

The Dark Tower

The Dark Tower. Strong point of a Castle in the heart of Switzerland, a place with a troubling past, and a place which the forces of evil are using again in a new and deadly way. The Glaston Chronicles continue with this, the second in the series of books involving Matt Bergin and his cousins, Luke and Annie Martin.

Safe back from their time-traveling exploits in Second World War France, the cousins find themselves drawn into a new adventure in the twenty-first century, but one involving their old adversary, Emil Schwarzen, who is now an aged and extremely wealthy entrepreneur.

But Matt and his cousins don't realize that Emil is not only rich, but also very corrupt, and they find themselves up against almost overwhelming dark forces as they undergo a terrifying final struggle with Emil and his partisans of evil.

"The Dark Tower, the second book of the Glaston Chronicles series, delivers a powerful message to young people about the dangers of the occult and the real spiritual battle we face between good and evil. Donal Foley has written a thrilling adventure story that engages the reader immediately. Most profound is the story behind the story of three young people who rely on their faith, prayer and forgiveness to bring good out of evil and the redemption of one who sought to destroy them. Catholic readers will especially appreciate how these elements of the faith are the weapons that produce a victorious ending."

*Barb Ernster, Communications Manager/Editor,
World Apostolate of Fatima, USA*

"The essential theme of The Dark Tower—of the spiritual war, of holiness, of the supernatural and the occult, of good and evil—is profound and, I believe, essentially true and will, I hope, help people."

Fr. Jeremy Davies, author, CTS booklet, Exorcism

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The Dark Tower

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Glastonbury Tor, October 1940

“Stay exactly where you are.”

Matt Bergin knew that voice all too well, and his heart sank. He glanced at his younger cousins, Luke and Annie Martin, and at Annie’s cairn terrier, Toby, as they slowly turned around. Now they were facing away from St. Michael’s Tower atop Glastonbury Tor, and the glowing light coming from the archway at its base. But in front of them, half a dozen yards away, was Emil Schwarzen. He stared fixedly at them, holding a gun in his right hand.

Matt’s shoulders slumped at the sight of the grinning Emil, still wearing his refugee’s clothes. Why hadn’t they been more careful? Hadn’t Alex warned them him about this when he’d said at their first meeting at the airport, ‘Always watch your back?’

A wave of thoughts and memories flooded into Matt’s mind; all the events of the last few days: their discovery of the secret Portal at the base of the Tower, and then their traveling through it back in time to 1940s France. And then, all their recent adventures culminating in their escape from that country in the captured Heinkel plane, along with the refugees and the French Resistance men.

And now, Emil was before them with a gun.

Had they come so far only to be thwarted at the last moment? Just a few more steps and they’d have been through the Portal and back in their own time. But now they were trapped in England, in October 1940, at the top of Glastonbury Tor, by an unstable young man pointing a gun straight at them.

Toby began to bark furiously at Emil, but Annie bent down and shushed him.

Matt took a deep breath and then said, “What are you doing here Emil? And how did you get that gun?”

“Oh, as for that, well, it’s one of the guns that were taken from the pilots of the Heinkel—I took it from Charles’s pocket without him realizing it. They were careless at

Tangmere and I wasn't searched. It's a nice Luger isn't it? Small but very accurate. Especially at close range."

"Put the gun away, Emil," said Annie. "You'll hurt somebody."

"If I don't get what I want I *do* intend to hurt somebody," said Emil loudly.

The light from the base of the Tower illuminated Emil's face and body—and from the way he looked, Matt saw that he meant business.

"I was there listening when you talked with Josef and Ruth at the farmhouse," he continued. "I didn't hear everything you said, but I heard enough. I want that device you have, a com ... puter I think you called it, the thing that allows you to travel through time. I'm going to go into the future and enjoy myself. No more war, or misery, or making do. I'm going to be rich and famous."

He must think Luke's smartphone is needed to go through the Portal, thought Matt. We'll have to keep him talking, distract him.

