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The monastery bell tolled persistently. Just after dawn, as the sea-mist cleared, unidentified boats were spotted on the hazy horizon steadily heading towards our holy island, Lindisfarne. In the scriptorium, several of my brother monks looked up from their Gospel writing and turned to me. Our eyes shared the same question -who could these strangers be? I motioned for three of my brothers to hurry down to the shore and greet the visitors. Quickly I also sent two more brothers to the kitchen to prepare some food and drink should these guests need refreshment after their travels. Then I joined the others on the sandy beach. It was a cold, windy January day, so began to shiver almost immediately as I waited amongst the sand dunes.

As the boats approached, we could see they were designed like nothing we had encountered before. Fierce dragon heads adorned the stern, each with menacing eyes and wild expressions. To me, they seemed to riding the waves! A cold shiver ran down my spine. But it wasn't the cold. Something didn't feel right.

Suddenly a roar erupted from the first of the boats to reach the shoreline! A man with a savage face and flowing fair hair leaped over the side and waded confidently to the beach. I could see one of my brother's opening his arms to welcome the man; his smile was stopped short with one swipe of an axe. Two, three, four men clambered off the first boat until it was too many to count. Piercing screams mixed with the sound of clashing swords and devilish shouts. These men took no mercy. My breath was knocked out of my lungs as I saw lifeless bodies fall.

Looking anxiously left and right and, with adrenalin coursing through my veins, I turned and ran as fast as I could back to the monastery. The bitter wind tugged furiously at my tunic, slowing down my panicked steps. Through gritted teeth, I hauled the great wooden gate closed. I hoped it might bar these cruel brutes for a short while but knew it would not be forever. Meanwhile other monks emptied out of the scriptorium and kitchen. Terror reflected in their eyes, as I hastily recounted what was happening on the beach. Only God could save us now! Gathered in the chapel, we began fervently praying towards the gleaming gold crucifix above the altar.

Axe on wood filled the air. The savages were here. Time had run out...