

# **DELIVER US FROM EVIL**

Sequel to the  
'The Father'



# **Deliver Us From Evil**

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**Father Antony Brennan**



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## DEDICATION

To the sterling souls who believe, fervently, that we should:

FIGHT FOR TRUTH...EVEN TO DEATH

Ecclesiasticus: 4:33

And adhere to the Truth uttered by the late Pope Benedict XVI when he said: 'If something was held sacred yesterday; it is sacred today'

Motu Proprio: Summorum Pontificum. 2007

U.I.O.G.D.

Ut in omnibus glorificetur Deus..  
(That in all things God may be glorified)

THE AUTHOR WISHES  
TO HONOUR  
SR. WILHELMINA LANCASTER O.S.B.  
WHO FOUNDED THE TRADITIONAL  
MONASTERY OF MARY, QUEEN OF APOSTLES,  
AND WHOSE INCORRUPT BODY LIES IN  
STATE IN THEIR MONASTERY IN MISSOURI

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# abbess angela

The lady Abbess, with a quickly stifled groan, pushed herself up from her prie-dieu by her hands. She remained stationary for a moment trying to control her face that no trace of her sufferings was observed by her community.

“Give me strength,” she whispered, as the skirts of her voluminous cowl dropped down to the floor as she stood. She knew she had only a few more things to do now then the morning Office of Matins and Lauds would be over.

She raised her hand in blessing then knocked strongly on her wooden kneeler, and led the community from the Chapel, along the long cloister to the Refectory where she would preside at breakfast.

As she led the large community, she managed to keep her back straight and her eyes down, pondering the list of duties that awaited her that day. The easy things – the everyday things – would be no problem, but then she had to receive the archbishop – from Rome – whom she had never met before.

This would be a compulsory canonical visitation and the Abbess knew she would be put through the wringer in the examination of her monastery.

The last thing she needed was a severe migraine headache.



After presiding at breakfast, where she nibbled on half a slice of dry toast and forced herself to drink half a cup of coffee, the Abbess went to her own quarters in the tower block near the entry to the monastery. Arriving at her office, she immediately sank into a comfortable chair which Sister Munchin had ready for her.

Sister Mary Munchin was a plump, middle-aged woman who possessed a great sense of humour and a ready laugh. She looked as if she should be more 'at home' in the kitchen, whereas she was Abbess Angela's secretary, with a knowledge of the whole information technology world that surpassed most of the other sisters. She also had a university degree in Law. She had practised for four years before seeking entry to the monastery and was still registered and acted as the lawyer for the monastery.

Abbess Angela relied on Munchin for just about everything.

Sister Munchin had been with the Abbess for many years now and she could read her Superior easily: her

worries, her harassment, her perplexity and also her bodily frailty. She had looked briefly at the Abbess's face during breakfast and knew that, once again, the poor nun had been stricken with a migraine. It was a very hot summer day as well; that didn't help the sick Abbess!

Thank God, she thought, they were wearing their summer habits; if they were wearing their heavy winter ones, they'd be 'cooked' as the day really warmed up. But she reminded herself, they would change very soon now, as summer - despite the heat of this day - was nearly over.

She fussed over her beautiful and fragile Abbess as she settled her.

"Sister Munchin ..." began the Abbess, only to be shushed by the plump, smiling nun. "No, no, no, no, my Lady. Just rest a bit. I'm going to make one of my special herbal drinks for you...I want you to be charming and gracious and intellectually brilliant when His Grace arrives. That'll scare him to death!"

The Abbess laughed gently. "Oh Munchin, you always make me feel better. All right, I'll drink your horrible drink. It's most probably poisonous, but the way I feel this morning, I don't really care."

Munchin mimed great horror. "And, just who would then lead us, I'd like to ask? Always forgetting us and thinking only of yourself ... I think I'll tell the archbishop. That's what I'll do!" She spoilt her reprimand by laughing and her rich, happy laugh rang out."

"You're one in a thousand, Munchin. I don't know what I'd do without you." She took the glass of repulsive

herbal mixture, closed her eyes, and drank the lot. “Now, I’ve taken that horrible stuff so ... now I can begin to arrange the details of our visit with His Grace ... but ... Wait a minute!

“Listen! What on earth is that noise? Who is shouting? It’s coming from the Sub Prioress’s office ...”

The door linking the Abbess to her second in charge, burst open and a nun stumbled in backwards, shouting, rudely to Sister Gertrude. “I’ll tell them I saw you ... don’t you dare raise your hand to me - I’ll have you in court, I will - you starched idiot ... you ....”

Mother Abbess spoke crisply and authoritatively: “Sister Margaret Mary, control yourself! I order you, under obedience, to restrain your vulgar behaviour, *immediately.*”

The pretty nun fell to her knees at the feet of the Abbess flapping her fingers - which the Abbess noted had painted nails.

“My lady Abbess. I shall do penance for all my anger, and I’ll fast as well, but please believe me. I was only trying to bring you a little bunch of wildflowers I picked, inside the enclosure, this morning. I knew you were not well, and I thought they might help you; I always find they help me if I am overwrought.” She thrust a few blooms at the Abbess, who took them slowly.

“Why, how sweet of you, Sister Margaret Mary, flowers ... Goodness me! ... They’re sopping wet! ... Oh dear, well it must have been a very heavy dew this morning.” She held the flowers further away from her clothes. “Now Sister, I have a very heavy workload this

morning and the new archbishop is coming as well, so I'll have to send you away now, but I'll get Sister Munchin here, to make an appointment for you; then we could have a good chat. All right? See Sister out, Sister Munchin."

The intruder hastened to get out quickly. It was well known to the community that Munchin had a powerful foot.

As the door closed behind Margaret Mary, the Abbess held out the flowers to her staunch defender.

"Munchin, look at these poor flowers. *Picked them inside the enclosure?* Does she think we are complete fools? These are the ones I, personally, put into the vase at the shrine of our Hermit Father this morning. That dreadful woman has reefed them out of the vase. And to do that she had to break the enclosure, as the shrine is outside the enclosure. So, two lies.... Oh, Munchin! What am I to do with her. Tell me, what do you think of her?"

Sister Munchin was never afraid of speaking her mind.

"My right hand tingles every time I see her. I want to slap her hard. She's a frightful woman: she shirks her work; she spends hours on her stupid face; she sways as she walks in the processions like a mannequin on a catwalk; she paints her nails and has had 16 phoney fainting attacks this year alone. I must admit, however, she's a very good actress; she would have done well on the stage."

"Munchin, they are all bad things. She must have some good qualities?"

“You’re right, my Lady. She’s clean, spotless, as a matter of fact; could be, of course, that she doesn’t do any work at all; her voice is good and she’s good in the choir. Oh, and most important of all – her nails – which she is always fussing over – are scrupulously clean; mine are a disgrace.”

“Do you like her, Munchin?”

“No. I’d be telling a lie if I said I did.”

“But you call her, Sister!”

Munchin placed both hands on her hips and replied. “I didn’t like my blood sisters much, either.”

The Abbess tried to look severe but spoilt it by laughing helplessly.

“Oh, Munchin, if only I could say the things you say, but I cannot. Now go and redeem yourself by going to Sister Gertrude who is waiting patiently behind the door. Ask her to come, and you stay for the conference as well.”

Sister Gertrude came in with her hands full of papers and her large notebook under her arm. She was a tall nun, very thin, with exquisite beauty, and was from a powerful and illustrious family. She had perfect manners and usually spoke calmly and was hardly ever agitated no matter how difficult the problem turned out to be. Sister had a degree in accountancy, so the Abbess relied on her heavily in all financial matters. Over the past seventeen years, Gertrude had become Abbess Angela’s right hand in running the huge monastery.

“Benedicite, Mother Abbess. Another hot day!”.

“Deus, my dearest sister; indeed, it is, or will be!” Angela asked Gertrude to be seated as they would now

determine who should be present for the archbishop. "I know you would already have a list; let's see if it is the same as I have." She opened her file. "Now we want the nuns in charge of all the various departments, so:

"You and I, of course, will bear the brunt of all the questioning.

"Sister Raphael, the doctor. I've told Raphael to have a full report of the illnesses, their types, any deaths - thank God, none yet - and any 'phoneys' i.e., malingeringers, or hypochondriacs.

"The Novice Mistress, Sister Boniface: I told her I wanted particularly an outline of the subjects studied, and the list of the Church Doctrines begun. The chosen Spiritual Directive method they followed... with, of course, preference given for Benedictine Spirituality.

"The Postulant Mistress, Sister Lucy: I urged her to have a clear programme ready for inspection. *Especially I wanted the Customs to be taught, well explained and strictly observed.*

"Then will come the dollars and cents questions. We need the Cellarer, and the Bursar: Sister Matthew and her assistants: Sister John the Baptist and Sister Luke. I know and approve that they should both consult you, on very difficult financial questions, as you have the training. It is a very big portfolio, or office, but vitally necessary, to keep us afloat: with 42 nuns to feed, clothe and house, ours is a gigantic task.

"I'm not sure if the Visitator will want to see the Farm Manager, Sister Isidore, or not. I told her to be prepared. It really depends on whether he understands farm work, or not. However, we certainly understand it,

as without our excellent farm and dairy herd, we would starve; that's besides all the profit we make from our sales – particularly our cheeses which help to keep the place going."

There was a slight pause. Angela closed her eyes. Then she spoke softly. "He'll undoubtedly then ask about 'troublesome nuns', such as sisters Margaret Mary and Felix of Valois ... tell me, Gertrude, does Sister Felix still think she's a rabbit?"

Gertrude answered, trying to keep a straight face: "Oh, no, my Lady; this week she's a camel. We've all tried to get the pillows from her back, but she cries so much if they are removed, I think it's better to leave them there; next week she'll be something else."

"Gertrude, does the doctor and the specialist think there is any hope of improvement?"

"Not really, my Lady. Sister Raphael doesn't think so either. The Specialist said she should be 'sectioned' ... which they say now, instead of saying, 'has to be certified insane'. However, she is really a very sweet, good, woman and she is totally quiet in the chapel ..."

"I see, then if she's not a danger to herself, nor to others, then she shall stay here as long as that is the case. The poor woman didn't know that condition was going to happen to her when she applied to join here.

"She was one of the first ones to enter. I would hate, personally, to see her go." The abbess closed her eyes tightly for a moment, then asked Gertrude. "Now, we can't just slide over it. What about Sister Margaret Mary? Have you any suggestions to make re that poor nun?"

Sister Gertrude was slow in replying. “My lady, I would like to know what Sister Raphael, thinks about that woman. If she is truly sick, then I have been very wrong in thinking many harsh things about her; if Raphael is of my own opinion, then Margaret Mary should be put into a hospital for dementia patients, for I truly think she is demented.” She kept her eyes down, afraid that she had been uncharitable.

The Abbess reached over and patted the hand of Gertrude. “Be at peace, Gertrude. I, too, think that is where Margaret Mary will end up. The little scene we had this morning is an indication of what all the sisters tell me about that nun. I’m so sorry that she is in Final Vows; that complicates things. If this side of her, had appeared before Finals, she would never have been ever admitted to Final Vows.”

She sighed. “But it’s no use crying over spilt milk, as my father used to say, and he was right. One thing I want to discuss with Raphael is whether we could take her to a good psychiatrist for a report; it would, at least, be a guide as to her real health condition.” The abbess sat up in her chair. “Don’t worry yourself anymore about her, Gertrude. I’ll speak to Raphael.”

“Now, Sister, a difficult problem. Sister Munchin has indicated to me from her conversations with the priests from the Hermitage Shrine – who come each morning to offer the holy Mass for us – there is a real fear that Rome may force us to use the new rite of Mass. I mean the new form of the liturgy in the vernacular, which they claim, was the outcome of the Vatican II

Council and, as you would know well, Sister, the new Mass was released in 1969.”

Gertrude was so shocked, she forgot herself and spoke loudly, completely out of character. “Will this persecution from Rome ever cease? Firstly, we had that ‘Vultum Dei Quaerere’ Document; we struggled with that trying to make sense of what they wanted. First the pope tells us that we must not concern ourselves with *numbers* in our communities, then he calmly contradicts himself by announcing – in that same document – that *if we fall below 5 sisters* then the monastery will lose its autonomy. Of course, we have to be aware of numbers!

“However, scholars now say that that document was the first one of a planned campaign of ‘obsolescence’ for Contemplative monasteries. The archbishop Jose Rodriguez Carballo obviously believes that such monasteries have no place now in the modern world: they had been useful once for dealing with women who were left unmarried, but such women now, can hold important positions which have large salaries and are now supported by the State in their old age. Thus, the monasteries are redundant.”

“To me, Sister Gertrude, that is one of the outrageous lines in that document – to even suggest that nuns in times past were only in monasteries as they had nowhere else to go.” Gertrude nodded her agreement. She continued:

“Then we had to deal with that disastrous ‘Cor Orans’ document!

“To me it is harsh beyond belief; it is also utterly stupid. It required that we give the candidate 12 years

before they decide if they wish to remain or not - instead of the almost universal 8 or 9 years that is now the rule. To me it is stupid. It talks so much about being in the modern world now, but it fails to understand that most candidates *now*, come to such monasteries *after university, with a degree, so are much older to start with*, than was the case earlier."

The Abbess nodded her agreement. "Then, Gertrude, the part that I thought most disastrous was the demand that Novice Mistresses must attend the endless, continuing educational classes *outside her monastery*. To my mind that would be the end of the Novice Mistresses. How can you lead others to the contemplative life by gadding around to every clerical Tom, Dick or Harry; to be forced to listen to a bunch of - mostly disgruntled - clergy who are tired of their vocation and have found a way to vent their spleen against those monastics secure in their vocation? And I'd like to know how you can teach the value of STABILITY *when you're never at home yourself!*"

"I agree whole heartedly, my Lady. Then this Carballo, has the nerve to tell us that we must join a federation and that will be the end of the autonomy of each monastery. Even their goods, are to be shared. This means - and you understand with my background my Lady, it irritates me most - that no longer can we even call the money we make by the labour of our hands, our own: it will belong to a 'Federation' and can be removed - what a word, 'Removed' - they should write 'stolen', from us whenever they decide to use it elsewhere. Apparently, the money we have - in actual cash and

then the value of the buildings, or land we have, are now in jeopardy.

“On top of, and apart from other problematic statements, – to calmly announce that if the nuns in a monastery to which they have given their life, are too old or, too few, their monastery *can be suppressed*. That, my mind, my Lady, *is both cruel and evil!*”

“Rome is not just threatening us, my Lady. From the reading you suggested I do, I’ve kept a list of the monasteries so far suppressed by the Vatican, I found the following which I believe is a sample of what is to come:

“The Dominican Monastery in Maradi, the Poor Clares in Marche, the Cenacle in both Montauto and Anghiari, then there was the Monastery of the Visitation in Pistoria. They are just the tip of the iceberg.

“And now, finally, this last document, ‘Traditionis Custodes’. Why are they doing this to us? Our Masses are not offered in the parish church; we cause the authorities no problems; we cost nothing to anyone; definitely not to the local Hierarchy, nor do we meddle with Diocesan squabbles. Why can’t they leave us alone? My personal belief is – God forgive me if I am wrong – but I think the authorities in Rome have lost the Faith.”

“My Lady, there are many scholars and good Catholic writers who are trying to understand the reasons for the Vatican’s opposition to the Monasteries and the whole contemplative life. One of the best analyses of the situation, I have read, said: ‘the Vatican authorities see no point in cloistered orders and only

value an order if it makes its work – its reason for existence - to achieve a social commitment, or end.’

“According to this view – and to me it explains it all: the Vatican sees the contemplative life as useless. My own opinion is, that the pope thinks we should all become Social Workers.

“And that means, my Lady, that the age-old belief – held from the beginning – that the prayers of those men and women committed to God, fully without reserve – isolated from the world – are the greatest gift any woman, or man, can give to the active work of the Church – is no longer part of our Faith! Well, it’s certainly part of mine! Have they forgotten this ‘all or nothing’ monastic life that ‘contemplative monasteries try to practice’, was present in the early church. We hear about the hermit *Desert FATHERS* often enough, but there were, even then, a very large number of hermit *Desert MOTHERS* as well.”

The abbess nodded. “But, Gertrude, the Vatican is using the argument that we need to fulfil all these suggestions and adopt the New English Mass, to prove our allegiance, by obedience to the directives from the Vatican II Council.”

Gertrude responded by standing up and speaking emphatically. “Well, let me say that that is an OUTRIGHT LIE! The new Mass in the vernacular came after the Council had finished, but it was hatched together *before the Documents of the Council were even available, in most countries*. The only ‘radical’ things, in the document on the Liturgy – the Constitution: ‘*Sacrosanctum Concilium*’ was that it suggested we

change the Scripture Readings: they should be in the vernacular, not Latin.