"You're wrong, Emil," he said. "The device is a type of telephone, it's nothing to do with the light. We can't control that."

"Ah, so you are from the future, then. I thought so. It's no good lying to me, though. I want that device, and I'm prepared to kill for it."

"What, all of us?" said Matt, as he gradually edged away from his cousins. Luke saw this and slowly began to move in the opposite direction. "That would be murder."

"How do you know I haven't already killed some people?" said Emil with a grin. "In fact I have. But we're wasting time. Give me the device or you'll regret it."

"Emil," said Matt, in as calm a voice as he could muster. "You can stay here in England, in this time, the 1940s. Once the war is over, you'll be able to have a good life here. You're safe here, away from the Germans. If you go into the future, you just won't fit in. It'll be too strange for you."

"No, I want to see the future, to live in the future. And nobody's going to stop me."

"We were told," said Matt thinking quickly, "that you have to have the right intention to go through the Portal safely."

“Right intention? What are you talking about? Who told you that?”

“A friend.”

“You’re lying. You just don’t want me to do what you’ve done.”

Matt tried to stay calm and think clearly. He’s too far away for me to rush him, he thought. He sent up a silent prayer and a plea: Alex, we need your help now.

“Stop playing for time, Matt. Give me the device, and I’ll let you all go. That’s a promise.”

“I’m not sure if your promises are worth very much,” said Matt. “Why should we trust you?”

“Because you don’t have any other option,” said Emil, grinning again. He held the gun up higher, and pointed it straight at Matt’s chest. His voice became harder. “I’m tired of waiting, I want the device now.”

Matt knew he couldn’t take a chance—no way of telling what someone as unpredictable as Emil might do, especially with a gun in his hand.

After a few moments, he turned to Luke and said, “Okay Luke, give it to him. It won’t do him any good anyway.”

Luke pulled the smartphone out of his pocket.

“Good,” said Emil. “Now you’re being sensible. Make it work.”

Luke activated the smart phone and soon the screen began to glow. At the same moment the light in the archway intensified, shimmering and undulating in its strange, hypnotic way.

“I thought so,” said Emil, “the device is linked to this light in some way.”

“That was just a coincidence,” said Matt. “The smartphone has nothing to do with the light.”

Emil wasn’t listening, though, and, almost to himself said, “With this device I’ll be able to travel through time at will.”

Then more loudly he said to Luke. “Now give it to me.”

Matt looked at the strange expression on Emil’s face in the light from the archway. He glanced at Luke and nodded. Luke held out the smartphone for Emil to take.

As Emil stepped forward, left arm outstretched, Matt saw a dark blur as Toby raced out of the gloom and

launched himself at Emil's other hand, the one holding the Luger. With a cry of pain Emil dropped the gun as Toby made contact with his sharp teeth.

"Arghh! That dog," he shrieked.

Matt leapt forward and kicked the gun out of the way, toward Luke, while at the same time dodging a blow aimed at his head by Emil, who'd quickly recovered. Matt was well aware that Emil was physically stronger and taller than him, and a year or more older—he was at least sixteen or seventeen. But he had no time to think—Emil was rushing at him, arms swinging; he'd have to rely on his Aikido training.

As Emil swung his fist at him, Matt blocked the blow, stepped aside, grabbed him behind the neck with his other hand and used Emil's momentum, and an Aikido hip throw, to hurl him heavily to the ground. Emil lay still for several moments with a perplexed look on his face, trying to work out what had happened. Then jumping up, he looked warily at the three Cousins, one after the other. Toby rushed him again, this time attaching his teeth to the bottom of Emil's right trouser leg, and frantically pulling it.

Matt turned his head slightly, to see if Luke had picked up the gun, and almost caught the full force of a blow from Emil, who'd raced at him again, fists flying. He was knocked backwards by the force of Emil's attack; he jumped on top of him, and grabbed him around the neck, as Toby was thrown free. They rolled across the ground but Matt managed to throw Emil off.

