailor then bent to his oars. Soon the boat was speeding swiftly through the water towards the Sea Queen. They waited until they saw the monks were safely on board. They watched until they saw the ship's white sails billowing in the breeze as she moved further out to sea. At last, she was only a tiny white speck on the horizon.

As they turned for home Martin felt both sad and happy. Sad because he would not see the elderly abbot again. Happy because he had helped him keep the crucifix.

## The Dreaming

Lying snugly in his bed, Martin thought over the recent events. What a lot had happened. He remembered the day when he fell from his horse and how kind the monks had been. He thought of how he had enjoyed his lessons with Brother Nathan, even though Stephen had been so unfriendly. Stephen was jealous because he could not do his work as well as he could. What a sad day it had been when the monastery had closed, and the monks had to leave. He was pleased he had been able to help the abbot. Now he was wondering who would live on the place where the monastery stood. As he sank into a deep sleep, his thoughts changed to dreams.

He was riding to the monastery again, but that building was no longer there. In its place stood a large stone farmhouse with mullioned windows, gabled roofs and twisted chimneys. There were animals in the fields and men were working there. He thought the family who owned the big house would be quite wealthy. There they were on the lawn, but how quaintly they were dressed. Both the lady and gentleman had fancy ruffled collars around their necks. The man's hose was quite different from what he had seen before. The boy and girl were dressed like their parents. How strange they looked! Glancing down at his own hose he was still more amazed to see that they were the same style as the boy's. When he put his hands to his neck, he found he was wearing a ruffled collar too. Back at home he discovered his parents were dressed in similar fashion.

'What has happened to us, Mother? Why are we in these strange new clothes?' He asked.

'Time moves on, Martin, and fashions change. The new trunk hose you are wearing is the very latest style. So are our ruffs, and my new farthingale. Do you like it?' 'Oh yes, Mother,' he replied, noticing her wide-skirted gown.

'We shall ride over to make acquaintance with our new neighbours soon,' said his father. They became friendly with the owners of the farmhouse, but Martin always remembered the monks living there, especially his teacher, Brother Nathan.

On a later visit to their neighbours, they did not ride on horseback. His father said, 'We will go in our new carriage today.' Catherine and Mary were delighted to sit back and watch the horses pulling them along. They were all wearing different clothes again. Gone were the ruffs and trunk hose. Instead, he and his father wore breeches that came below their knees, white stockings and buckled shoes. On their heads they had hats with three corners. His father's hair was curled at the sides and tied at the back with black ribbon. His mother and sisters had lots of lace on their dresses and wore large wide hats tied with ribbon under the chin to keep them in place. He heard his parents talking about a new king being crowned. He was called George.

`What happened to King Henry?' he asked, then felt rather silly when they laughed at him.

`Are you forgetting we have had a lot of kings since Henry,' said his father.

`He was the one who had the monasteries pulled down though. There was one here before this Tudor farmhouse, wasn't there?' His father seemed doubtful. `So I have heard, but that was a long time ago.' Martin looked upset.

`Time moves on and many things change,' his mother said kindly. 'But there probably were monks here if you have heard so too.'

The carriage wheels seemed to move faster and faster each time they visited the Tudor house, and Martin's family had different clothes more often. Soon he was noticing a change in the house itself. It was no longer a new house. The garden was full of weeds and some of the windows were cracked. The people living there were not happy. They talked of leaving.

Some time afterwards Martin visited the house by himself. The people had gone. Only an old shepherd was living there to tend some sheep that were left behind. 'We shall soon be going as well, me and my sheep,' he said sadly. `This house has been good in its day but is fast falling into ruin. Nobody wants to farm here anymore. The owners are talking of selling the place.'

`Do you know who lived here to start with?' Martin asked him.

`Aye, that I do lad. My family have worked here as shepherds for generations, ever since the time of Queen Elizabeth. And now, here I am in Queen Victoria's reign. My old grandfather always said he'd been told by his grandfather that the first folk to live here were the monks. After they were turned out by Queen Elizabeth's father, this farmhouse was built in the monastery's place. Now that it's soon going to be a ruin, I reckon something else will be built on the spot. But things do change as time moves on.'

Martin realised the old man's words were almost the same as those his mother kept saying when new things happened. But he felt contented to know the monks really had been there as he remembered. He still seemed to feel their presence. Perhaps he would see Brother Nathan once more. In one of his letters the monk had told him Father Jerome had died and he was thinking of coming back again. Martin hoped he would.