“Well, we have been doing that for years now; it was a very sensible suggestion to make for people. Not many ordinary men and women have knowledge of Latin. BUT *that was the extent of the mandated changes that we had to make that effects those in the pews!* There were other sensible changes in the ranking of Feasts, and so on, but these only concerned priests and those in the sanctuary. But even those changes never touched the integrity of the holy Liturgy – the Mass – itself!”

“I’m sorry, Sister Gertrude, that’s not quite correct. That document speaks with a divided tongue. It *appears to be a very traditional document – carefully safeguarding our glorious traditions – yet it is that document which, I think, is the worst of them all.* It *planted the seeds – which scholars have called ‘time bombs’ - which after the Council was over, could then burst forth into the hideous, serious, and grievous, interpretations that virtually destroyed our Faith – changing it completely.*

“Those responsible for the terrible changes that were thrust upon us, knew that there would be an uproar if they set down in writing what they wanted to abolish – and the goals they wanted to achieve – so, wrote that document with devilish ingenuity, so that most of the Council Fathers had no idea what, in fact, they were actually voting to implement.”

Sister Gertrude forced herself to speak quietly.... “Thank you for explaining that; I didn’t realise that, but I do understand now, my Lady, why you insisted I read Pope Pius 5<sup>th</sup>’s great encyclical, ‘Quo Primum,’ in which

that great pope ripped away all the extra bits – the litanies, the extra prayers, and so on – that had become stapled onto the sacred liturgy over the centuries. He declared that the ancient Liturgy – *in its pure unencumbered form* – was to be the Liturgy of the Catholic Church for all time. And remember, that pope’s writings were codified in the Council of Trent.”

“I have to play the devil’s advocate, again, at this point, Sister Gertrude. You must not forget, the present incumbent on the throne of Peter has declared that all Pius 5<sup>th</sup>’s work is now *abrogated!* Which means that it now is worthless what Pius 5<sup>th</sup> did or said.”

“Words fail me, my Lady! How is that possible? It’s absolute nonsense to even make such a statement!” she shook her head in bewilderment. “That good pope, Benedict XVI, tried to fix up the stupidity of the arguments to destroy the ‘Traditional rite’ of Mass, with his great Motu Proprio, ‘*Summorum Pontificum*,’ and *I do know* that IT is now abrogated as well.

“I feel so insulted that I want to stop praying for the pope altogether but,” she smiled at her superior, “I won’t, so don’t worry. He’s still the pope, duly elected and there have been plenty of bad ones, or weak and sinful ones, in the past – about 40 in all, I believe – so he’s something we have to endure; but the attempt to destroy the ancient Mass, I can never forgive.”

Gertrude was seriously upset and sat down again; she then asked, humbly and fearfully: “My lady, surely the priests from the Hermitage shrine would be on our side, wouldn’t they?”

Angela leaned over and took the hand of her sub-prioress. “My dear, dear Gertrude. Thank God you are here. I had a secret fear that I would face the lions alone in the arena.” She released the hand. “Gertrude, you and Munchin are my greatest allies in this. And to answer your question, Munchin is not sure. She’s definite about Father Joyceson and Father Mark Tulliver, but is unsure if Father Le Blanc is with us, or not.

“The whole question seems to me to be so ridiculous, Gertrude. However, I am a realist. I know that if the pope actually does demand that the Liturgy be changed, we have little room to manoeuvre, canonically.”

She sat up straighter. “However, let me assure you, I will not go down silently! I have asked Munchin to keep me abreast of what the priests think and say – from the Shrine – about the matter, and to be alert to *our legal situation* if, and *what*, actually happens. Thank God we have one lawyer among us.”

She closed her eyes. “How much more proof do we need that the ancient Liturgy is pleasing to God, than the graces people have received from living, seeing, or just being present at *The Father’s* masses. That wonderful Cardinal McViver and Bishop Lipgurd, as well, both said that hundreds and hundreds of men and women have come back to the Faith, or been consoled and strengthened, in the faith, by just attending the old Mass, *which has been offered for more than a thousand years*. How much more evidence is required that it is the true rite? It has not only lasted over one thousand years but

parts of the prayers of that Mass can be found, in Greek, written in the Catacombs.

“You realise, my dear Gertrude, that if I remain obstinate, they might remove me.” Sister Gertrude stood up again in her shock. “But they can’t: you are the one who keeps us all together....”

“No, dear child. God is the one who does that. Look, I promise you I shall try my hardest today to find out where the Archbishop stands in this matter.

“Now back to what we have to face today, Gertrude. Is there anything else I have forgotten?

Gertrude was slow in answering. “No, my list is roughly the same as yours. I must admit I’m more worried about the financial questions than any of the others. It’s a very observant house with few real troubles from the sisters. But...it’s not only the ‘troublesome’ ones – in terms of behaviours – that we could be asked about; it is the opposite as well...”

The abbess quickly asked: “You mean, Sister Josephine?”

“Yes, my Lady.”

Abbess Angela closed her eyes. She remained silent for a full minute then asked, humbly. “Sister Gertrude. What do you, personally, think of that nun?”

“I’m not sure, my Lady.... Regardless of what I think of her, I believe the main question is to ask: Do we really think she’s *genuine*, or not!”

“And how am I to answer that? Every order I give her, she obeys instantly; she works hard at whatever task she is given and never complains. I left her for three months, just cleaning the bathrooms, and she was still

smiling happily whenever I happened to see her. She told me to transfer her anywhere I liked; it was immaterial to her. St Benedict had made it clear in his Rule that every work, if done for the glory of God, is valuable, so whatever job you're given, accept it with joy. as it will be a way to serve God, with love."

"Is she learned, my Lady?"

"To my surprise, Gertrude, yes – it appears, she is." The Abbess sighed again. "And that again is a mystery! Josephine only finished Primary Education; she writes well, with very good grammar, and seems to read easily quite difficult theology books that some of the very highly educated nuns find difficult – sometimes works in Latin and Greek." The Abbess smiled, ruefully. "When she applied for entry, I was hesitant on account of her standard of education. As all the Divine Office and liturgical life is in Latin, I didn't know whether she would cope with it all. But I decided to risk it. We could improve her education inside if she really had a vocation: she deserved the chance to, at least, be given a try."

"I do remember, my Lady, from that Chapter Meeting you had when Sister Boniface, the Novice Mistress, asked you if she could have the young Sister Josephine as her assistant ... Sister Boniface must have noticed gifts that Josephine had."

"... and I said 'No'. I remember it vividly, wondering if I had done what God wanted me to do."

Sister Gertrude, summonsed up her courage and asked, timidly, "My Lady, do you think that God ... has sent us ... a ... saint?"

The Abbess was silent. She sat silent with clasped hands. At last, she looked up. "Sister Gertrude, I'm glad *you* said that word; *I was too frightened to say it.*" She reached out and touched Gertrude's arm briefly. "Sister let's leave it there. God will show us, one way or the other, the truth of that nun."

Sister Munchin, who had remained silent, now drew attention to the time. "My Lady, it is nearly time for the archbishop to arrive...."

There were startled cries from both nuns. The abbess spoke quickly. "Gertrude, we'll use the visitors' room; Munchin, see that it has enough chairs. I'll notify all the nuns involved." She reached over for the loudspeaker, found the switch, pulled it down and spoke: her voice going to every corner of the huge building.

"Would the following Sisters come to the Visitors' Room, with their notes, immediately. The Archbishop is due to arrive any minute now. I want all the rest of the community to pray that God will bless this Inspection and Visitation." She then quickly read the list of the nuns required.



Sister Margaret Mary had left the enclosure gate on the latch – after her previous excursion outside the enclosed area – and now had herself hidden behind a thick cypress hedge, where she guessed it was likely the archbishop’s car, would come to a stop. It was close to the official entry to the monastery and the front door.

The nun’s face was twisted into a grimace of hate for both The Abbess and the unknown archbishop. She guessed that he was coming here to deal with her: everyone was talking about her; she knew they watched her, even at night – she felt their eyes peering at her.

They would, however, be very respectful to her when she had removed the Abbess and put herself in her rightful place. She forced herself to consider the fate of the archbishop: she finally decided he could live, if he did as he was told; otherwise, he’d die with *the temporary abbess*. She liked that term ... ‘temporary abbess’ ... well, that’s all she is, temporary. I’ll take her

place. They'd all take real notice of her then, wouldn't they?

She would then become quite famous; she knew she was beautiful, desirable, and when she was clothed, as she intended to be, in the glorious robes of the Abbess, the community would kneel in adoration of her: the most beautiful Abbess in the world.

She carefully checked the long thin knife under her scapular and moved it slightly so that it wouldn't hinder her movement and waited, poised to strike.



aiting for the car began to be tedious. **W**She went back to her favourite dream. When she was Abbess, she would order all members of the community, and all visitors, who came to see her, to do so, but only on their knees. It would be only fitting.

The sound of a car reversing into the space near the gate startled her. He's here!

Is it coming to this spot? Yes, yes, yes, it is! She was so clever!

NOW! Blood would flow. She wanted to laugh aloud – it was all so easy – she fought hard to control herself. The car stopped. There was a moment of silence, then the driver's door opened, a leg came out and then the whole body of the man with his back to her. NOW, was the time!

She sprang like a tiger and her long fingernails seared into the skin of the man's neck, the full weight of her body knocking him face-down to the ground. He screamed in shock and searing pain.

His Grace, Archbishop Edward Wilkinson, was trying desperately to breathe, his face in the dust. As he struggled wildly, thinking he had been assaulted by a lunatic, he lashed out with his fists aimlessly. He managed to turn his head swiftly to see his attacker and gasped: it was a NUN! A fully clothed nun!

“In the name of God, Sister, what are you doing?” he shouted. “Are you trying to kill me? Let me up, or I could hurt you badly.”

The nun actually laughed loudly. “You haven’t a chance, I’m going to kill you. You thought you were going to put me into a Home, didn’t you? No way, you, and that she-wolf, in there: that so-called Abbess – the stupid, ugly, old bastard – are both in for a surprise.”

The deranged nun was kneeling with her full weight on his back and shoulders. He really found it almost impossible to move. The voice...that insane voice... went on and on and on...

“I might change my plans: You could take me away, in your pretty car ... I’ll drive. If you won’t let me, I’ll kill you. Look!” the demented nun brandished a long thin knife in his face.

The man tried to make the situation clear by talking rationally. “Well, I can’t take you away until you get your knee off my back. If I move, I’ll throw you to the ground, sister, and I don’t want to do that.”

“Hit me, and I’ll scream blue murder; I’ll get the cops; you’ll go to jail. But I’d much rather kill both of you, the one inside ... she’s insane, you know. We call her the ‘Black Angel’. She’s rotten to the core – she’s got them all fooled; I’m getting out, but I’ll kill her first

and then you as well ... yes, that would be much better ... both of you ... you could die together; I'll take the car." The insane nun reached inside her habit and drew out again, the long thin knife "It will be just as it is in the movies: two lovers, one a black angel and the other a fancy, 'Nancy boy' dressed in pretty clothes with rings on his fingers...."

The archbishop realised – for the first time – that with that frightful knife she had – he was actually in serious trouble. If he moved at all, she'd strike...he tried to turn a little on his side...

"Ugh? What are you doing? Don't you dare move. I think I'll kill you now and get it over...."

There was a sudden, piercing scream from the attacker. The Abbess had grabbed the collar of the insane nun's habit with both hands and pulled her roughly away with all her strength; and in doing so, freed the bruised and shaken archbishop.

The Abbess was quickly assisted by Sisters Munchin and Gertrude. The two assistants quickly removed the knife from the nun's hand. The Abbess took the knife and ordered the two sisters to take Sister Margaret Mary to the concrete locked room, in the basement: the key was in the possession of Sister Isidore. She asked them also to ask Isidore to come to the office as soon as she was free; the Abbess wanted a job done for the archbishop.

Soon there were only the prelate and the Abbess left. Abbess Angela gave her hand to the man, still on the ground, and gently helped to pull him to his feet.

He stood up and began shaking out the dust on his cloak and wiping down his hair and face with his handkerchief. The Abbess tried to sort out her immediate priorities.

“Give me a minute, Your Grace; I have all the Department Mistresses in the visitors’ room – I don’t want them to see you as you are. I’ll open the front door and then you can come into my office that way – it will be a chance to recover from that frightful introduction to our home.”

She hurried to the visitors’ room, briefly explained what had happened, and asked the nuns to wait until the archbishop made his intentions clear. She then brought in the august visitator to her office, by the front door, and suggested he sit in the comfortable chair.

Back inside the office and seated, she asked the archbishop if he drank coffee; he did, so she rang the kitchen and asked them, as a special favour, to prepare quickly a beautiful little morning tea for the archbishop; he’d had a great shock. They assured her it would be on the way in their special ‘immediate’ service. The Abbess smiled and then faced her superior with a wry expression and lifted eyebrows.

“Well, Your Grace, that wasn’t the first impression we were hoping to give you of our monastery. We can only hope, Your Grace, that you won’t judge the whole monastery from that one nun who attacked you this morning. I admire your courage; most men, if faced with what you experienced, would have hi-tailed it out of this place as fast as they could go, utterly convinced we were savages.

“Apart from the shock, the exterior dirt and the soiling of your exterior clothes – which we will fix – did you seriously injure anything else?”

“I think the only thing hurt, my Lady, was my vanity. I’ve never been thrown to the ground by a woman before.” He started to laugh, and the Abbess joined in.

“Your Grace, when Sister Mary Gertrude, my second in command, asked what exactly you would want to see and to investigate, believe it or not, but that nun: Sister Margaret Mary, was top of our list. So, in a way, you saved us from hunting for her! She must have been hiding in wait for you. All the sisters knew you were coming.

“We were actually discussing what to do with that nun this morning as we prepared for the visitation. I wondered at taking her to a psychiatrist to get a Specialist’s medical opinion. We are fortunate as we have a doctor among the sisters, Sister Mary Raphael. She is fully qualified and registered, thank God. She is our resident doctor, while Sister Mary Munchin, who helped you off the ground this morning, is a qualified and registered Lawyer, so she acts as our lawyer, and is invaluable with her legal advice in so many areas.”

There was a discrete knock on the office door; it opened to reveal a sumptuous morning tea. Sister Mary Benedict, the main cook of the monastery, silently put the tray on the abbess’s desk curtseyed to the archbishop and smiled as the Abbess thanked the good nun fervently.

The archbishop was lavish in his praise and stood up and taking the surprised cook's hand, said: "Well, now I can tell you the truth. I have had no sleep last night as the plane was in difficulties and had to come down to refuel, or something, and only got into Sydney two hours before I turned up here. So, I have had no sleep and no breakfast. To receive a feast like this is a taste of Heaven to a starving man."

Sister Benedict smiled. "Then sit at ease, Your Grace, and eat your fill."

When he had eaten, the Abbess led the archbishop to the Visitors' room. He saw one seat left empty, so assumed it was for him.

He went there as the nuns stood up and said together: "Benedicite, Your Grace," and he, remembering in time, answered, "Deus." And he and the nuns, sat down.

Angela introduced all the nuns and they each came forward, genuflected and kissed the episcopal ring; Sister Munchin was the last one in the line. As she kissed the ring, she blushed scarlet and retreated behind the Abbess's chair.

The Abbess was a beautiful woman and today, after that terrible scene with Margaret Mary, she was very pale; this enhanced her appearance. When dressed again in her proper regalia she was an astonishing, impressive sight.

**T**he abbess broke the silence. “Your Grace, in preparing for your visit, I asked all the Heads of Departments in the Monastery to prepare an account of their department. As you have never been here before, we were not sure, exactly, how you wished to proceed?”

“My Lady Abbess, after this morning’s episode, I think I have become slightly adrift ... mentally. I had only arrived in your country about 8.00 am this morning – as I told you. *When I left Rome, it was snowing;* the heat of this morning in your country nearly killed me. Then, when I had found out where you lived and had driven that long distance here, I have to admit I was near the end of my strength”. He paused, and Angela, spoke quickly.

“It never occurred to me that you had only just arrived in this country. We could easily have postponed the visit.” The archbishop nodded his understanding, and continued:

“I would like to adjourn this full meeting until tomorrow morning. That will give us – all of us – a chance to recover after this awful morning. It would also give me the opportunity to have a good night’s sleep. If I take the reports of each Department, I could study them today and make a list of questions for each; then, tomorrow, we could have the big meeting in the morning, at, let’s say, 10 o’clock.

“If your secretary – I believe her name is the same as that great Irish monk – ‘Munchin’ – collects the reports, I shall take them with me. I shall stay the night with the Fathers at the holy shrine you have so close to this huge place.” He paused again, looking a little unsure of himself. “There is one thing more.