Luke now had the gun in his hand—having pocketed the smartphone—but feared he'd hit Matt if he tried to use it. Annie stood next to Luke, nervously holding his other arm, unsure what to do, but praying that Matt would somehow overpower Emil. Toby was still running around, barking loudly. Matt and Emil both jumped up again, but as Emil did so, he scooped up some dirt from the ground and threw it into Matt's eyes. Barging him over, he charged past him and toward the fading Portal light.

Matt, wiping his eyes as he turned, shouted, "No, Emil, don't do it."

But Emil wasn't listening. He dashed through the archway and vanished into the light.

Matt, Luke and Annie stood still, totally stunned.

“What do we do now?” asked Luke. “We’ll have to go through the light before it fades, but what if he’s there waiting for us?”

“Let’s give it few moments, and then all three of us go through together,” said Matt.

“And what about the gun?” said Luke. “We can’t just leave it here. We’ll have to take it back with us and get rid of it somehow.”

By now, the light in the archway was clearly beginning to fade.

“We’ll have to go through,” said Luke, “or we’ll be stuck here, in 1940.”

“Okay,” said Matt, “but all together and be ready for anything. Annie, you’ve got Toby? Good. Here goes, one, two, three. Now!”

2

They rushed through the Portal and raced out the other side. To Matt’s relief, it was much darker, just like on the first evening, and reassuringly cold. The top of the Tor and the landscape around them were covered with snow. He pulled the zip of his coat up and put on his gloves, as did Luke and Annie.

“We must be back in our time,” said Matt as he looked around. In the gathering darkness he could pick out car headlights, and the remains of the pallet fire piled on the grass where they’d left the pieces of wood before they’d come through the Portal on Christmas Eve.

But there was no sign of Emil.

As Annie put Toby down, a familiar voice sounded behind them, “Well, you made it back safely.”

They whirled around to see Alex in the faintly glimmering light from the Tower archway. He was smiling, and dressed as they’d seen him at the airport, in a dark jacket and trousers.

“Alex!” exclaimed Annie, “where’ve you been? We needed your help.”

“It seemed to me that you all coped admirably, Annie. Well done.”

“But what about all those times we were in danger—like just now,” said Matt.

“Well, you were all doing so well, I didn’t want to spoil your fun.”

“Spoil our fun,” said Matt. “I can do without fun like that!”

“What about Emil?” asked Luke. “What happened to him?”

“He’s gone back to where he belongs.”

“What d’you mean?”

“I mean he’s gone back to his own time and his own place, in his case, occupied France in October 1940, to Reims, where you first met him.”

“I see,” said Matt, “so he wasn’t able to come to our time because he didn’t have the right intention.”

“Precisely,” replied Alex, “Emil’s intentions were bad, and so he’s back where he started. Come and see where he is now, before the light fades.”

They all approached the Portal, and through it saw the familiar sight of the view from the door of Reims cathedral, where they’d emerged on Christmas Eve. Emil was seated on the ground in front of it, sobbing. Matt and his cousins stared at him.

“You know I pity him,” said Matt, “He had so many problems to deal with.”

Emil began to talk to himself. “I’m going to have my revenge, even if it takes a lifetime. Nobody tricks me and gets away with it. Yes, I’ll have my revenge on those three, sooner or later. Nobody tricks me, nobody, nobody ...”

The view through the Portal faded and with it Emil’s anguished and hateful voice.

They were all silent for a few moments, and then Matt said, “There are still one or two things I’m puzzled about, Alex. For instance, the way Toby acted at times. I mean like just now, biting Emil’s hand and making him drop the gun, or at the Château when he raced off and put the guard dogs off our scent. And right at the beginning, when he went through the Portal. Why did he do those things? Are you able to communicate with him or something?”

Alex bent down and scooped Toby up in his hands.

“You don’t expect me to tell you all my secrets do you?”