His dreaming was whirling again, faster and faster. It whirled them to the place once more. The carriage in which they travelled this time had four wheels but was not pulled by horses at all. It moved very quickly all on its own. This time they had not come from their old home but from somewhere further away. He thought they had changed their old home for a newer one, but he didn't seem to mind. One thing which did surprise him when they arrived was to see an imposing new building standing on the spot where he had last spoken with the old shepherd.

`We will stay at this new guest-house,' his father told them. 'People say what a good reputation it has for bed and breakfast, or even for a longer

holiday. We have two more days of our holiday left so can spend them here.'

The next two days were very happy. There were other people staying at the house too. Somehow, Martin did not think it strange that everyone was in a different style of dress yet again. He and his father wore T-shirts and long trousers while his mother and sisters had short skirts which only, reached to their knees. None of them wore hats or caps. His mother's fair hair was cut short, the same as Catherine's and Mary's. By this time, he had become used to different clothes so did not think them strange.

He made friends with a red-haired boy called Steve. They talked about their families and about their schools. The boy told Martin he did not much like school. He did not enjoy some of the books they had to read and found hand-writing difficult. But he was doing well on the computer. His father was a businessman and said he would let Steve join him when he left school. 'I like books and most things we do at school, especially history,' said Martin. 'Perhaps I shall become a teacher. But we are all good at different things, I suppose, and have to do what suits us best.' Steve agreed that was true. The boys were keen to keep in touch after the holidays so decided to e-mail each other when they got home.

There were leaflets in the new guesthouse which told the history of the place. Martin showed a leaflet to his family. 'Look. It says there was an old Tudor farmhouse on the site before this restaurant was built. Earlier still, monks were thought to be living here. Isn't that interesting?'

'Yes dear, but it is time to leave now. It will soon be dark and we have a long drive.' His mother was anxious for them to be leaving.

As they drove away, Martin took a backward glance. It was not the guesthouse he saw but the monastery. He hoped he would catch a glimpse of Brother Nathan, if only for a moment. Then he would know that he really had come back.

The night was dull and wet as they left the place. Patches of fog swirled in front of the car so his father could only drive slowly. Martin sat beside him in the front while his mother was with the two girls in the back. They had not been travelling long before it happened. There, standing in the road ahead and looking straight towards him, a familiar figure appeared out of the mist.

'Brother Nathan! You've come back! I hoped you would,' Martin cried joyfully to himself, for the words would not come out loud. As the car drew nearer, they had only time to smile at each other before he saw the danger.

'Look out, Dad, you're going to hit him,' he yelled. His father swerved the car and Martin's dream ended in a bump.



at school. Or it could be with reading those leaflets at the guesthouse. They mentioned monks being around, didn't they?' Martin's mother was not a believer in the supernatural.

Richard Morley was less inclined to condemn ghosts as merely phantoms. He said to his wife, 'Aren't you forgetting something though? Remember it wasn't only Martin who saw that monk on the road. I saw him too. I told that policeman so even before Martin mentioned it. So how do you account for that?' She had no answer. 'Talking of that policeman, here he comes now. That's a coincidence. Probably wants to ask something else about the accident,' said Richard.

The doctor had just come back into the ward, accompanied by the police officer. 'I've called in to see how the young man is now. The doctor here tells me he has recovered. That is good news. You will also be pleased to know there are no charges concerning the accident. We have put it down to the foggy condition of the road.' The doctor left them again and the officer had a look at Martin who, of course, did not remember him.

He stayed for a little while, then, turning to leave, pulled something from his pocket and handed it to Martin's mother, saying, 'Oh, I almost forgot to give you this. I presume it is yours. We found it by your car when we moved it from that tree. It's an unusual sort of necklace, but I reckon you ladies wear all sorts of things these days. Or maybe it belongs to one of your daughters. I know they like fancy beads. You'd better take it anyway. Can't think it belongs to anybody else.'

The officer left them, and Martin's mother inspected the string of beads he had given her. 'This certainly isn't mine, and neither does it belong to Catherine or Mary. We wouldn't be seen wearing such a thing. It's very old and shabby looking anyway. I wonder how it came to be by our car. Her blue eyes stared at the beads in bewilderment. 'Whose beads do you think they can be?' she enquired of her husband. Richard was just as puzzled as she was. She then handed them to Martin. 'What do you think this funny looking necklace is?' she asked.

Martin took it carefully from her hand and fingered the beads lovingly. His eyes took on a faraway look and he smiled to himself. 'I do remember seeing something like these before,' he said dreamily. 'It must have been a long time ago, but I do remember.'