“My lady, I wish to speak with you, privately now, when the other good sisters leave the room. I wish to speak of something, that you can then inform your sisters, when this visitation is over.”

The Abbess stood up. “Certainly, Your Grace. You have every right to rearrange the visit. You have had a terrible, indeed, dreadful, introduction to our country, and to our monastery, with all that has happened to you this morning. My sisters and I are at your disposal. I personally think your new arrangement is very sensible and practical.”

Angela spoke to her sisters. “Sisters, have you given your reports to Sister Munchin? Good! Sisters, would you kindly leave us now and my sincere thanks to every one of you for all your splendid work in preparation for the visitation.”

The Abbess remained standing until the last sister had left the room. The archbishop then motioned to her to be seated. The Abbess sat opposite the Visitator, her hands in the sleeves of her cowl.

“My Lady,” the archbishop began, “firstly let me say that one of the things I was especially requested to assess was the ‘spirit of the community; whether they were united in their zeal; did they see the community as their own family and, indeed, did they seem to be willing to assist one another within the enclosure.

“This morning, the few members of the community, that I saw, answered all those questions, not in words, which could be false, but in action. They demonstrated a ‘oneness’ that I have not seen anywhere else. Now if that is a glimpse of what the rest of the community is like, then I think you have a wondrous and, today, a unique contemplative, balanced, united monastery.

“I tell you that in confidence.

“Now, my Lady. I need to know your story. I have heard it is like something out of a pious pamphlet with great exaggeration, it is said. Would you please just tell me, yourself, your ‘history’.”

The Abbess was amused. “Your Grace, if it is from a pious pamphlet, I think you should suppress that publication immediately.

“My life story is not so much *pious*, as simply ‘odd’. I suppose what makes it so extraordinary is that it is entwined with that of *The Father* of the hermitage.

“Your Grace. I need to explain the mystery of the name of our Hermit Founder. When he first came to live in the old, abandoned church, so long ago now, no-

one knew his actual name, so he was simply called: ‘*The Father*’. People, in talking about him referred to him simply, as ‘The Father’. There were no other priests there, or in the near vicinity, so the custom of calling the ‘un-named’ priest, ‘The Father’ continued and became entrenched in the local vocabulary.

“But to get back to my history. My dearest mother had one child, a boy, and then lost a number of children after that. My parents were told they would never have another child by the doctors. Then *The Father* told them both that there was an angel still waiting to come to them so they must call her, Angela.”

She smiled again. “Now, Your Grace, brace yourself: apparently, I’m the angel!” The archbishop laughed naturally.

“Well, strange as it seems, my mother soon found herself pregnant and, as *The Father* had foretold, I arrived on the scene, and not only *The Father*, but the late, wonderful, holy, Cardinal McViver, actually delivered me.

“I grew up, loving *The Father* and seeing both my parents, become fervent members of the Church. However, to my increasing embarrassment, as I grew older, the *Father* kept introducing me as the Mother Superior of the Benedictine monastery of the Transfiguration. When people, including priests, asked where that monastery was, *The Father* said it was not built yet, but Angela would be the first Superior.

“In my teen-age years I think I had a small rebellion. I ran away to university in the city and hated it; I wanted desperately to simply ‘go home’. I enjoyed the study but

hated the lifestyle. I began to think if another young woman prattled on to me about make-up or her 'dates', I thought I would likely go crazy. So, like a whipped dog, I crawled home and saw *The Father* and told him everything..." The archbishop interrupted her.

"Excuse me, my Lady. Was *The Father* angry, or bitter at you defying him?"

"Good Heavens, NO! That would never happen with *The Father*. He smiled and even laughed a little at my tale of woe. He said it was good for me to experience a glimpse of 'worldly life'. Then he said something that has never left me:

*'When you are ready and mature enough for the life, Christ Jesus will direct you what to do, and HOW to do it.'*

"I've never forgotten that Your Grace, and it brought me to this place."

"But this monastery is HUGE. How on earth did you finance it?"

"Well, you could say that aspect was certainly miraculous, or at least, *weirdly strange*. You see, there was a very wealthy man named Jacob Bloom who, about 70 years ago, built this large building in imitation of the grand European mansions of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

"Jacob spent about ten years, in all, building this huge place with its 16 bedrooms, endless smaller parlours, a massive reception room and a ballroom. He then built the amenities block where the Laundry and Kitchen areas are, plus eight more bedrooms used, originally, for Jacob's servants. He also built the barns and garages and so on. Truly a magnificent and

extraordinary mansion; possibly the best in this whole country.”

“Well now to finish the story, my Lady: how did this extraordinary house of Jacob become a monastery? I gather from the name Jacob was not a Christian?”

“You are correct. The answer is simple. Jacob went to visit *The Father*. His intention was to unmask the ‘hoax’ as he called it. He saw one of the last Masses that the glorious priest of God offered, and Jacob nearly died of fright. He sought and obtained a private meeting with *The Father*, and to cut a long story short, became a Catholic, was baptized within a fortnight, knew he was dying and made the whole place, land, house and buildings and all therein, over to *The Father*. It was to be kept in *The Father’s* name until the ‘Monastery of the Transfiguration’ was erected as an enclosed female Benedictine Monastery of the strict observance. It then became ours completely.”

The Abbess’ voice began to wobble. “You see it’s, simple really! … … NO, IT ISN’T! IT’S TERRIFYING! Yes, before you ask, *I do know* I am somehow involved in a great plan of God but, *Your Grace, I am a simple woman and, to tell the truth, I find it so frightening, I want, often, to just run away.*”

The Abbess was now weeping, quietly, and had half turned away from the Visitator. She blew her nose discretely and turned back again. “Forgive, me please, Your Grace.”

The archbishop smiled. “My Lady, there is nothing to forgive. If I were in your position, I’d most probably jump off a cliff; I’d be so frightened.” He stood up and

took a turn around the room. “Let’s talk about some practical things for a moment.

“Now, about that nun ... Margaret Mary ... what did you do with her? If you’ve told me, I’ve forgotten.”

“We put her in a sealed, concrete, room in the basement. I think Jacob used it for his wine cellar. It is without a window and only has, *now*, I believe, a bed, a chair and a small table. She has screamed almost continuously, I believe.

“Your Grace, I have tried everything I know, in dealing with that nun, but after today, and her attempt to kill both you and me, she is dangerous to others and, I think, could be dangerous to herself.” She sighed. “I simply don’t know what to do with her”.

The archbishop nodded. “I think it’s time for the Specialists. We have some very fine Psychiatrists and Specialists in mental diseases that we use. It will be necessary to transport the nun to the city to see them. Does she have parents living? I imagine she has; she is only young.”

“Yes, Your Grace, her mother is living; I think she has had a lot to do with the nun’s condition. I shall have to contact the mother and ask her if she will agree to her daughter being taken to the city for treatment.” She grimaced. “I’m not looking forward to that conversation.”

“Let me know, my Lady, the result of that conversation and we’ll take it from there.” The archbishop smiled. “Now, do you have anything you wish to ask me. I’m nearly finished with my questions ...”

The Abbess shifted uneasily in her chair.

“Another thing I would like to raise with you, Your Grace. I didn’t intend to ask you about another nun here who is perplexing me, but with your new programme arrangement, there is now time to mention her.”

“Yes?”

“Your Grace, how do you know if someone is a saint or not?”

“My Lady, that’s a difficult one, and no mistake! I think it depends on a number of factors, especially the duration of time they exhibit the same, or related, above average virtues, dispositions, fervour. I would place ‘obedience’ very high on the list, myself.

“Then, I would like to know what kind of *faults* does the person have? Are there honest, and persevering, efforts to overcome such faults? Does she shun some members of the community and favour others? Does she favour ostentatious, attentive-seeking bodily ‘poses’, and has she at any time mutilated herself – even in small ways – to draw attention to herself? Was that helpful at all?”

“Well, yes it was. As you listed the requirements for sanctity to be considered to be, at least, a possibility. But the problem is that she has answered, to my mind, all your requirements with the correct answer, through my observation of her, in all the years she has been here.

“She has never changed from when she entered. She is loved by all and, consequently, is given the worse tasks of all to do, e.g., the toilets in the lavatories: she never complains, ever; she seems to thrive wherever she is

placed; she is totally honest and very, very, ordinary in all her postures - I've often found her slouching in her stall; if a defect is found, by the various nuns in charge of sections, she moves heaven and earth to improve, and to remove, the defect."

"Is she learned?" asked the archbishop.

"I knew that question would arise, and I was dreading having to answer it ... No, she is NOT learned - she only finished Primary, or it might be called, *Elementary*, School, in your country ... yet ... she reads the Fathers of the Church in Latin and Greek with ease, and understands them and can explain, *simply*, the Theology therein. I have found she can take a very difficult passage and explain the meaning in a few words" The Abbess dabbed her forehead. "I even asked her, recently to explain a teaching of Aquinas on the morality of anger - whether it could be justified, or not - and she rattled off an answer that was 'right on the nail'.

"Your Grace, I'm frightened, Sister Mary Josephine might have ... might have...."

"*Infused knowledge?* Is that what you fear, my Lady?"

"Yes," breathed Angela in a whisper.

There was silence after the Abbess had spoken; the archbishop sat perfectly still, with his eyes closed. Then, he sighed deeply, and asked:

"Could you think up a reason to summons her to your room now? I want to see her and speak to her. This is very, very serious, my Lady."

"Give me a moment to think ... yes ... yes ... I think that would do." She reached out and lifted the big

microphone to her desk - the one used to speak to the entire monastery.

Angela's voice rang out over the entire monastery. "Excuse me my sisters. It is nearly Station time for the Hour of Sext. Today, due to extraordinary circumstances, I cannot be with you, but Sister Mary Gertrude will take my place at both Station and Sext.

"Now the archbishop wishes to interview a representative number of sisters today; he will be back tomorrow as well. But the ones decided on for today are Sister Mary Munchin, Sister Mary Josephine and Sister Mary Isidore. Would those three nuns come to my office immediately. If you are engaged in work you cannot leave, send word to us here. Thank you, my sisters."

The archbishop asked the Abbess if she had a large crucifix he could hold, or wear? She handed him one she had on her desk.

Within minutes the nuns had arrived, Josephine was first, so was taken straight into the presence of the archbishop. The Abbess then went to sit outside her office with the sisters, but the archbishop asked her to return. He spoke quietly to the Abbess "You could keep a record of my interviews with the sisters."

The prelate now wearing the large crucifix, faced and welcomed Sister Mary Josephine, shaking hands with the young nun - after she had genuflected and kissed the ring. She was naturally nervous in speaking with an archbishop. She had never spoken to a bishop before.

The archbishop sat back in his chair and looked closely at this young nun. She was of average height and was not skeletal, so she obviously ate moderately well. He smiled at her and said gently:

“Well, we might just as well get on with the questions, Sister.

How old are you?”

“I am twenty-nine, Your Grace, and what a beautiful crucifix!”

“And you are in final vows?”

“Yes.”

“Dic mihi cur monialis fieri vis?”

(*Have you always wanted to become a nun?*)

“Yes, Your Grace, from about the age of three.”

“Have you a good education? Been to good schools?”

“No, Your Grace. I have only finished Primary.”

“Why is that? Didn’t you like school?”

“I loved school; I wanted to stay, but I was needed on the farm.”

“I see. Libetne precari?”

(*Do you like praying?*)

“Sometimes, Your Grace. Sometimes I have to force myself to stay in chapel – especially for the long vigils.”

“¿Te gusta leer las historias de los santos?”

(*Do you like to read the lives of the saints?*)

“Not all the time. I like the exciting stories of the Crusades, and that brave and wonderful saint, Joan of Arc. But mainly I stay with little Therese, the ‘little Flower’. That is my hope, Your Grace, that I might

become another tiny flower in the sight of our beloved Lord: following in Therese's precious footsteps."

"Vidisti Mariam aut aliquos angelos aut sanctos?"

(*Have you seen Mary or other angels, or saints?*)

Sister Josephine laughed. "Of course not, Your Grace".

"Nearly at the end of my questioning, Sister. Let me ask you:

Etes-vous un saint?"

(*Are you a saint?*)

There was another peal of laughter from the obviously happy nun.

"Far from it, Your Grace. Perhaps when I am 95 and am driving everyone mad, I might be close to being one, but at the moment, I think it's a long way off."

One last question:

Te gusta tu abadesa?

(*Do you like your Abbess?*)

"I think she's marvelous. She works from dawn to dusk and is so kind to all the stumbling on the way. Sister Munchin told me how the Abbess took the knife from the foolish nun today. That tells you what a real Mother, this Abbess of ours is."

"Excuse me, Sister. I forgot an important question:

"I'm sure you've read of St Catherine of Sienna, haven't you?"

"Yes, we certainly did study that saint in the Novitiate. To be honest with you, Your Grace, the whole business of the three popes in Avignon left me so muddled, I can't remember much about St Catherine. I think she wasn't an ordinary sort of nun, but kind of

a ‘third Order’ member of the Dominican Order. Is that right? I could be wrong about that.”

The archbishop stood up; the interview was over. He held out his hand again to Sister Josephine. She, keeping hold of his hand, asked:

“Your Grace, would you give me permission to ask one question of YOU?”

The archbishop was startled. He nodded, waiting.

“I have no right to really know this, but I’m curious:

¿Por qué no le ha dicho a la abadesa cuál es la verdadera razón por la que ha venido aquí hoy?”

*(Why have you not told our Abbess the true reason you are here at this particular monastery today?)*

The archbishop dropped the hand of the nun and fell back onto his chair; he was badly shaken.

“Sister Josephine, no joking now. I order you to tell me, immediately: **WHAT WAS MY REAL REASON FOR COMING TO THIS MONASTERY TODAY?**”

The nun stood perfectly still. She answered quietly and with respect. “I’m sorry if I started you, Your Grace. I am often abrupt; it’s a terrible fault I have ... but....

“The real reason for your visit was to tell our dearest Mother, our Abbess, that our Hermit Priest, *‘The Father’*, has just cleared the first part of his journey, in that special department in the Vatican, and has now been declared a ‘Servant of God’, which will eventually result, God willing, in *‘The Father’* being declared a SAINT!”

She knelt down, suddenly frightened and trembling, in front of the archbishop. “Please, Your

Grace, I am strangely frightened: please give me your blessing."

The prelate sketched a blessing over the nun and waved her to the door. He needed to speak, in private, to the Abbess urgently.

There was dead silence in the office of the Abbess. Both she and the archbishop stared at each other. With an effort, the archbishop muttered, as he handed back the crucifix to the startled Abbess: “My Lady, could you send those three nuns back to the chapel: they could join the others for the hour of Sext?”

The Abbess sat up straight then went to her door. She told the sisters to re-join the community for Sext: the archbishop would continue the interrogation the next day.

Sister Munchin – the last to leave – stared at her Abbess. Something was wrong ... very wrong. She lingered, then faltered, “My Lady, are you sure? Could I stay, just in case you need me?”

Angela, brought back to earth with the warmth of the nun’s concern, sighed, and then, as from long way away, she came back and smiled, a very tired smile, at her faithful secretary.

“No, my dearest Sister, no. I’m fine; I’ve just had a big shock that is all. You run off now, Munchin; already Sext is half over.” The nun bowed and left, looking back at her Superior as she left. The Abbess returned to her chair at her desk.

“Your Grace, I received a tremendous shock listening to your interview with Sister Josephine. I’m very grateful to you for that. You found evidence that could have taken me years to discover. Not that I have any idea what I’m going to do with the information....”

“My Lady, this is so rare, so almost unbelievable, that I’m hesitant to come to any conclusion. But you realise I’ll have to report this to the Papal Nuncio for this country. The poor young woman might end up having to go to Rome to the experts there.”

The Abbess gasped. In her agitation she reached out to clutch his arm “They would take her away?”

“It could be, I really don’t know. I’ve only ever known one case of this before, in which I was involved; that was with a woman who was nearly twice the age of Sister Josephine...”

“But. Your Grace, what exactly have you discovered?”

“That your young nun would appear to have, BOTH *Glosolalia*, AND *Infused Knowledge*. And, I also believe she has no real awareness that she has these gifts.” He noticed that the Abbess looked fairly lost, so began to speak of the difference between those two words: “*Glosolalia* is the ability to understand and, usually, to speak many previously unknown languages, while *Infused Knowledge* is the ability to understand,

without study, difficult Theological, or erudite, works of genius.”

“And *this young sister has that?*”

The archbishop nodded.

“Dear Lord in Heaven! What am I to do with her, Your Grace?”

“Apart from one suggestion, I simply don’t know.”