Let's just say that Toby and I are good friends. Aren't we Toby?"

Toby gazed up at Alex, gave him one of his inscrutable looks, and then a little yap, at which they all laughed.

"Well," said Matt after a moment, "the wishes we made certainly came true, anyway."

"Oh yes," said Alex, "be careful of what you say in front of the crib. Anything could happen."

Yes, the crib, thought Matt, St. Joseph's crib, that was how it'd all started.

They were all silent for a moment or two, and then Alex said. "Better give me that gun Luke; you won't be needing it."

Holding the gun awkwardly by the handle, Luke gave it to Alex, who put it in his inside jacket pocket.

"Now, if you hurry, you'll catch up with your father. He's just down there at the base of the Tor. Remember, you're back at exactly the same time as you left. Nothing has changed here."

Of course, thought Matt, his uncle would be just as they'd left him, walking back down the Tor.

Alex handed Toby to Annie, and moved nearer the Portal.

"I must be going and so must you. Good bye Matt, Luke and Annie, and Toby. You did very well all of you, very well indeed. We'll meet again, don't worry."

He paused for a moment and then said. "And remember, Christmas is nearly here. Don't forget to celebrate the birth of the Savior. That's the real meaning of Christmas."

With a last wave, he turned around, walked into the Portal, and disappeared, just as the light shimmered for the last time and vanished.

The three Cousins stood before the ancient Tower in silence.

"I don't know what to make of Alex," said Luke.

"And we forgot to ask where he comes from," said Matt, "or who he actually is. Or *what* he is."

"I think he must be an angel, or something," said Annie. "Except he hasn't got any wings."

"Well, whoever or whatever he is, we need to catch up with your Dad," said Matt, as they rushed off down the

path, with Toby, as usual, in the lead.

They caught up with Mr. Martin at the bottom of the Tor. Annie ran up to him, and gave him a big hug and a kiss. “Dad, it’s great to see you!”

Luke, too, hugged his father. “How are you Dad, is everything okay?”

“I’m fine, I’m the same as I was five minutes ago when I last saw you.”

“Of course,” said Luke, “just checking.”

Matt came up and shook his hand, “Good to see you again, Rob.”

Mr. Martin stared at all three with a puzzled expression on his face. “You haven’t been drinking some of that stuff those boys, or whoever it was, were drinking up there on the Tor, have you?”

“Us? Drinking? Of course not, Dad,” said Luke, “we’re just happy to see you again.”

With a slight shake of the head, Mr. Martin set off in the direction of home. “I’ve been a teacher for over twenty years, and I’ll never really understand children—especially my own. Well, let’s get back, your mother will have something for us to eat. And we do need to find out what’s wrong with Aunt Gwen.”

Yes, thought Matt, poor old Aunt Gwen, I wonder what’s wrong with her.

When they reached the top of the High Street, Mr. Martin said, “I’ve just remembered a bit of last minute shopping. We’ll just pop down here a minute.”

They walked down the High Street, through the thinning crowds. As they passed the Anglican church they heard the faint sound of voices and music. They went toward the entrance and saw a sign for a Christmas Eve carol concert.

“I’ve just got to get some money out of the cash machine, and get a few last minute odds and ends,” said Mr. Martin. “Back in a few moments.”

“Of course, Dad,” said Luke, “we’ll pop in here for a minute.”

The three Cousins entered the church and stood at the back, just in time to hear the strains of *Once in Royal David’s city* echoing through the nave. They stood quietly and listened to the beautiful voices. Even Toby seemed taken by

the mood of tranquility. Next thing they knew, though, Mr. Martin had returned and the spell was broken.

“That was so beautiful,” said Annie. “I’ve never really appreciated Christmas carols before, but that was wonderful.”

They made their way toward the house almost in silence. Luke dropped off a rather battered box of antibiotics—minus one blister pack—at Mrs. Jones’s house. She was grateful to receive it, and thanked him profusely.