“And that suggestion, is?”

“Keep her close to you. She is a precious pearl you have been given; your own salvation could very easily depend *upon what, and how, you deal with this nun!*”

“Really, Your Grace, that is too much! I have 41 other sisters to watch and care for, as well as Sister Josephine...

“*No! ... Please forget I ever said that Your Grace! ... and may God forgive me for my ... grumble, in thought and word, at the burden I've been given.*

“I do, *really and truly*, I do understand, the shocking wonder of the gifts that I have seen manifested here in this office today. We read about such things every day here in either Readings that accompany the Divine Office, or in our own library where the shelves are full of wondrous events that occurred to saints in our own Order. Why should I be surprised at such events?

“This is really serious, Your Grace, for me, I mean. I am a very poor Mother Superior if I doubt a supernatural event here in our own house.

“Dear and Merciful God! I have lived in the shadow of the great saint, the Hermit Father, with his extraordinary gifts of Levitation, even the Stigmata.... I remember clearly as a little child, being taken, by my big

brother, in to see our blessed and our holy Father, after the Mass when he received the Stigmata. On that same occasion, I experienced the blinding of that ... now ... blessed Brother Paul, who was prepared, sometime later, on another occasion, to give his life for The Father, when they both were killed.

“So, with a background like mine, you would think I would be the first one to be looking for, and rejoicing if I found, any sign of supernatural evidence in the children that God, Himself, has given to me.” The archbishop came to the defence of the now distressed Abbess who was openly weeping.

“My Lady don’t be too hard on yourself. It is much easier to speak about virtues, than to practise them. I can waffle on about the wonderful benefits of enduring, patiently, a broken leg and being confined to bed; that is very easy. It is not easy at all when we, ourselves, suffer a much less serious affliction, which disturbs our daily schedule and throws our daily programme out.

“We then find that ‘Patience,’ can be a difficult and searing nightmare of Reality, that we struggle desperately to, pretend, we have.”

“Your Grace, that is so true. I confess I am certainly an impatient woman.

“Now, to practicalities. In order to keep Sister Josephine near me, I need your permission to speak openly to Sister Munchin about that nun. Munchin is my secretary and my lawyer, so is in and out of this office, twenty times a day; I can’t keep thinking up excuses for Josephine being here. That’s the first thing.

“Secondly, what on earth am I do to with Sister Josephine? The two gifts she has are not glaringly clear to me as to how they can be used in an office. I mean, I don’t even know if Josephine can type or not? I suspect not. As far as I know she has never worked in an office.

“My Lady, my Lady, my Lady ... leave some room for the Holy Ghost to move; if all this is of God, then He will undoubtedly show you what to do next.

“I think we have done enough for one day. You and I have escaped death; we have coped with a maniac nun.... Incidentally, who is actually looking after the imprisoned nun?”

“Sister Isidore is the one in charge of the key to the cell. I shall inform Isidore that the prisoner’s meals must be brought to her by two nuns together. I shall also ask Sister Isidore to emphasize to the others how dangerous this nun is, and warn them, they are to be on their guard with her.

“I shall call the local Police Superintendent, Jerry Adams and report the whole matter to him. He was a very young constable who had to deal with the unknown from the very beginning all those years ago—then, later, he was at the Mass when *The Father* received the stigmata, so he will do everything he can to help us in this situation.”

“My Lady, if you arrange a time with the good Superintendent to be here, I ask of you to let me be there to support your version of what happened. Once the police are notified, it really will be taken out of our hands altogether.”

“That’s true and sensible. Well, after I have rung the police, I’ll ring this evening and leave a message with the Hermitage priests, if possible, with Monsignor Joyceson. He is a holy and precious priest.”

“Now, my Lady, I must soon be on my way. I never intended to stay here so long today, but just before I go, would you take me for a quick look at your farm work. I would also like to see where all your wonderful water comes from: I’ve heard you have plentiful water. That is, indeed, God’s gift to you: you would need a lot of water to run this place and to irrigate your fields.”

“Right let’s go quickly, Your Grace, while the nuns are in the chapel and in the dining room; we shall then not be held up with unnecessary talk.”

The Abbess led the way down a flight of stairs then to the side door which led onto the fields. The archbishop wandered around the area; he stooped and picked up handfuls of soil looking at it carefully.

“This is very good soil, my Lady. I think you could grow everything here...Oh, I see, it all slopes down to your Dam: it seems to be a wide canal that flows down from behind the monastery, as you said; then it finally ends up at the Dam.”

“Look at this, Your Grace. By the time it gets to our Dam it is a very strong current indeed. We have to be very careful in using it; it’s always plentiful, but it is a dangerous Dam. It is a deep dam, as you can see, but there is an opening in the end wall which is about two feet wide and the water rushes through that, goes over a spillway and then drops 400 feet down a cliff face to a huge pool at the bottom. Any animal would be dashed

to its death through the opening – we call it a Race – and then into the vicious fall to the pool below.

“We have tried to fix the problem, but it was beyond us. We have lost two pigs and one calf through not being quick enough, to get them away from the Dam in time.

The archbishop had stooped down and sampled a handful of water. “It’s beautiful water, clean, pure, glorious. I see you pump it up ...” he turned to speak looking directly at the Abbess, ‘to that huge tank on the roof?’ she nodded. “I thought so. I think I could suggest a way to fix the problem here – the dangerous problem with the Race. I think I know of a way that it could be made safe. That opening that leads to the waterfall – it’s not very wide. Why couldn’t that be covered by a metal grill with large squares so that the water was not impeded. That way, the open squares would let the water through, but stop anything larger than, say, a foot square.

“We thought of that, Your Grace, but we found it impossible to find a way to drill the metal frame to the rock wall...”

“Did you use men with underwater divers’ helmets and breathing equipment?”

“No, we wondered about that....”

“Would you please leave it to me: I shall attend to it with your permission. I would like to make that my personal gift to the monastery.” The Abbess agreed immediately and thanked the good man.

The archbishop looked at his watch. “Good Heavens I’d better go now; I have more than I expected

to do tonight. I must also write an account of what I, inadvertently, discovered with Sister Josephine, for the Nuncio."

The archbishop stood up and held out his hand. The Abbess genuflected, kissed the episcopal ring and opened the door of the enclosure. The car was just outside, so within a minute, the archbishop, with a quick wave, revved the car and was gone.

As she came back inside, she stopped dead. "Merciful God, forgive me! I didn't mention my joy and gratitude to God for the news of our precious Father Hermit ... a 'Servant of God' ... officially now on the road to sainthood ... and to think that that potential saint, actually assisted at my birth. I must let my father know; I know how much he idolised The Father.... But I must let the community know first. Nearly all of them knew The Father Hermit."

The Abbess looked quickly at her watch; yes, there was still time to catch the community all together in the chapel as Sext would be finishing in a few minutes. She picked up her cowl on the way and struggled into the voluminous garment as she entered the chapel and hurried to her central stall.

She waited until Sister Gertrude had finished that Hour of the Divine Office but held up her hand as the Sub-Priress went to dismiss the sisters.

The Abbess stood up in her stall. She waited until there was perfect silence, then spoke slowly.

"My sisters. Today has been the most unusual I have ever experienced in the life of this monastery. We have seen tragedy and the heroism of our Visitator,

Archbishop Edward Wilkinson, who was very nearly killed. We have seen magnificent cooperation between different sections of the monastery as all the sisters came to the defence of each other and our common home.

“I want to thank collectively and individually each and every nun for being, today, what our holy Founder, St. Benedict, wanted us to be: ‘a community of believers united in living charity’. We have lived today as a family – a big family to be sure – but still a family.

“That business of our dangerous Dam – with the Race – is going to be made safe – the archbishop has promised to do that as his special gift to us; the situation with the mentally sick nun will be soon underway as well. The police might want to ask questions of the particular nuns who played a significant part in saving the life of our Visitator from that poor, sick nun.

“But I didn’t just rush down here to tell you sad things, but to tell you a glorious, wonderful and thrilling piece of news that impacts on each and every one of us – you, as well as, on me.

“I know that even the Novices have been, at least introduced, to Canon Law; you have studied all the difficult steps there are in the process of being declared a Saint of the Catholic Church. “Each step is very difficult and if there is any doubt at all, the candidate’s name is just dismissed; the process is stopped altogether and can never be reopened.

“But, even before the first stage begins, the ‘examination’ of the proposal for the ‘candidate,’ has to be intensively investigated as to whether this particular

candidate would seem to be a likely candidate, and it would then be worthwhile to continue with the rigorous tests of each stage of the long and complicated process.

“Sisters, this preliminary period can take years, indeed, hundreds of years, but once agreed to, by a panel of experts, ‘the Cause,’ as it is called, can proceed. If this preliminary hurdle is overcome, then the candidate is called a ‘Servant of God’ and has entered the next stages of investigation.

“Now this is the news that affects us! The great Archbishop came to this monastery today, not just for a canonical examination, but to tell us *THAT THE HERMIT FATHER’S CAUSE FOR CANONIZATION WAS FORMALLY PROPOSED IN ROME AND IT WAS RUSHED THROUGH THE FIRST STAGE. THERE WAS NO OPPOSITION; IT WAS THE UNANIMOUS OPINION THAT THIS HUMBLE PRIEST should be immediately declared to be a ‘SERVANT OF GOD’ and has been passed to the next stage.* That means, my dearest Sisters, that soon, even within our lifetimes, our holy Father Founder *WILL BE DECLARED A SAINT!*

There was dead silence for a moment, then the whole chapel burst forth in a storm of clapping. The Abbess, herself, joined in the applause. She then announced: “We will now sing the ‘Te Deum’ the glorious hymn of praise and thanksgiving to our Lord God.”

The nun at the organ pulled out all the stops and the glorious music, with the singing, went forth throughout the entire building.

When the hymn was finished, the Abbess knocked on her kneeler with her knuckles and many nuns left the chapel, but even more remained on their knees to offer their personal thanks to the Christ they loved.

As the Abbess discovered much later, they prayed that they, too, might shine like torches in a world darkened by sin and evil and a devastating, fearful loss of Faith.

As Angela left the chapel, she paused at Sister Josephine's stall and gently touched her shoulder, then pointed to herself, beckoning her; she repeated this gesture to Sister Munchin, as well, then went on to her office.

As she led the two nuns to her office, she was praying fervently for Wisdom in dealing with this new, and extraordinary, situation.

rriving at her office the Abbess invited both nuns to enter and to sit down. She spoke first to Sister Munchin.

“Sister, I shall speak to Sister Josephine now. You will be surprised at the questions, but I urge you not to speak. After Sister has answered a couple of questions, then she can go to her lunch in the Refectory, while I speak to you.”

Munchin looked surprised but nodded her head. The Abbess turned to Sister Josephine.

“Sister, would you please tell me if you have ever learned typing and whether you know how to use a computer?”

The young nun smiled. “Yes, my Lady. As I couldn’t go to school after Primary, my mother was worried that if I – at some time – had to get work, I would have no

training, so each night she taught me, to type – on a terrible old typewriter we had at home. In time I could type quite fast. This was a help to my poor father with all the things he had to report to the Government. He could then dictate them to me, and I could type them up so they would look very competent and efficient.”

“I see. And the computer?”

“The lady next door – well, it was three miles away, but as you know, that would be considered close in the farming area of our country – she offered to teach me whenever I had some time off. My father was anxious for me to learn, as he needed information which we could find no other way. The Government, apparently, took it for granted that all farmers would have a computer and would know how to use it. So, at all the times my father didn’t need me for farm work, I jumped on my pedal bike and went to this good neighbour’s place where she and her daughter – who was getting ready to go to university – taught me how to use one. I’m not an expert by any means, my Lady, but I can manage most ordinary things with the computer.”

“Thank you, my child. That’s all I needed to know. I am thinking of transferring you to a different task very soon and I needed to know those two things. You may return now to the refectory.”

Josephine curtsied to the Abbess and went quietly from the room.

There was a brief period of silence. Then the Abbess sighed and turned to her secretary whom she secretly called ‘her rock’.

Munchin got in first. “I see. So, I’m getting the boot, am I? Well, after today, I don’t really mind. I think you’re too dangerous to be around: what with near-death experiences every couple of hours, and desperate rescues to undertake. I don’t think I can stand much more: I’m a delicate little thing, frail and full of fears....”

The Abbess stopped the flow. “You will certainly have some quite new, severe bruises, very soon, if you don’t stop your tale of woe. You know perfectly well you are as tough as an old boot and take emergencies in your stride.... No, don’t answer that....”

The Abbess ceased joking. “Sister Munchin, I have something very serious to tell you so, no more jokes, I beg of you. I want to tell you what the archbishop and I discovered today about Sister Josephine: the true Josephine, not the everyday Josephine that we are familiar with.... It is full of wonder and is, truly frightening, as well as glorious.... Listen carefully.”

Sister Munchin’s face reflected her astonishment at what the Abbess then said. When she ceased speaking, Munchin revived and asked, tremulously.

“My Lady, are you and the archbishop, sure of this?”

“Let me read the test he gave her; It is in Latin, English, French and Spanish and, remember Munchin, Josephine only went to Primary School, no more than that, yet she answers to any question asked in multiple languages. The Novice Mistress, some years ago, had spoken to me about her strange young Novice who seemed to understand Augustine and Aquinas. I didn’t pay any attention to it at the time.

“Listen to this test; I cannot pronounce the Spanish or French well enough to read it, so I’ll tell you in which language the question was asked.”

Munchin listened intently. She was a very intelligent woman so understood how serious this whole affair was.

“So, that’s what ‘Glosolalia’ really means. I’ve always thought it was that kindergarten type of babbling that used to take place in charismatic meetings. I always thought they were a bunch of freaks. But this, with Josephine, is the real and true meaning of that word – which I now understand, is an extraordinary gift from God.... So, my Lady, we could possibly have a real, live, saint living here, in our community. What are you going to do with her?”

“The archbishop said I must keep her close to me at all times. That is the reason I asked about the typing and the computer.

“Can we use her here in this office? Could she be a sort of ‘secretary to you, the chief secretary’? Or the one who types up all your reports, thus relieving you of the tedium of the boring tasks ... or even typing up the files I have to keep on everything. Does this make sense, Munchin?”

“My Lady, before I answer that. Could I ask if you were going to let Monsignor Joyceson know about this? Before you reply, I think you should.”

“To be honest, Munchin, all this is so bewildering, I’m having trouble keeping my feet on the ground; I never even gave the Monsignor a thought.... Yes, that’s

sensible advice; I'll ask the archbishop to tell that good priest; it will save repeating all the facts over and over.

"Now about the office and Josephine. What are your thoughts?"

Sister Munchin looked steadily at her Superior. "My Lady, I can always do with help in keeping up with all the ghastly reports. It seems, at times, that the Church is as bad as the Government in the demands they make on us for reports on just about everything. So, yes, I could use her and be glad to."

Sister Munchin raised a troubled face to her Abbess. "The only thing that worries me is coping with the 'new Josephine'. I've never had anything to do with 'Mystical Theology,' other than read about it." She shuddered. "To tell the truth, my Lady, the thought of being alone with Sister Josephine - now that I know what you have told me - fills me with dread. What if she wafts off half-way through a Report she is typing? Or goes into a trance? Or starts speaking in Spanish, or Cantonese? You know, full well, I struggle enough with Latin."

The Abbess held up her hand. "Munchin, Munchin, Munchin! Stop it! Sister Josephine will be just as she always is, quiet, a tremendous worker, never talkative and does every task she is given willingly and, indeed, perfectly.

The Abbess smiled at her staunch defender and her most valued supporter. "Now leave it with me; you run off to have a good meal. After your lunch, the whole situation will seem less threatening.... Off you go, now.

I may not have time to get down there today. God bless you Munchin, you'll manage the situation fine."

As Sister Munchin left the office, the Abbess was already contacting the Police. She knew the Superintendent, Jerry Adams, well. He was near to retirement now but was still at the Burnside Police Station, where he had his office. He had been a tower of strength to the Abbess during the early years of the monastic enterprise. She knew he would not let them down this time either.

She had not forgotten her promise to the archbishop to have him there when the police visited. She also remembered her need to phone Monsignor Joyceson after the police...

"Good afternoon, Superintendent Adams. It's that pesky nun from the Abbey speaking. Now, as you can imagine, my calling you, means that there is some trouble; I'm sorry, but there is. Please let me explain what happened here today... .... and ... then ... ....

## VII

After arranging for the Police Superintendent to call the next morning, the Abbess then phoned Fr Joyceson, to ask him to come to speak to her on the morrow as she had a serious problem to discuss with him. He said he could be there at 10.0am. She then went down to the dining room and collected her small midday meal from the Kitchen nun; it had been kept hot for her.