“She probably won’t notice the missing capsules,” whispered Annie, as Luke caught up with them at the door, “And if she does she can always get some more.”

“Yeah, enough there to keep her going until after Christmas, anyway,” he said quietly. “And they were put to a very good use.”

Yes, thought Matt, those capsules saved the life of Max, Josef and Ruth’s son.

When they reached home, Luke and Annie hugged their mother, and Ben and Grace. Like her husband, Mrs. Martin was puzzled at how unusually affectionate her children had suddenly become.

“I don’t understand you children,” she said, “It’s as if you haven’t seen me for weeks.”

“It was the same with me at the bottom of the Tor,” said Mr. Martin.

“Well, it’s Christmas Eve, Mum, isn’t it,” said Luke, “And we’re entering into the spirit of Christmas. You know peace and love to all men of goodwill, and all that stuff. And especially to members of our family. And I remembered to give Mrs. Jones her antibiotics, too.”

“Good. I’m glad you remembered that,” said Mrs. Martin. “Well, I’m all in favor of the Christmas spirit,” she continued.

“And I’m happy to go to Midnight Mass with you and Dad,” said Luke.

“Me too,” said Annie.

Mrs. Martin, stopped what she was doing. “Oh! Good! I won’t say any more in case I wake up and discover this is all a dream. You children are all right, aren’t you?”

“Of course, Mum,” said Annie.

“Never felt better,” said Luke.

“Matt,” said Mrs. Martin, “perhaps you can explain things? Did you have some sort of strange encounter up there on the Tor? Have my two eldest children been replaced by aliens?”

“Not exactly. ... I mean, no, not really. I think it’s just the Christmas spirit, y’know, it’s affected us all very deeply. And I’d like to come to Midnight Mass, too,” he continued. “In fact, I wouldn’t miss it for anything.”

“Good. Well, Christmas is certainly special,” said Mrs. Martin reflectively.

She then noticed the mud on Matt’s clothes, after his struggle with Emil at the top of the Tor.

“How did you get so dirty, Matt?”

“I, er..., fell down.”

“I hope it wasn’t anything to do with whoever it was started that fire on the Tor,” said Mr. Martin.

“No, it wasn’t anything like that,” said Matt.

“That reminds me, I must ring the police about that.”

Mrs. Martin asked what happened, and Mr. Martin told her about the fire, and the pallets, and the discarded beer cans at the top of the Tor. He finished by saying, “I’ll go and phone the police now.”

When he’d gone, Matt said, “I need a shower,”

“Yes, Matt,” said Mrs. Martin. “That’s a good idea for all of you. In fact, you look as though you’ve been on an assault course rather than just up to the top of the Tor.”

“Well, it is a bit muddy up there ...” he began.

He looked at their clothes—his aunt was right, they did look pretty battered. His jacket and trousers were covered with mud, while Luke and Annie’s clothes were also looking the worse for wear after all their adventures.

Matt went up the stairs to the landing, and climbed the loft ladder to the attic room. He began to turn out his pockets, but stopped when he saw Tom Williams’s wallet. He went to the door and called down to Luke.

“Luke come up here a minute, will you? And bring Annie with you. I’ve got something to show you.”

A few seconds later, they appeared in the doorway, as Matt held up the wallet.

“Tom’s wallet,” exclaimed Luke. “I forgot all about that.”

Matt opened the wallet, and pulled out some letters and

other personal effects, including the half of the photo that had been torn in two, the one which showed Aunt Gwen as a young woman.

“We need to say something to Aunt Gwen,” he said. “To put her mind at rest.”

“Yes,” said Luke, “but how will she react?”

“Well, Alex did say she’d understand. Anyway, we’ve got to try whatever happens. Let’s get cleaned up, and then go down and see her.”

Half an hour later, the three of them, and Toby, were outside the door to the living room. Matt pulled up the chain around his neck which was holding the Marian medal he’d been given by Fr. Marcel.