The Abbess thanked the kitchen staff for delaying their work. Sister Mary Benedict, the plump chief cook, smiled and said, “no problem,” which was her usual response to every request. Once started, the Abbess realised how terribly hungry she actually was.

After eating and finishing the prayers, that she had missed, she began looking forward to Vespers and then, much later, to Compline as the last Office for the day and, finally ... please God, it would be time to sleep.... It had been quite an exhausting day.

# VIII

The next morning broke clear and bright. It would be a beautiful very late summer day. Sister Isidore had been extremely tired and slept heavily. Consequently, she overslept and was the last out of bed. She was still yawning as she washed and cleaned her teeth then dressed to face the day. She hurried as she didn't want to give scandal by getting to the chapel last, so she dithered in her mind as to whether she should attend to the prisoner, Margaret Mary, or not. She had intended to permit the disgraced nun to use the Privy that the sisters used - even though she had provided a portable chamber cabinet in the prisoner cell - but looking at the time, she knew she would be late, so decided to leave the prisoner until they had finished Lauds and Prime.

Isidore thought she had made it, but once outside her room, she heard the nuns singing and recognized the Psalms from Lauds. She realised, with dismay, that she had missed Matins completely. "God have mercy on

me, a lazy wretch!" she prayed and decided to go and do what she should have done with Margaret Mary.

Isidore went to the special cabinet to which she had a key and using it, opened a strange-shaped drawer in which lay the large key, of the concrete room in the basement below.

Not trying to rush now, she walked slowly down the stairs to the basement and then to the solid, silent concrete tomb in which the prisoner had been placed.

As Isidore managed the awkward key in the lock, she was surprised as there was no shouting, or cursing, coming from inside the room. Isidore was relieved; she obviously was not going to be assailed with vile language as she tried to cope with the mad woman. With a heavy shove of her shoulder, she thrust the door wide open and stood still ... her eyes staring ... transfixed.... She blinked, perhaps she was seeing things that were not there....

*My God! ... My God ... have mercy! Mercy ... ... Mercy ...  
please God ... please ...*

*My God have mercy! What should I do? ...*

*... Mother ... ... Yes! ... I must get Mother! ...*

Sister Isidore ran up the stairs; she was not young anymore and was puffing badly. She paused a moment to steady her breathing, and part of her brain was trying to organize what to say to the Abbess ...

She reached the chapel and fully aware that the nuns were all chanting the Divine Office, with the Abbess presiding, Isidore rushed in through the door and screamed ... ... ...

“My Lady ... SHE’S DEAD! SHE’S BEEN MURDERED!”

And after delivering this bombshell, her eyes rolled up and she fell to the floor in a dead faint.

# IX

he Abbess sat stunned, as was everyone else. **T**hen as a number of nuns had begun to scream with hysteria, she rose to her feet and stood erect. She then spoke in loud, slow words, with chilling effect.

“I order... every nun in the monastery ... *be STILL* ... do not move ... Stop that screaming instantly! I shall hold the special Mistresses of the Postulants, the Novices, the First Professed, responsible, if they do not control the nuns under their particular obedience.

“I now order Sister Mary Gertrude to take my place. The weekly Antiphon Sisters will now repeat the interrupted Antiphon from the beginning. Listen, Sisters, to the Antiphon.

“I want Sister Mary Raphael, Sister Mary Munchin and Sister Mary Bede to accompany me, NOW!” She nodded to Sister Gertrude who immediately left her stall and went to the Abbess’s place.

Gertrude then nodded to the Antiphon singers, and they began, with shaky voices, to intone the

introduction to the Psalm they had been singing before the terrifying outburst from Sister Isidore.

On her way out of the chapel, the Abbess stood while Sisters Raphael and Munchin lifted Isidore up and carried her out to the hall.

Isidore was starting to come to; Raphael had sent Munchin off for her stethoscope. Raphael was taking the pulse which was racing at a frightening rate. "My Lady, this nun needs to be put to bed in the Infirmary; she has been subjected to a really fearful shock: Isidore is a pretty tough, old character; it must have been dreadful for her to collapse as she did." So, saying, she received permission to take two more nuns from the Chapel and they carried the reviving woman to the Infirmary.

The other nuns in the group with the Abbess, including Raphael, hurried down to the basement and to the Concrete room. They saw the open door and the key still in it.... The Abbess had to force herself to go first into the room and see whatever horror there was to face ... she walked slowly into the doorway: she knew you could see the whole room from the doorway.

The others were terrified - and curious - at the same time. Could they dare to take a peek? ...

The Abbess' voice came through loud and clear. "Come and have a good look, Sisters. We are further involved in mystery."

Munchin rushed in, then shouted, angrily: 'THERE'S NO ONE HERE! THE ROOM'S EMPTY!"

The nuns stared in disbelief. The prisoner was certainly gone but what then had Isidore meant? This was madness!

The Abbess was the first to recover. "Quickly, up to the Infirmary. Sister Mary Raphael, you must try your hardest to get Sister Isidore to explain what she saw. I have the Police Superintendent, the Visitator and Monsignor Joyceson, all coming to see me, very soon now, about Margaret Mary, and now there is no Margaret Mary!"

Raphael cried aloud: "Merciful God, come to our aid! If Sister Margaret Mary is ill and needs medical assistance, please let us find her...."

The Abbess suddenly restrained her. "But wait just a minute, Sister Raphael." She held up her hand restraining the nun. "What are those stains there on the cement floor, almost under the bed? There's been much blood shed there". She moved back. "Are there any blood stains out here beyond the door? ... Yes, there are ... look at these, they lead to the side door which opens to the stairs that go up to the outside ground level. Let me see if that door is locked ... Yes, it is. I wonder who has the key ... But look! The blood continues *under the door, so someone had the key to that...What on earth does it all mean?*

"Right! Well, come Sisters, off we go to the Infirmary. Poor Sister Isidore is not a foolish, silly girl, who fancies she sees things when there's nothing there to see. She is a tough old battle axe who is worth her weight in gold; she could not have fabricated the horror

that left her in a fainting fit in a hundred years. She saw something horrible, and we were too late....”



**T**he Abbess with her chosen helpers let Sister Raphael go first into the infirmary. It was a big room: very long and fairly wide. It could comfortably fit twelve beds. At the moment only four were occupied.

Sister Isidore was at the end of the row to give her privacy. She grabbed the Abbess's hand as soon as she came to the bed. "Oh, thank God, my Lady ... you're here! I've never seen anything like it in my life!"

The Abbess took the hand and smoothed it in her own. "I know it must have been terrible for you to be so upset that you fainted. That's the first time that has happened in all the years I've known you." A brief smile touched Isidore's lips, before her eyes clouded over again. She clutched at the hand again, as if it was her only link with sanity. "But who could do that to her? Is there a monster living here; is one of our nuns Satan Himself in disguise? I've never seen such cruelty."

“My dear Sister Isidore, would you please describe what you saw when you opened the door and went into the room?”

Isidore looked bewildered. “But ... you’ve seen it yourself....”

“That’s what we have not done, my dear Sister. When we arrived there, the room was empty....”

*“Empty? I don’t understand ... empty? ... Then, where did the body go?”*

“Sister, I want you to let Sister Raphael take your Blood Pressure and your oxygen intake, then I want you to describe, in detail, all that you saw in that dreadful room, to Sister Bede and to me. The only evidence that there was something wrong – when we got there – was blood on the floor under the bed and leading to the door that leads up to the ground level.”

Sister Raphael moved in with her stethoscope and the finger- oxygen meter. She muttered to the Abbess: “BP is a bit high but that’s natural after the shock she’d undoubtedly had; the oxygen is low but that’s within normal limits as well.” She moved back but kept her fingers on Isidore’s pulse.

Isidore had seized upon one word that the Abbess had said. “Blood! I’ll say there was blood; I’ve never seen such an amount of blood ... from the body of the poor wretched, woman ... and her face ... the terror on the face as they stabbed her again and again ... my Lady, her body had gaping wounds so large it resembled a scene from a particularly violent film which could be the stuff of nightmares.”

The Abbess spoke quietly. “Sister Isidore, you and I are both from farming backgrounds; we have seen animals killed and bodies of cows hung up as the carcasses are cleaned ready for market. Was the scene something like that?”

“Yes! ... No! ... We’d never do anything as cruel and as horrible as that. You know well, my Lady, that farmers always try to do the slaughtering as humanely merciful as possible; this was the reverse. It was done to extract the greatest amount of agony on the victim as was possible. The mind that performed this operation is a diseased mind: a dangerous mind and ... Merciful God!” The nun’s voice began to scream. “That creature’s here, in our community!”

Sister Raphael immediately stood in front of her patient.

“I’m sorry, my Lady. I cannot allow any more questions for the time being. I’m going to give Sister Isidore a mild sedative. She needs to rest that mind and that heart for a little while; otherwise, the situation could turn very serious.”

“Just one more question, Sister Raphael then I promise we’ll get out of your way.” Raphael nodded, “Made it quick then”.

“My dear Sister Isidore one more little question. Would you say that the body was definitely dead when it was taken away, or could the wounded nun be still alive?”

The near-hysterical nun shouted: “With those wounds? No way, my Lady. She was dead! ... The blood stopped flowing as I stared at her.”

“Thank you, Sister. Now Sister Raphael, it’s up to you now. Get our dearest Sister back to health, that’s what we want.” The abbess led her small group of nuns backed out of the infirmary.

The Abbess had intended to return to the chapel but paused at the door. “No”, she suddenly exclaimed. “Extraordinary events call for extraordinary, temporary adjustments to be made. We will go straight into the Refectory. I’ll shall ask, as a special favour, that we may have our breakfast now before the others, with our coffee first. Come sisters, this is better; then we can face the horrors that we’ll face today, on a full stomach.” She smiled gently and the tired and greatly troubled, shocked, sisters smiled gratefully. They followed the Abbess into the large Refectory.

After breakfast, the Abbess went into the kitchen to arrange morning tea for the Police Superintendent, His Grace, Edward Wilkinson and for Monsignor Joyceson. She took the opportunity to check on supplies with Sister Mary Benedict and her chief assistant, Sister Mary Luke. While there, she advised them of what had happened to Sister Margaret Mary and asked them to pray for the soul of that tormented woman.

They were shocked by the news and horrified to hear that she was murdered. Their Abbess was going to speak further with these nuns when she glanced at her watch. Good Heavens! All the visitors would be there soon.

She hurried back to her office and found that Munchin – always reliable – had rearranged the office with another small desk and computer installed for

their new office Staffer, Sister Josephine. It was close to Munchin's own desk, so they could communicate, quietly, with each other.

Both Munchin and Josephine rose and bowed as the Abbess entered the office. She acknowledged their bow and used the opportunity to briefly examine Josephine. As she expected, the new member of their office was totally calm and smiling quietly: obviously not worried about her new place of work. She looked, as she always did, utterly serene and 'ready for work'.

Munchin informed the Abbess that the three men had arrived and were waiting for her in the visitors' room.

The Abbess knew she couldn't keep them waiting, so quickly told Munchin to record in shorthand all that was said, especially from the Police Superintendent and the archbishop. "Munchin, you were with me at the bedside with poor Sister Isidore. If I forget anything, I give you full permission to interrupt me and inform me, quietly, what I have forgotten. Let's all go in and both of you take your notepads with you."

As they entered the visitors' room, the three men stood up. The Abbess acknowledged the Prelate first, then the Superintendent of Police and lastly, the well-loved priest, Mgr. Joyceson. She expressed her gratitude at their presence.

"Gentlemen let's sit down. This situation is too serious for us to waste time on ceremony. I take it you three are aware that we have had a serious incident here, yesterday of a solemnly professed nun, who for safety's sake - both her own and others - we locked in a

concrete cell in the basement. What happened this morning just as Matins was over and Lauds was beginning – that was at 5.00am – was this: we were almost shocked out of our minds by the hysterical announcement by Sister Mary Isidore that Sister Margaret Mary was DEAD; she also declared that the nun had been MURDERED!” The three men rose to their feet, shocked at the horrific news.

“Sister Isidore then collapsed into a dead faint and has still not recovered; as the shock was so great that she had to be given a mild sedative by our doctor nun, Sister Mary Raphael. Sister Isidore was nearly out of her mind at what she, apparently, saw in the room.

“I took a couple of nuns with me, and we hurried to the basement room where – to our astonishment – we found the room empty but there is evidence of a huge amount of blood stains on the floor, bed and under the outside door. But the body had disappeared.”

Superintendent Adams broke in. “My Lady, what is this nun, er ... Sister Isidore, like? Is she normally a very nervous nun; or inclined to hysterics?”

The Abbess couldn’t resist smiling. “Oh, Superintendent, forgive me for wanting to laugh outright. Sister Isidore is, as my dearest father would say: ‘As tough as an old boot’. She is the one who handles, almost singlehandedly, the slaughtering of the cattle, if and when, it is necessary. But don’t take my word for it. Your Grace, you have met Sister Isidore’s haven’t you?” The archbishop nodded gravely. The abbess continued:

“Isidore is in charge of all the farming activities here, and she is 100% efficient and also one of strongest, but compassionate, women I have ever known.”

Monsignor Joyceson spoke in his soft, gentle voice. “I could add my little bit of information to that, Superintendent. Yes, she is tough, but she also has a spirituality that equals that of the Little Flower. I am always astonished at her simplicity and her love for Christ and His Holy Mother. She is a true Religious.”

The superintendent looked puzzled. “Then why is she with the doctor and why has she been given a sedative? The two accounts are contradictory.”

“You are completely correct, Superintendent,” agreed the Abbess. “When she tried to tell me about what she saw when she went to take the imprisoned nun to the Privy, she went into hysterics. Apparently, according to her, the sight was so traumatic, it nearly sent her off her head.

“Could I suggest, gentlemen, that we all go now to the Infirmary to speak to Sister Mary Raphael, who is a solemnly professed nun but, don’t forget she is also a fully qualified, registered medical doctor.” She began to stand as she spoke. “We have to abide by Sister Raphael’s advice. She’ll tell us if it is safe to try to get at the truth of what she saw from Sister Isidore, or not.”

The men agreed and followed behind the Abbess as they began the long walk to the infirmary. The abbess had nodded to Sister Munchin to accompany them as well.

When the delegation stood before the Infirmary door, they were introduced to Sister Mary Raphael who informed them that she had moved Isidore to a small private room and as the patient had had a little rest, with a short sleep, she was much calmer.

Raphael made the sensible suggestion that only the Abbess went into the room and the rest could stand just outside; they could easily hear with the door left open: it was a very small room, with just the bed and a chair in it.

The men agreed instantly. They, with Sister Munchin, stood just out of sight, but within easy hearing distance of the door, while the Abbess went straight in and sat beside the recovering nun.

Angela took the work-roughened hand of her 'Daughter in Christ'.

"Well, my very dear Isidore, this is a pretty kettle of fish, isn't it? Now, my girl, you know we use you as an example of how to put up with small cuts and hard work. Never have I seen you so horrified by what you saw this morning with that poor, sad, nun ... Sister Margaret Mary. Her body has disappeared, and we must move Heaven and Earth to try and find it. That's why we really need you to describe her appearance when you saw her. Just take your time; no one will rush you ... but I must tell you, Izzy, I'm longing for a good cup of coffee, and I bet you are too. So, off we go; hold my hand tightly, now tell me, dear child, about this morning. You went to the concrete room to get Sister and you opened it as usual. You are now standing at the door of that terrible room.

“Sister Isidore, you are there now ... Tell me what you are seeing!”

Sister Isidore held the hand of her Abbess tightly and her eyes partially closed.... “The nun was on her bed. Her clothes seemed to have been ripped from her; bits of material were hanging down the sides of the bed. Her eyes were enormous and terrified, while her mouth was opened as wide as it would go in a silent scream. She was half-siting, half-flying. Blood. Yes, there was blood everywhere, she seemed covered with blood. I’ve never seen such an amount of blood. And, and, and ...”

“Yes, dearest child; you are doing splendidly. You have given us a clear picture so far ... *please, Sister Isidore, continue ...*”

“There were four wooden stakes driven into her body leaving huge, gaping wounds and, apparently, pinioning her to the bed. From each wound the blood had flowed until there was none left, I think. The wooden stakes were driven deep into the mattress making the poor creature a caricature of a human being: she looked like a badly broken doll ... and ... and ...”

“Goodness gracious me!” exclaimed the Abbess - deliberately using an old-fashioned expression that Isidore’s grandmother would most probably have used - to comfort the distraught nun.

The good nun was struggling to say the last piece of evidence she had to give. She tried to lift herself in the bed and was holding herself upright by her elbows.