“I forgot about this until just now, when I was in the shower.”

“Yes, I found mine too,” said Luke. “It wasn’t all a dream.”

“No. Anything but a dream,” said Annie firmly.

They could hear Mrs. Martin in the kitchen, and they knew that Ben and Grace were upstairs with Mr. Martin in his study, so the moment seemed ideal. Matt peeked around the door, and saw Aunt Gwen alone in the living room, seated near the fire, obviously deep in thought. She was still wearing the same outfit she’d arrived in—the two-piece tweed suit.

“Can we come in, Aunt Gwen?” he said.

Luke and Annie stood beside him in the open doorway.

To their surprise, she welcomed them with a smile, “Certainly my dears, come in. Come and sit down near me by the fire.” She saw Toby and said, “And bring in your little dog, too, Annie.”

They went in and Matt closed the door firmly behind them.

“Aunt Gwen, we wanted to talk about some things with you.”

“What things?” she replied, as she adjusted her spectacles.

“Well,” began Matt, “it’s a bit difficult, to explain. We’ve had some strange experiences lately.”

“So have I,” said Aunt Gwen, with a touch of emotion in her voice.

Matt glanced at his cousins and then continued. "We've ... we've come into the possession of a photograph, and we'd like you to have it. We think it belonged to your fiancé Tom. We found this picture of you in this wallet, taken when you were a young woman."

With that, Matt handed over the torn photo and the wallet.

They had no idea how she'd react, but after gazing at them for a moment, and then at the photo, she put the photo and wallet down on the coffee table, and picked up her handbag and opened it. She rummaged about in it and finally pulled out a little envelope, discolored with age, and opened it. From this she extracted part of a photo, torn down one side like the one from the wallet, a faded picture of Tom, but just as the children had seen him. She placed them together on the coffee table. They fitted exactly.

"That's the picture of Tom and I that was taken before he left on his last mission," she said. "We were in a rush and it was the only picture of us together, but he tore it and gave half to me. How did his wallet come into your possession?"

"It's a long story," said Matt.

"I'm in the mood for long stories," she replied. "Please carry on."

"Well it all began when we went up to the Tor this afternoon," said Matt.

He told her the whole story, with Luke and Annie interrupting from time to time to add details.

"...and that's how we came to have the wallet and the picture. I know it sounds too incredible to believe, but ..."

Aunt Gwen paused for a moment, and then said, "You may be surprised to learn that I do believe you. Let me tell you what happened to me this afternoon. After you left, I dozed off in front of the fire, and had an incredible dream, only it was more than a dream, it was as if it was really happening, and I was a part of it. I was young again and with Tom, and we were at the top of the Tor, on the last evening I saw him alive, in October 1940."

"You were with him on the Tor before he left?" exclaimed Annie.

"Yes, my dear. It was as if I was reliving that whole ex-

perience, and then the dream or whatever it was changed; instead of us coming down the Tor again, the archway at the bottom of St. Michael's Tower began to glow with a strange light. Tom kissed me and said, 'I'll be waiting for you Gwen.' Then he walked into the light and disappeared. And then I woke up."

"Wow," said Matt, "that is amazing."

"So I knew something strange was going to happen," she said, "And I believe what you've told me about the Tor and St. Michael's Tower. And the other thing is that when you were making your wishes this afternoon, I secretly made a wish that I might see Tom again ..."

She picked up the wallet and took its contents out, and spread them on the coffee table. Among them were some RAF identity tags with Tom's name and a number stamped on them.

"We're a bit worried, though, about all this," said Luke. "Should we tell all this to Mum and Dad?"

Aunt Gwen thought for a few moments before saying, "I don't think so, my dears. I think it might be too much for them. After all, you're back safe and sound so there's nothing really to worry about now, is there? For the time being at least, I would keep quiet about it. Yes, I'd keep quiet about your adventures, at least until after Christmas. It's a secret really, isn't it? And secrets are best kept hidden."