“My Lady...but that’s not all...*in that frightful, agonizing state she was ... STILL ALIVE!*”

There was a collective gasp from all those hearing these words. Angela spoke quickly. “Isidore, I order you to tell me, how you knew that! *Immediately!*”

“Her eyes, her poor eyes ... they were moving from side to side ... she was attempting to scream ... Oooeoh!” She fell back, her eyes turning upward; the Abbess called urgently for the doctor. Sister Raphael took the Abbess’s place at the bedside and was slowly inserting a needle into the traumatised woman’s arm. Raphael’s own hand was shaking slightly.

Nothing had prepared them for that!

The small group huddled together outside the Infirmary entry.

They stood silently for a moment, then the Police Superintendent asked.

“Was that sister alone? Did she take any other sister with her? And I don’t know what you think, but the details of the death suggest, I would think, more than one murderer was involved.”

The Abbess was suffering from the shock of what she had heard; she answered, her voice shaking slightly. “Superintendent, firstly, to answer your question: Yes, Sister Isidore was on her own. She has looked after Margaret Mary from the beginning when the nun was placed in the concrete room after trying to kill both the archbishop here, and me as well ... when the poor man just had arrived here and was getting out of his car.”

Superintendent Adams spoke slowly. “I’m nearly certain the murder must have been premeditated. It was too organized to fit into the small timeframe. “Do any of you know where they would have found the ‘stakes’

to drive into the body? Do you use these in the Farming area?"

The Abbess tried to remember the nuns who worked on the Farm. "If I've remembered correctly there are three main workers who are really in control of the whole work: Isidore, Anne and Bede ... I think Sister Mary Bede would be the best one to answer questions about the Farm. She's a very 'down to earth woman', and not likely to waste your time by talking nonsense." She turned to Sister Munchin. "Get her, please Sister". As soon as Munchin had sped off in a swirl of clothes, the Abbess looked for a room to take the visitors.

"Come with me, please into the small room over here; there are chairs and I want to sit down, as I'm sure you do, too." They had no sooner sat down when a breathless Sister Bede came puffing into the room with Munchin.

The Abbess immediately smiled at the young nun and urged her to take a minute or two to catch her breath. She then offered the panting nun a chair which was gratefully accepted. There was a brief silence in the room.

The Abbess was anxious to put the nun at her ease. "Now Sister Bede, you know the Farm work backwards and thank God you do; you are the best 'off-sider' to Sister Isidore we could have. You know well all that we have growing at the moment in vegetables and in cereals. Now about vegetables, do you use wooden stakes, at all."

“Indeed, we do, my Lady. We had to buy a big bundle of them new this year. We tried to get away with what we had used for several years but they were too old and rotten. We bought two dozen wooden stakes and I think we have used nearly all of them for the avenue and trellis we made for the new climbing tomato plants we were trying this year. The new climbing tomatoes yield twice the load of the ordinary ones, so we think the stakes were a wonderful idea.”

The police Superintendent asked quickly: “Would you know if any, say a couple, were taken away from the ones not used?”

“No, sir, not a chance. Some get broken in knocking them into the ground and damaged in many other ways. I think we have about eight good ones left altogether.”

They were interrupted by a breathless nun, Sister Anne who rushed into the small room carrying four stakes in her hands and was ready to cry at any moment. “My lady, these stakes were found near the entrance to the side basement door. We think, *there is ... blood ... on them....*” She staggered and would have fallen had not Munchin grabbed her and told her roughly to, ‘pull herself together’. She then helped the now crying nun to a chair.

The Abbess quickly rose and took the shaken nun in her arms. The young nun then began to beg pardon, but the Abbess shushed her instantly and sent the two nuns off to the kitchen and told Munchin to tell the Kitchen that, Sisters Bede and Anne were to have a hot drink immediately. They could then return to their work, or to the chapel.

Both the police Superintendent and the archbishop were examining the stakes. "Now, if I were a gambling man," the archbishop smiled, "I'd bet my Pectoral cross that that is blood, and it's the same blood on each of the four stakes." The Policeman laughed softly. "I think your cross is quite safe. I think the same as you." He sighed. "But we have to go through all the normal channels, so off they go to the expert chaps...." He touched the archbishop softly on the arm. "Now is the hard part, Your Grace, I have to tell the Abbess that we can keep it quiet no longer; I will have to hand it over to the normal cops. And it then has to be regarded as just another murder investigation. That will then mean they will be subject to all the disturbance and questioning of all the inhabitants. There is no 'escape clause' just because they are nuns; it is possible that it could be even worse than the usual, in that some of the police could be 'anti-Catholic,' or 'anti-Religion,' of any sort. I'll ask for Inspector Murray: he's a decent man; that's all we can ask for now."

The superintendent excused himself, spoke to the Abbess and left the building.

The archbishop slowly made his way back to the Abbess's office.

The Abbess was about to follow him when she decided to visit the tomato avenue and trellis that the sister spoke of.

She found it exactly as Sister Bede has described. She looked closely at the upright stakes. They were solid, indeed; they needed to be as she saw how heavy the load of tomatoes was hanging from the trellis. She

saw a couple of unused stakes and lifted them carefully trying to assess the weight. She expected them to be light, but they were not: they were quite heavy – heavy for a woman that was.

She shook her head. That's nonsense; she was a woman, and she could lift them. So too could Sister Bede.

Perhaps she should try two, so picked up another one; now she was finding it difficult. Yet there were four stakes used, and had been found covered in blood so, four were definitely used. How did the murderer do that? Well as she could lift two, and Bede could lift four, of the stakes, that meant nothing, except – she smiled to herself – that Sister Bede was much stronger and fitter than she was.

She wandered down towards the Dam with the dreadful Race. Why couldn't she just pick up a vital clue as the fictional detectives do? She smiled to herself at the thought and looked around their beautiful, indeed glorious, grounds. She felt very close to God out in His 'wonderland of nature'. No wonder the saintly Hermit Priest was always quoting Gerard Manly Hopkins. She racked her memory: what was his favourite expression? Oh yes: 'the world is charged with the glory of God'. And – she thought ... it certainly was.

As she stood on the brink of the Dam telling herself to stop dreaming and to face the reality of murder, she moved forward and almost slipped. Her eyes went down to see the stone she must have slipped on and received a violent shock: it wasn't a stone; *it was a sandal...a nun's sandal!*

She bent down and with a short twig, she eased it from the water and let it stay on the shore well away from the water. She looked about and saw Sister Bede in the distance. She called her name, over and over, "Bede! Bede! Bede! At last, the nun looked up and saw her Abbess calling to her. She picked up her skirts and ran as fast as she could.

"My Lady, what on earth is the matter? Are you ill?"

"I've found the murdered nun's sandal. Run and get the policeman, if he is still here, or else get the archbishop and Sister Munchin and bring them here, **QUICKLY!**"

Sister Bede was as good as her word. She had the archbishop and Sister Munchin there in less than five minutes. Both were panting badly.

The archbishop was soon phoning the Superintendent who had just reached his home as he received the call. He promised to return immediately and would try to bring Inspector Murray with him. He then asked them to move away from the sandal and take a number of photos of the sandal – if they could – for the police.

The abbess looked about. "What can we use to protect the sandal? The police will want to see it 'in situ'."

Once again Munchin solved the problem. "What about one of those covers for the delicate Chilli plants. They are clear plastic and go right down into the soil. They would hold the sandal in place."

"Thank you, Sister, a wonderful idea. Bede would you select one and bring it here, please."

The clear plastic 'hood' was fetched; carefully put over the sandal, then photographed carefully by the archbishop.

The Abbess sent Sisters Bede and Muchin off to the chapel as the bell was ringing for the office of Sext, or midday. In that way, they would be free to eat their one big meal on their fast day.

Both the Archbishop and the Abbess were relieved when the Superintendent had returned. The archbishop, however, said he would remain with the sandal, and the superintendent would then be free to organize the police when they arrived, and the nuns would then be free to go to the Divine Office.

The superintendent expressed his gratitude and promised that, as soon as he could, he would send replacement guards when the police inspector arrived. The archbishop could then have lunch in the refectory; the Abbess would arrange it with the kitchen. Angela nodded her approval and told them she would do so.

When the Hour of Sext was chanted and the whole community were at lunch there was a commotion at the front door which, even in the chapel, could be heard.

It seemed to be mainly shouting by a number of male voices.

The Portress, a nun called Sister Mary Magdalene, hurried from her place at table and her voice was soon heard. She sounded as if she were frightened.

The Abbess and Gertrude rose to their feet concerned. Something was wrong; this had never happened before. They were just about to leave the Refectory when 12 policemen and women - poured

into the Refectory. They were led by a short, stout Policeman with a very loud voice and a very rude and vulgar manner.

To the Abbess's astonishment, the police then drew their truncheons. The leader, an Inspector, stationed himself in front of the Abbess facing the whole community. He shouted loudly:

“All right! We've been informed there's a killer on the loose in this place! If you are carrying any weapons, just put them on the tables in front of you and stand up immediately.”

The nuns, shaken and bewildered, were unsure what they were being asked to do, but went to stand, when their Abbess's voice overrode the policeman.

“My Sisters, sit down as you were. However, this gentleman has asked for our weapons. I shall hand over mine immediately and if you have yours with you, then put it on the table in front of you.” The nuns watched with fear, then started to laugh, as their Abbess took out her Rosary beads and placed them solemnly on the table in front of her. Soon, the whole room was laughing uproariously – including some of the police.

The policeman flushed scarlet and went to speak but the Abbess got in first.

“Now, be careful of these dangerous weapons, Inspector, they're dangerous, especially for someone like you....”

“Now, look here ...”

Again, the Abbess's voice overruled him.

“Sister Munchin, go immediately to our office, and phone the solicitor who handles all our affairs and

inform him we wish to make several charges against the police. And you, as a fully qualified solicitor and attorney, take notes of all that is occurring in this raid ... *for that is what it is ... it is not a normal response to an appeal for help from the police ... it is a RAID!*"

She turned and stared steadily at the Inspector. "Inspector, could we start all over again? I think you are under some misapprehension. We were the ones who requested help from the police - no one else; we are hiding nothing. Your Superintendent is, at this very moment, with a great man from Rome called archbishop Wilkinson; they are guarding a very vital clue as to how the body could have been disposed of. The gentlemen and the clue are waiting for you down by the Dam.

"However, I'll give you a warning. While you are in this sacred place, you will either behave as a reasonable human being, or we'll put you out. It's as simple as that. Several of our sisters have black belts in Karate and all are tough women through working on our farm. We do our own slaughtering of cattle and require no male help, so if I were you, I would go easy on the threats and the loud voice.

"I order you, Inspector, to withdraw your troop of good men and women to the front door and we will start again. I shall take the Inspector, his Sergeants and anyone else in a position of rank into our visitors' room, and explain the whole situation here, that necessitated my calling on Superintendent Jerry Adams.

"Sister Mary Bede, would you go down to the archbishop and inform him that the police have

arrived; then I want you to remain with the clue until this inspector sends one of his troops to take over. Thank you, my dear Sisters.” She stood up.

“We will now sing our Grace, then everyone can just go back to the tasks you were doing, or you would now be beginning, just as usual. We’ll call you if we need you.

“Sister *DOCTOR* Raphael, would you come with me to the visitors’ room. Your input will be necessary.

The inspector, red-faced and unsure what to do, spoke quickly to his Sergeants and, on their advice, decided that withdrawal was the wisest thing to do, so waved his troop back, ordered them to put away their truncheons and followed the Abbess to the visitors' room, in a docile column.

## XII

The lady Abbess looked at the men and women now in her Visitors' room. She had Munchin and Josephine standing behind her, having their note pads and pens ready.

The Abbess began. "Before I begin, would you please, sir, tell me your name? It is difficult speaking to a nameless person."

"It's 'Smart', that what it is. And may I ask how am I supposed to address you? I suppose I have to genuflect three times and kiss the ground twice."

"I notice you are getting on in years, so just one genuflection will do, Inspector Smart." She went on in a bemused voice as though to herself: '*Smart', really? I suppose the parents were optimistic.*'

She looked up. "No inspector, I'm just being nasty: we can't help our names. My name is now the Lady Abbess, but that is cumbersome for you to say, so just 'Mother Angela,' will do. OK with you?"

"Umpt!"

“I’ll take that for a ‘yes.’” She settled herself in her chair. “As I’ve never seen any of you before, to my knowledge, I’ll give you a quick run-down of this place:

“We are a female monastery of enclosed Benedictine nuns of the strict observance. This form of monasticism has been around for fifteen hundred years and, as you would expect, was begun by a saint named Benedict.

“St Benedict based his great rule on two strong pillars: ‘ora and labora’ i.e. prayer and hard work, and that is what we do, every day of our lives, for the glory of God and for the salvation of souls who have lost their way.

“We had 42 nuns here; now it is 41. It is a very busy life with a great deal of work, many hours of prayer per day and the barest essentials to eat.

“It is not for weaklings.”

A young policewoman put up her hand. “Excuse me, mam, do the women fight much?”

The Abbess laughed naturally. “My dear girl. It’s a house of *women*; of course, they disagree and, possibly, say dreadful things, about each other – *to themselves* – but not openly. If they said it, openly, they would then have to confess it publicly in the dining room before the whole community. But despite the angry thoughts about another, if anyone, even someone they didn’t like, was in trouble, there is not one nun who would not die for the rest of the nuns. All disagreements are swept aside if anyone is in real trouble.

“Now, the nun who caused all the problem was one of us. Where she is now, rests with God. Her name was

Sister Margaret Mary, and she was a Solemnly Professed nun, which means that she had finished eight or nine years of training and had been formally permitted, by the Council of nuns, that runs the monastery, to take Final Vows to God, for life.

“Over the past few months, she has been acting strangely. I’ll let Sister Mary Raphael tell you of the mental condition. Sister is a trained, qualified, *and registered*, doctor and is our precious doctor here. She is in control of the Infirmary – our hospital”.

## XIII

Sister Mary Raphael stood up. "Thank you, my Lady Abbess. Sister Margaret Mary was brought to my attention by the Abbess as she had been exhibiting disconcerting symptoms of an early onset of Dementia, which was very worrying; she was still a relatively young woman. She was obsessed with being the centre of attention all the time and did bizarre antics to make people look at her.

"Yesterday, she attacked the archbishop viciously immediately he had left his car. She knocked him to the ground and brandished a large sharp knife at him, then when the Abbess ran to the rescue of this distinguished man, Margaret Mary shouted she wanted to kill both the archbishop and the Mother Abbess. Two other nuns had to run to the help of the Abbess with this fearful, insane, dangerous, woman.

"Thank God, our Abbess was saved - the archbishop as well. The knife was taken from the assailant, and she was placed in a concrete room in the basement which has no windows and could be locked.

It was the only place we had to put her. She was really out of her mind in my medical opinion.

“The Archbishop Edward Wilkinson who – as the Abbess has informed you, is guarding the clue at the side of the Dam at the moment – when you see him, will corroborate all I have said.”

## XIV

**T**he Abbess then took up the story. "I put the imprisoned distraught nun under the care of Sister Mary Isidore who is in charge of all our Farm work here. As any nun will tell you, Sister Isidore is a very tough lady; she is also a very compassionate one. She was not one who would fall for any sob-sister story." She drew a big breath and continued the evidence.

"This morning Sister Isidore went to take the crazy nun to the normal privy, instead of the chamber portable toilet, in the concrete room. She retrieved the key from its special place. She hurried to the room and opened the door. The shocking state of the murdered nun that she then saw, has nearly sent her insane.

She then managed to inform the nuns in the chapel and then she passed out; she has been in the Infirmary ever since.

"I hurried to the scene and found to my amazement that the nun's body had gone!

“However, she had been murdered first before the body was taken away. How do we know that? ... What? ... Oh, excuse me. Superintendent.”

The Police Superintendent had barged into the large room. He was perspiring and was panting heavily. He bowed to the Abbess and didn’t even look at the Inspector.

“My Lady, forgive me for this rude intrusion. I came as soon as I could. Sister Mary Bede told me of the treatment you have received and on behalf of the police, I apologize with all my being for the disgraceful behaviour you have endured....”

The Abbess raised her hand and spoke calmly. “My dear Superintendent, please don’t! We had a small difference of opinion, that was all. It’s sorted out now. We were just explaining the whole situation to the Inspector and his band of good people.”

“Before you continue, my Lady” gasped the elderly policeman, “I’ll send another member of the police to take the place of Sister Bede. The policeman will then release the archbishop as well. If we do it that way, the good Sister Bede can bring back here the bloodiest stakes I have ever seen which as you and I know, were used to kill that poor nun. Sister Bede found them in the short stairwell leading down to the basement door. They’ll have to go to our experts.”