"Thanks, Aunt Gwen," said Matt. "That's what we thought, too."

"I'm the one who should thank you, dear children. I feel like a new woman. I can see now that when I retired from teaching I allowed myself to become bitter and inward looking. I had too much time on my hands, too much time to think, to brood. I'm sorry for the way I treated you all, for my rudeness. Can you forgive me?"

"Of course, Aunt Gwen," said Annie quickly, speaking for all three.

"Yes, I mean to be a different woman in the future, even though I probably don't have very much time left."

She brushed aside their protests.

"My dears, we are all mortal, and I feel that my dream is a sign that my own end isn't too far off. I'm going to start by paying a visit to the parish priest. I saw about an appeal

for funds for needy people, refugees I think, in the parish newsletter, so I will make a start with that. And I won't forget you three, although I'm not going to give you too much money directly—I worked with children for far too long to see how easily it can spoil them.

“But as and when you need money for a particular sensible purpose, well, you know where to come. For example, if you should want to come back to this country Matt, then I could pay your airfare, or if you, Luke and Annie, wanted to visit Matt in America, then that could be arranged.”

“Thanks, Aunt Gwen,” said Annie, “we really appreciate that.”

“Well, that's settled,” said Aunt Gwen, as she rose from her seat, and gave each of them a hug in turn. She also patted Toby on the head. “Now let's get ready to celebrate Christmas properly.”

After they'd left the living room, and were back up in Matt's room, Luke exclaimed, “Of course! And the other thing is that my wish about Aunt Gwen has also come true, even though I only said it as a sort of joke. D'you remember? I said wished that Aunt Gwen would stop being such a pain, and how that really would be a miracle. Well, its come true, hasn't it?”

“Yeah,” said Matt, “you're right, that really was the biggest miracle of all.”

Everyone helped with putting up the decorations, and decorating the tree. Christmas cards were put on the chimney breast over the mantelpiece, and at Annie's insistence, they all said the Rosary together before heading off for church, all wrapped up in warm coats and scarves. The family was in place for the carol service well before the official start time of 11:30. But it was a bit late for Aunt Gwen, and she said she'd go the next morning.

After all the recent excitement, Matt was happy just to sit quietly and soak up the atmosphere. Yes, Christmas was special he thought, and particularly *this* Christmas. When Midnight Mass was over, he went up to have a look at the crèche near the altar with the rest of the family.

“This one is bigger,” said Grace, “but I think ours is nicer.”

Matt smiled at her, and then looked at the Christ Child in

the manger, nestled between Mary and Joseph, with the shepherds and the animals around them. Alex's words came back to him. Yes, he thought, this is what Christmas is really all about.

The clear, pitch black night sky sparkled with stars as they walked home together, crunching along on the snow. Mince pies and even some sherry awaited them when they reached the house. Before they went to bed, the little baby Jesus was placed in the manger of their own fragrant acacia wood crib, St. Joseph's crib. Standing before it, Matt had the same sensation he'd felt at the church crèche, of how special Christmas really was.

They next morning, which was bright and sunny, the three Cousins didn't get up till quite late, and by the time they appeared, preparations for Christmas dinner were in full swing. Granny Harris arrived just after midday, and after presents were exchanged, they all sat down to eat traditional Christmas fare; turkey, plum pudding and custard, more mince pies, a little wine and lots of laughter, all interspersed with periodic barking from Toby. They pulled some Christmas crackers—which Matt thought were great fun—and everyone wore their paper hats.

Luke took some photos of the gathering with his smartphone, and as the meal progressed Granny, who'd not been looking forward to her annual meeting with Aunt Gwen, was very pleasantly surprised to see that a profound change had come over her sister-in-law. Indeed, when the others said they were going out for a walk, she declared that she'd stay behind with Aunt Gwen for a fireside chat.

After Matt phoned his family in Hartford, and exchanged Christmas greetings with them, they went to Wearyall Hill, to see the Glastonbury thorn and the place where Joseph of Arimathea had traditionally landed.