She smiled at the senior policeman, “Perhaps, Superintendent, you could now carry on with the tale - weird and bewildering as it is - to your colleagues. I was just about to tell them how Sister Mary Isidore knew the corpse had been murdered. Would you give us a

moment and I'll take my nuns out of this room and wait for you in my office? Please come there when you are ready and advise us what to do. We want to do everything that is correct and even if, God forbid, it should turn out that another nun was involved, then we want that to be exposed as well. Although, for the life of me, I can't believe that that will be the answer to this extraordinary case which has shattered us completely."

The Abbess stood up and signalled the other nuns. As she was leaving, she smiled and said, "I'll notify the kitchen that coffee and some pastries will be delivered to the police left in this room. "You can't be expected to keep going on hot air.... Excuse me now." And the Abbess made a gracious exit from the room.

**B**ack in her own office, the Abbess mopped her brow. Munchin, always on the lookout for any sign of distress on the Abbess' face, quickly gave her superior a glass of water.

“Munchin, give me your honest opinion. Can you think of anyone, anyone at all, of the community who hated Sister Margaret Mary so intensely that they would, not only kill, the woman but – as it seems they did – torture her before death?”

“To be totally honest, my Lady, for the life of me, I can’t believe that has happened.” She smiled in a wry manner. “Yet, I think I’ve wanted to throttle that woman many times in the past, for her stupidity, her vanity, her pretence. I think a good number of nuns – the majority in fact – would have felt the same ... but there is a world of difference between feelings of intense irritation, and gruesome murder, such as that poor, foolish woman, endured. That is so gruesome I cannot believe a nun was involved.”

A young voice piped up. It was the new office worker, Sister Josephine. They all looked at her, surprised at her intervention. The Abbess recovered first.

“I’m sorry, what did you say? Sister Josephine?”

“But they weren’t involved, were they?”

“Sister Josephine, I don’t understand you. What are you mean?”

“It wasn’t a nun who killed Sister Margaret Mary, it was a man.” After dropping this astounding statement, Josephine went back, placidly, to her typing. Both Angela and Munchin were staring at her, utterly confused.

The Abbess quickly asked Munchin. “Where is the archbishop now, Sister, do you know? I thought he would have been here. I need to talk with him.”

“I’ll find out and get back to you.” With that, Munchin was off and ten minutes later she returned with the archbishop in tow. The Abbess waved her hand towards a chair and then said, sharply to Josephine. “Sister Josephine, would you please go to the kitchen and ask them to provide for twelve policemen and women, a late morning tea. I promised them and I forgot. Hurry now, dear, and remember, Sister Josephine, as my secretary, it is your job to remind me of important things I have forgotten. Off you go now.”

As soon as Josephine had gone, the Abbess looked at the archbishop.

“Your Grace, I think Sister Josephine has just handed us the murderer of Margaret Mary on a plate...”

“My Lady what on earth do you mean?”

“What I said! She calmly announced that I needn’t worry about the murder being done by another nun; *it was done by a man!*”

The archbishop gasped. “And the only man here is ... God help us!

... *Old John!*”

“Thank Heavens you think exactly as I did, your Grace. that John must be the answer. All the force, the brutality, the sheer physical strength employed, pointed to a man. I was doubtful a woman would have been strong enough. When I thought of a man being the murderer, I dismissed the idea; there were no men here, except one very dear, very old, relic over 80 years old.” She started to weep. “And, who loves us dearly; he calls us his daughters....”

“But where did he come from my Lady? Did you employ him?

“Your Grace. he came with the place. He is a glorious man. I think he loves each one of us and thinks we are all his children. Half the time we call him, ‘Dad’. He is loved by everyone in this monastery. I can easily imagine how rough he could have been but, basically, so kind, as well: he would literally, do anything, we ask of him.

“He lives in a tiny room in the old servants’ quarters and refused a better room that I offered him. He is one, extraordinary, character and I think we were very fortunate in having him. I’m not sure how old he is; he is very old. He idolised his master, Jacob.”

The archbishop touched the hand of the Abbess briefly. “You realise, my Lady, his very love for all of you

could have been the motive for the murder. What a weird and ... rather wonderful, motive....”

The Abbess clutched the hand of the archbishop. “And I now know the significance of the sandal found on the side of the Dam. That is how he got rid of the body. It is now 400 feet down the waterfall in that very deep lake at the base of the mountain.”

Sister Munchin was the only one sceptical. “My Lady, it is only on the word of that young woman, Josephine....”

“No, Munchin, I’m sure Josephine’s right. John is the only man here and the whole episode of Margaret Mary, now makes complete sense. Sister Isidore finding the right key, yet the door had been opened before her to remove the body. That means there were two keys, not one, as we thought. It makes sense that the only other person who would have a key, was John.

“Then the force needed and the heavy stakes and all the horrors: that is not the work of any nun here: and finally, the disposal. I’m sure I’m right about that as well.” She sat up straight and pulled impatiently at her guimpe, which was slightly out of kilter.

## XVI

unchin, please get the Superintendent and the Inspector. I'll explain our theory to them and take them to John's room in the other building and I'll ask the old man directly, face to face.

“Please don't mention Josephine, or her special powers, at this stage. If possible, we'll leave them out altogether. We will present our findings as if we came to this decision ourselves. Agreed?”

They nodded and Sister Munchin hurried off to get the police required.

The Abbess turned a distracted face to the archbishop. “Your Grace, with all the tumult since your arrival at this monastery, I haven't had the mental time to consider the greatness of the special message you brought us about the *Hermit Father*.

“It became tangled in a near-death experience for you and for me; then a horrific murder happened and if that were not enough, we have become a ‘police scene’ with about a dozen Policemen and women – crawling

all over our precious enclosure. But truly, I had not forgotten the message; it has lurked at the back of my head all the time.

“Believe me, Your Grace, it is the greatest news I could ever have received, and I am thrilled at the radiant joy this has brought to my community – many of whom actually knew that glorious priest, including, of course, me – as I told you; he brought my mother into the faith and wrought many miracles – which I now understand were through his mystic gifts that he had received – though I certainly didn’t understand them ... *then*.

“It was because of the very rarity of those mystic gifts that *The Father* had received, that I was so reluctant to see the possibility that our Sister Mary Josephine might have received similar, ‘exotic’ gifts. Now, I realise the suffering, that goes with acceptance of such gifts, great and marvellous that they are.

“Your Grace, can we pray direct to The Father now, in our prayers, or must we wait for the Church to finish the investigation?”

“No, my dear Lady Abbess, *you must definitely WAIT*. I think this canonisation will shoot through at a great rate. I could be wrong about that, but I’ve studied his life, his teaching, his behaviour with the great and the humble and he was the same with each; his perseverance to the very end, and his ... love ... his overpowering, simple and unaffected love for Christ, and his identification with the hideous sufferings of Christ, borne out in his own body. All these facets of

his life scream to Heaven of the authenticity of this great priest.

“But to be practical, certainly continue your prayers to *The Father* for your needs, but always add: ‘if this is pleasing to you, almighty Father.’

“That’s sensible and practical advice, Your Grace, now.... No, come right in gentlemen.”

She stood up and addressed the two senior policemen. The Superintendent had his usual competent manner; the Inspector looked suspicious and ready to pounce on any slip that this ‘tricky’ woman made. He made a point of sitting down grudgingly; the Abbess waited calmly until he was seated.

“Gentlemen,” the Abbess addressed them. “We have come to a possible solution to the mystery. We wanted to let you know of it immediately. I personally think it is the complete answer to this bewildering event that has happened.

“When I say, ‘we’, I mean, His Grace Archbishop Edward Wilkinson and my staff here in my office. I think our explanation will satisfy you as it explains also, the disappearance of the corpse.

“I was particularly disturbed by the violence that had obviously been inflicted on the body of that poor nun. On investigation and then hearing from the nun who saw the murdered woman, I was bewildered by the *extent of the violence shown and the strength required to inflict* the violence.... I was troubled by the use of the four wooden stakes which, apparently, had been thrust, or hammered, into the body of that wretched, helpless nun. I began to wonder if a woman could actually inflict

that damage. Would she have had the strength to do that?

“Then it was suggested to me that it could have been done by a man ... that would certainly explain the violence and strength required, but there was only one man here and that was ‘Old John’, a man over 80 years old who came with the place when it was given by the owner, Jacob Bloom, to the Church, as he was dying, forty years ago. ‘Old John’ was one of his trusted young servants. He looked after the whole property until it was given to me – 25 years ago – to form a Monastery for females.

“I then met Old John for the very first time. He was harmless and had nowhere else to go, so I decided to keep him here in the only home he had ever known. He lives in the separate smaller building towards the back of this one. That was where all Jacob’s servants lived when he lived in this mansion. The old man is still in the very room that he has known since he came here from some orphanage as a small child.

“Thanks be to God, he likes us, especially me. I think he confuses me with the daughter he never had. Anyway, as the numbers grew here it made no difference to Old John; I think somehow in his mind he thinks he has many, many, daughters. I might add that the sisters here love him and treat him as though he were their grandfather.

“We hardly ever see him. He eats alone in a small special room off the refectory, and it is only when a physical task is beyond us, that I see him to usually ask his advice on what to do.”

The police inspector sneered openly. “What a concocted, ridiculous theory this is; you’ve made it up to protect your women here. I am against your stupid alibi totally and I’m not stopping here to listen to rubbish.” He turned to the Superintendent. “I’m telling you, sir, they’re having you on. Don’t fall for their lies and tricks....”

The Abbess cut in, her voice like ice. “Before the law, Inspector, we have the right of being heard in our defence, and if you want proof of what I have said of Old John, come with us now to the servants’ quarters and question the old man yourself. The Superintendent, the archbishop, my secretaries Sisters Munchin and Josephine and I, are going there now.” The Abbess stood up. “Come Sisters, your Grace, and those who believe in justice and Truth.”

The archbishop and the Superintendent hurried to catch up with the Abbess while Inspector Smart, his lips twisted into a cynical snarl, had to hurry to catch up with the others. He thought they were likely to set up another of their ridiculous ‘escape responsibility’ smoke screens; the idiots would have a difficult time pulling the wool over his eyes: he was determined on that.

## XVII

The Abbess stood before the door of a ground floor room in the servants' building. Most of the rooms in that building were shut. Only a few rooms were kept up as extra bedrooms for nuns' visitors - their parents and siblings - if they had travelled from another state, or for very long distances, to see their daughter or sister. Old John's room was the only one occupied full time.

## XVIII

The Abbess and her group were standing in a close group outside the door of the room. There was a moment of indecision, then the Abbess went and knocked loudly on the wooden door.

There was snuffling sound behind the door. The Abbess knocked again and called out. "John, it's Angela! Please open the door!"

With the sound of the name, the footsteps came clearer as they neared the door. It opened and a very old, stooped, emaciated old man stood in the doorway.

He hurried forward and nearly fell. The Abbess automatically went to catch him. The old man held onto the beautiful woman who forced herself to release the man's hands and step back.

"John, you and I have known each other for 25 years now, haven't we?" The old man nodded, his eyes watering. "John, we have a problem. Would you help us?"

The old man's eyes opened wide. "Didn't I do it right? I saw the danger you were in; the violent attack she made on the man in a black skirt near the car, and I saw the knife: she could have killed you. I thought we'd lost you, my child." He looked puzzled. "But I found the one who caused all that horror and decided she had to die...."

"You decided, did you John? Did anyone else speak to you about it?"

"What for? My old master Jacob, he taught me what to do with bad servants. I did the same with that bad woman. Jacob said that they were followers of Satan and that it required a stake through their heart to finish them off.

"That worried me. Where could I get the proper stakes. Then I remembered Isidore and Bede, those good hard-working servants had been building an avenue with wooden stakes and I managed to get four of them.

"Angela, I didn't know where the heart was; Jacob never taught me that, so I drove in four stakes in different places on the body - at least one of them would have been right."

The Abbess was trembling badly. "John, was there much blood?"

John's eyes opened even wider. "Blood was everywhere; she was a hard one to kill, that one, I can tell you. I had blood everywhere. When it was all over I came back here to shower, and I never shower during the week. Jacob only permitted us to shower once a week on a Saturday."

“Was she heavy to carry, John?”

“She weighed a ton, Angela. I had to throw her over my shoulder, and I fell down to the floor; I had a terrible job trying to get up again, but I did. I took the bundle of stakes outside the basement door and left them on the stairs. That made it a bit easier.”

“Then, I think, my dear John, you took her to the dam with the Race. That was how you got rid of the body, wasn’t it?”

“Yes, I always did that with all the others that Jacob ordered me to do.”

“Did you drop any of the clothes, or anything before the dead body, went over?”

‘Yes, but I didn’t know that until I returned here and had a good shower. I then washed my clothes and hung them out to dry. It was when I was doing the hanging out that I remembered the sandal. I had seen it on the way back and was too tired to do anything about it. I should have thrown it straight back into the water; it would have disappeared into the Race then. It seems wrong that she will be without a shoe for all eternity.”

“Now, don’t be worrying about that, John,” assured the Abbess, “I’ll ask God to give her some new sandals. OK?”

The Superintendent now spoke to John, carefully choosing his words. “John, I’m a policeman. I had to come with your ... with Angela to ask you to come with us for a short time. We need to fill out all the forms for the disappearance of Margaret Mary, that was the name of the woman you ... ... dispatched ... you have nothing

to fear at all and the archbishop who is visiting Angela, will come with you to make sure you are kept safe with good men called 'lawyers', to protect you." He reached out and patted the old man reassuringly, then added: "Do you want to pack a small suitcase with some clothes? You could stay overnight...."

"Stay overnight? I've never been away from this room, overnight before in all my life; Jacob wouldn't allow that...."

"I'm sorry, John," broke in the archbishop, "but you have to do what the policeman tells you. Jacob would tell you that ... you know that is true ... don't you?"

Inspector Smart had had enough. "This is stupid. The old goat has confessed to the crime. My time's precious, so we'll stop this charade and take this lunatic - who's obviously a multiple killer - put manacles on him and ... Look out! ...

"Bloody hell! ...He's gone!"

The door was slammed shut. The men quickly put their shoulders to the door, and they finally managed to break it open. One glance was enough to see the whole room; it was now empty. The only thing visible was another door leading to the rear quarters of the building; it was wide open.

The Abbess gave a small scream. "I know where he's going. Quick! we might be able to save him."

She ran quickly and the others raced after her to a side door in the main building, through to the other side, then into the area known as the 'Farm Area'. John could be seen running in a peculiar half hop, half run manner, to the Dam with the Race.

Without even a look backwards, Old John, dived in and was immediately swept into the Race, over the spillway rock and then, as the group reached the edge of the Dam, they heard a feeble, long, drawn-out scream as the body fell 400 feet to the pool at the bottom of the waterfall.

Old John was now dead.

The Abbess was holding both Munchin and Josephine who were both crying, loudly. The archbishop had his arms around the Superintendent. He saw how devastated the Inspector was, so reached out to him and held him close as well.

After some time, the individuals slowly made their ways back to the monastery and the office of the Abbess. They walked slowly in silence.

Back at the office, Sister Munchin, on her own initiate, rang through to the kitchen and asked for an emergency cup of coffee for seven people, suffering trauma, to be delivered instantly to the office of the Abbess.

The Abbess was the first to break the silence. "My Sisters and gentlemen, I never dreamt that Old John would commit suicide. Needless to say, I had no idea in the world that he had been the previous owner's 'disposal' expert ... a killer. He has been living here in our monastery for 25 years ... 25 years! Merciful God! And I never ever even suspected his real reason of being here. Thank God I didn't; I would have been frightened to death.

"He was - when the property changed hands, and I was installed - just one of the many servants who were

left with the property. The others, thank God, decided to take their chances elsewhere - they were all from orphanages. It was only John - even then called, 'Old John' - who refused to go. He had nowhere to go. I couldn't put him out of the only home he had ever known. I decided to let him stay. I thought that he might even be able to give us information as to work which we would have to do with the old building.

"Thank God, he took to us. He called me, 'my child,' from the very beginning so I don't know what incredible story he had in his head. He was a very loving and cheerful old man, and I think all the sisters loved him. I don't know how I'm going to face them when I relate what happened today.

"But I do know something definite. Tomorrow morning, we will start our eight days of fasting for the souls of both, Sister Margaret Mary and John." Her voice faltered. "I don't even have a surname for the poor man."

The Inspector mumbled a bit, then said: "Sis ... Sister ... we're not finished yet, I'm sorry ... truly believe me, I am sorry ... but we have to prove the man is dead. We'll have to go down to the pool at the foot of the waterfall. We might be able to retrieve the body."

"I understand, Inspector. Could I get the Farm workers to try to cut a pathway down to the bottom of the cliffs? We have two chain saws, I think...."