As they made their way over towards the Tor and St. Michael's Tower, Mr. Martin explained more about the history of the Tor and Glastonbury. After about ten minutes walking, they reached Chalice Well.

"This is where we came yesterday, when I explained about Joseph of Arimathea and the Holy Grail, you know, the chalice that was used at the Last Supper."

"Yeah," said Matt, "I remember."

Was it really only yesterday that I first came up here, he thought—it seemed like weeks ago.

“And over there,” he continued, pointing to the left, “is Chalice hill, which is also associated with the Holy Grail.”

As they went up the path towards the Tor, and started to cross the open space, Mr. Martin told them that this area was called Fairfield.

“A medieval Fair was held here for centuries, around the feast of St. Michael, and the original Charter for this was granted to the Abbot and monks of Glastonbury abbey hundreds of years ago. Nowadays, there’s a modern Medieval Fayre held in the town annually.”

The snow on the Tor lay shining in the sun as they began to climb up the steep path.

Mr. Martin carried on. “As for the Tor itself, the Celts, who lived here thousands of years ago, believed that the entrance to Annwn, their Otherworld or Underworld, was on the Tor. It’s said that we get the word Avalon, which is also associated with Glastonbury, from that Celtic word. And the Tor was also a place where it’s believed that Druidic rites took place. We do know that according to Gerald of Wales, Glastonbury Tor was called *Ynys Gutrin* in Welsh, that is the Island of Glass, and that later on the Saxons understood this name as ‘Glastingebury,’ from which derived our Glastonbury.”

By now, they’d reached the turn in the path and they all paused to catch their breath. The afternoon was lovely; crisp and cold, but sunny, and by the time they reached the base of the Tower, everyone was quite warm. They all agreed that the snow-covered countryside looked beautiful.

They went over to what looked like, to Matt, to be a sort of large compass, a circular dial set in concrete and giving the distances and compass directions to various landmarks. Mr. Martin told them that its technical name was a toposcope.

Then Matt, Luke and Annie walked slowly around the Tower. They looked through the archway, a little way away from the rest of the family, savoring the moment. They didn’t really expect anything to happen, but Annie was careful to keep a tight hold on Toby’s leash, just in case...

Matt turned to Mr. Martin and said, “Rob, you men-

tioned about Henry VIII being responsible for destroying the Abbey and St. Michael's Tower. I've been thinking about that, and I don't really understand it. Why did he do that?"

"Glastonbury Abbey was one of the most important monasteries in England," replied Mr. Martin, "but Henry was greedy and wanted its wealth for himself and his supporters. So the last abbot, Richard Whiting, was arrested with two of his monks, John Thorne and Roger James. Then they were brought up the top of the Tor, and were executed in a pretty horrible way—being hanged, drawn and quartered. So they were very brave men. They died for their faith in God and the Catholic Church. Abbot Whiting is now a Blessed, since he was beatified, which is one step from being a saint. There's a picture of him in the church where we were last night.

"I was last up here last month, on the anniversary of the death of the Martyrs. Every year there's a parish walk from the church to the top of the Tor as an act of commemoration, on 15 November, the anniversary day."

"But that's my birthday!" exclaimed Matt. He'd just turned fifteen the previous month.

"So it is," said Mr. Martin. "Sorry, I'd forgotten that. I'm not much good at remembering birthdays, I'm afraid, especially with having so many relatives. But that's an interesting coincidence isn't it?"

Perhaps it's more than a coincidence after all that's just happened to us, thought Matt. And the Tor really is holy ground.

When they got back to the house, they spent a quiet but fun evening playing games and doing jigsaws. Matt said it was the most satisfying evening he'd spent in ages, and everyone agreed it'd been the perfect Christmas day.

3

St. Stephen's Day—"Boxing Day"—26th December

The next morning, all three Cousins woke early and feeling surprisingly fresh after their recent adventures. Looking