The archbishop broke in. "No, my lady. You don't have to do that. The Police and I will look after that. We'll try to get a local firm if we can, and then we'll try to see if we could hire some underwater gear.

“I think – and I’m sure the Police do, too – that we should have a good look at what is lying on the bottom of that awful pool. If Old John was not demented, and actually was speaking the literal truth, then there could be a number of skeletons there which, even now, might be able to be identified.”

The Abbess shivered. “How repulsive it all is ... so much tragedy ... such fear and agony. I only hope that John was raving and that he was hallucinating. Please God that is so ... ... What, Sister?

“Oh, Coffee yes, how kind. Thank you, Sisters.

“Gentlemen and Sisters, you too, come and let us all drink together a cup of coffee ... and look, there’s even some tarts as well. Just what we need. Sisters this is one time when I use my authority and give you permission to drink and eat with non-sisters.”

After they had finished their little break, the Abbess allotted her tasks. “Sister Munchin, see Sister Gertrude and tell her all that has happened with regard to Old John. Tell her also of the plans to make a pathway down to the bottom of the cliffs to find the body of John and to retrieve any skeletons that are there. Finally, tell her I place her totally in control of the monastery until I tell her otherwise.” She turned to Sister Josephine, “You stay with me Sister, and always have your note pad with you at all times.

“Your Grace, this canonical inspection you were going to make of us, is a disaster so far. Let me assure you, we’re not always in such a mess as we are now. Do you wish to stay? Or do you wish to reschedule your

visit; your time is very valuable. I truly am very aware of that.

“Dear Monsignor, Joyceson, ... thank you for being with us today. I felt safe with you there. I have known you since I was a tiny girl; you were always part of my life. If you wish, after the horrors of this morning, to return to the Hermitage Shrine, please just tell me and then go. I know Father le Blanc, especially, will be concerned for you.”

The elderly grey-haired priest, smiled. “My Lady, I think I should go. If I were younger, I might have been able to help but if I go now, it’s one less for you to worry about.” He stood up. “Bless you my dear Lady Abbess, may God give you the strength and the wisdom to handle all these ... extraordinary discoveries.” The good priest shook hands with the Superintendent and the Inspector, bowed to the Abbess with her nuns, and quietly left the office.

The archbishop declared he was staying ‘put’. He said this was one way of getting out of returning to the local priests’ house at the Hermit’s Shrine and all the endless paperwork waiting for him there. The abbess immediately arranged for the archbishop to have lunch in the side room – that John had used – with the Inspector. The police inspector was surprised: he asked if he could speak to the ‘Sister’ alone first.

## XIX

The Abbess smiled and hunted the rest out of her office. She drew the Inspector close to her office table. "Sit, sit, sit, dear Inspector, I don't bite ... much, anyhow."

The inspector sat down awkwardly and was wondering how to start.... His quandary was abruptly ended by the Abbess saying, brightly...

"Inspector, let me help you. You are not a Catholic; you know nothing about nuns except they wear peculiar clothes. You know there are some of these weird creatures - who don't have husbands and children - who teach in schools, some even work in hospitals, but some, very, VERY, strange ones, even live locked-away from the outside world, in big buildings and are mainly silent and hardly ever seen, even by their parents, brothers and sisters.

"You've had a great shock meeting us. By being given this job to do, you didn't know how to proceed, so you thought you had to come over the 'big, bad,

tough, coppers brandishing your batons' whereas all you needed to do, was to ask." She laughed gently.

"Now you've seen enough of us to know we are perfectly normal women, living a difficult and unusual life, being dedicated as we are to Jesus Christ. As such, we have difficult rules to follow for, as you would well know, it's not easy living with 40 other women, as women can be everything that is bad, evil, and stupid as well. We are just as vulnerable to all the faults as men are. In fact, I think it's easier for a woman to be bad, than it is for men." She started to laugh.

"Am I anywhere near the truth, Inspector?"

The inspector looked up. He was laughing. "You wouldn't think of hiring yourself out as a 'fortune teller' would you? I could use you at the Police Picnic this year. We could make a fortune together."

"I'd like to say, 'it's a deal,' but unfortunately no, I'm not available, except on long term contracts." She stopped laughing and asked, smilingly. "What do you want to ask me? Is it about this case or ..."

"No, it's not about the case. Sister, I feel a fool for acting in the way I did. I noticed my special squad were astonished at my behaviour. Some of them are Catholics, too...."

"Oh, I'm sorry they were upset. They'll start whispering about you and your ability to command. Let me speak to all of them in a special meeting we can arrange; you can sit beside me so they can see there is no enmity between us.

"You realise, Inspector, if our positions were reversed, I would be as lost as you were, in dealing with

us: I would equally be at a loss in dealing with a situation such as you faced. We do all kinds of ridiculous things when we are not sure of ourselves.” She sat up straight, and then, studying the face of the Inspector, said: “Is that all? I think you want to ask me about something else?”

The Inspector flushed again. “Yes, I do. I’m told you knew the old bloke who lived in that ruined church in Burnside, who did tricks when he was in the church, or something. It drew great crowds I believe. Did you know him?”

The Abbess sat up straight, her face stern. “Inspector, never call that glorious priest a ‘bloke’ again. He was the greatest person I have ever had the privilege of knowing – knowing him even from my birth; he and a wonderful old cardinal actually helped deliver me, when my mother was in severe trouble giving birth. Both she and I would have died had it not been for *The Father*.

“That priest had foretold my barren parents that they would have a female child and that she must be called, Angela.

“The old priest lived in Burnside for many years before anyone even knew he had received what are called: ‘mystical gifts from God’, Inspector. He didn’t know himself, for years; strange, but true.

“Our Lord Jesus Christ asks one thing of us, Inspector: that we love Him and that is what the people we call ‘saints’ actually do; they love Christ to an extent that is simply extraordinary. “Sometimes, very rarely in the history of the church, such people are then given

strange and mystifying gifts such as Levitation, the Stigmata, Infused knowledge and other strange, but glorious gifts.

“The Father loved Christ to an extent that was incredible and when he was saying holy Mass, his feet would leave the ground, and he would become – absorbed – in God and would slowly rise to the ceiling. It nearly scared me to death when I first realised what was happening, then I became used to it. Crowds came from everywhere to see this strange sight.

“And, to counteract what you are thinking, or the question you want to ask, let me tell you that the Father made it a rule that there would NEVER be a collection made at any Masses held at that Church and there has never been, not one, in all the years even since the Father’s death!

“So, he gained nothing from these gifts personally, and lived in one room with a hard wooden bed, a chair, a kneeler, and large crucifix with the dying Christ on it, two hooks for his few clothes and that was all.

“I was actually present at the Mass when he received the Stigmata – that is, the terrible wounds in the hands, feet and side of his body, just as Christ had received on the cross at Calvary. He bled most fearfully every time he said Mass and his hands and feet had to be bandaged firmly to compress the blood. After a time, they only bled on Fridays.

“Inspector, I was permitted to go into the old part of the ruined church to receive his blessing on the day of the Stigmata. I’ll never forget it. I was only about six or seven years old, and I couldn’t believe this priest,

whom I knew so well, was wounded and bleeding, just like our precious Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ was ..." the Abbess started to weep. "Inspector, he tried to bless me with his wounded hands, and I nearly died of fright at the sight of the ghastly, torn hands - they looked as if they had been torn apart. I'm sorry, Inspector. Please excuse me weeping."

The Abbess closed her eyes tightly and then looked up and smiled wryly at the policeman.

"Well, now that I'm over my, 'loopy female,' bit, let's get down to the business that concerns both you and me.

"What do we do next? How soon can they start the path clearing and when do you think we can get the diving team in place and finally, what do you want us to do in the meanwhile. The only thing I can think of that could possibly be important, was to protect Old John's room. I think it should be locked tight. God alone knows what's in there. I've never been inside the room. Come to think of it, John never ever invited me in ... that's strange. Inspector if I get you the key. Could you do that first thing, just in case some nun sees the room and is horrified by the dirt and the mess of it and decides to clean it all out."

"Yes, please. A good idea. I should have thought of that myself. Get me the key ... I *mean* 'please get me the key' and I would be grateful if you would come with me to the room." Angela laughed a natural laugh and hurried out of the office to get the key.

She stumbled a little in surprise as Sister Mary Josephine was coming towards her holding the key in

her hand. “Is this what you wanted, my Lady?” she asked, as if it were utterly normal.

The Abbess thanked the nun slowly, realising she had to adjust herself to this new situation of someone who knows what she wanted, even before she knew it herself. Merciful God, she prayed, help me to cope with this!

She put out her arm and detained Josephine. “Sister, I want you to come with the Inspector and me to Old John’s room, now. I’ll just get him. She turned quickly and hurried back to her office. Soon the three of them were standing in front of the old man’s room.

With a hand that trembled slightly, she opened the door with the key and, hesitatingly advanced into the small room. Why am I hesitating, she wondered? What am I afraid of?

The Inspector stood in the middle of the room. He looked at the narrow bed with quite filthy sheets and blankets, then in the clothes closet where there were a few disreputable, threadbare coats, shirts and trousers and socks and another pair of thick, heavy work boots. There was a small table and one kitchen chair. On the table was a large basin for washing. They noticed there was a tap in a corner of the room with a small shower area which was tiled. There was nothing else.

The only thing that was incongruous, was the remains of a large Easter candle with a box of matches lying on the top. It stood about one foot from the ground and was standing on a plate in front of one side wall.

“Well, I was completely wrong, Inspector. There’s nothing here of any value to you....”

The policeman was not convinced. “There’s something wrong, somehow ... this is not the normal state of an old man who hardly ever left his room.... But what are you doing, Sister?” He was intrigued by Sister Josephine’s action: she was going around the room, tapping the walls. She had tapped and listened to three of them, and was on the last one, when she gave a little cry. “It’s here; this one....” She hit the wall a little harder and the listeners heard an echo within the wall itself.

“Blimey, what the hell is in this wall? I need witnesses,” cried the inspector as he fumbled for his phone and was soon talking to his two sergeants and demanded their presence immediately at John’s room. They were there within minutes and the Inspector asked the Abbess and the sister, to stand back against the opposite wall so they could see, but would not touch, whatever they were going to find.

The police decided to take the linen panel off completely. With great care they used their knives and managed to get the strange material, which they found to their utter amazement actually, WAS ‘material’: it looked like a particularly strong and starched linen which had then been painted the same colour as the rest of the walls. As they removed the ‘linen wall’ the policemen nearly dropped the linen. There were gasps of horror and fear; the men quickly moved aside. The Abbess then saw the horrific sight of a withered skeleton nailed to the back of the wall. There were four bottles of priceless liquor – at the skeleton’s feet, and a

magnificent painting of an elderly man, elegantly dressed. The painting, which was enclosed with a golden ormolu frame, was hanging to the side of the hideous skeleton.

“But who is the old man in the painting?” the inspector asked, deeply shocked.

The Abbess had turned white, as if she would faint. “Inspector, I believe that is the dead man, Jacob Bloom, the previous owner of this mansion and he was obviously adored by his slave, poor, dearest, old John.”

“And the skeleton?”

“The same man, Inspector. That means that the big grave in Burnside cemetery ... is empty! The coffin is there but it’s empty. I did know that only one servant attended the funeral and arranged all the details, and that servant was poor John.”

Angela groped for the chair and sat down quickly.

“YOU REALISE, INSPECTOR, THIS WAS A SHRINE!

“A shrine to the only person who ever cared for John. That would be the reason for the large candle; he’s seen us burning candles for the holy Masses and our religious services, so he had his own services here in his room.”

She shook herself. “If I am right, Inspector, there must be an easier way to put that wall back and to open it than what you did.” She looked at Sister Josephine. “Do you know how to do it, Sister?”

“I think so, my Lady. Let me try.” And Josephine quickly hung the linen wall back in place by using tiny hooks that the men had not even noticed. At their

request she opened the ‘shrine’ wall again and left it open.

They checked the back door that it was definitely securely locked from the inside; then the small silent group left the room. They made sure they locked the front door carefully as well.

The inspector asked the Abbess, quite humbly, if she would let him retain the key until the cemetery plot was reopened. The absence of a body in the coffin would prove their theory, once and for all.

“Inspector, please keep the wretched key; I am so confused and mentally shocked that I think I must get to the chapel quickly, please excuse me. Come with me, Sister Josephine, please.”

As they were about to enter the chapel, the Abbess remembered her new secretary had missed the meal.

“I’m beg your pardon, Sister Josephine. You have missed your lunch – small as it is on our fast day. You go on to the kitchen and ask the kitchen to let you have lunch even though they will be washing up by now. Then go back to our office. You can tell Sister Munchin all about the discoveries of the morning. That will save me of having to repeat myself again. Thank you.” She disappeared as the chapel door closed and knelt on the floor behind her Prie dieu.

Her mind was in tumult. “Please God, preserve me; keep me sane and give me the wisdom to deal with all this”. She knew well that she must pray fervently for the grace she needed: her mind was a jumble of horrors: she knew that she was failing to trust God. He had placed her in this position of authority: He must be her only

fountain of strength and courage. Well, she would stay on the floor until she received the grace to ‘carry on’ – no matter what happened in the meantime.

At Vespers that afternoon, Sister Gertrude, seeing her Abbess still kneeling on the floor *behind* her stall, immediately assumed there to be ‘trouble, somewhere’ and took over the role of the Abbess and stood upright in the Abbess’s stall. That was the normal thing to do when the Abbess was tied up with affairs and simply couldn’t get to the chapel.

Vespers then began.

When Vespers had finished, the kitchen rang through to Sister Munchin, asking for the Abbess; she had missed another meal. They were concerned; she had not eaten since breakfast. Was she ill? Could they cook something special?

Munchin said she would check it out and get back to them. She and Josephine hurried off to the chapel.

They crept up to the Abbess who was still kneeling on the floor; everyone else had gone to the Refectory. The two nuns were both frightened to see the stillness and the eyes which didn’t seem to move; she was kneeling as if she had suddenly died; she seemed to be barely breathing.

Munchin was angry. She turned to Josephine and whispered fiercely. “Now, come on ‘wonder woman’, ‘superwoman’, ‘miracle worker’, you can earn your keep by doing a little miracle *HERE*, if you don’t mind. We want our Abbess back, so bring her back! NOW!”

Sister Josephine took a step back, bewildered. She was not a ‘miracle worker’; what did Sister Munchin

mean? "Please Lord Jesus," she prayed, "help my Lady! I don't think she can get up from the floor".

Almost instantly, the Abbess rose from the floor smiling. "Is something the matter, Munchin? You are looking so fierce. Come on, my champion, and you too, Sister Josephine, it's time we should be in the refectory. I hope they've left something for us, I'm so hungry. I'm sure you are too."

Sister Munchin, in distress, pulled her arm from the grasp of her Abbess. "My Lady, I've sinned: I've doubted ... a great sin, and I am definitely guilty." She knelt on the floor.

"Please forgive me, my Lady, and you too, Sister Josephine."

Josephine was truly puzzled, but smiled at her and extended her hand to help the Abbess to pull Sister Munchin to her feet. Josephine then pretended to give Munchin a punch, which made them all laugh, as the three of them hurried off to the Refectory.

The abbess paid a fleeting visit to the sisters at Recreation, which was usually held in the gardens or, in wet weather, the Chapter Room. The nuns usually worked on their embroidery, knitting, played table tennis, or simply chatted. There were four tables set aside for the game and many of the nuns were really keen on this harmless but skilful sport. The laughter was loud and happy.

The Abbess only stayed five minutes. She had no desire to spoil their one truly 'normal' hour in their day. She simply apologized for her absence and said she hoped the great mystery would be soon over and the

police would have left their monastery. She promised she would outline the details of what had happened at Chapter in the morning.

She left quickly, taking Gertrude with her. The archbishop was waiting for them in the office.

The archbishop looked a little the worse for wear. He was wearing a black suit with a clerical collar and purple vest, not his episcopal robes this time. It was soon clear why he was dressed as he was.

“My Lady, Sisters, I have much to tell you. Please be seated and would the secretaries please take notes.

“Firstly, the men who will fix the dangerous Dam, will be here tomorrow; the metal shop is making a metal grill to the approximate measurement I was able to give them. I made it much larger; the bigger the better, in case I was wrong. They have the diving equipment required.

“The Police Superintendent, hearing that the firm had the diving equipment, immediately hired them to do the search of the waterfall pool for the bodies. The men will attend to that as soon as the path is complete.

“Next. The firm that specializes in clearance work, will be here as well tomorrow, to begin the path down to the pool. It will be a large team and they are confident

they could do the job in two days, even less; then the police could move in to search the pool for the bodies of Sister Margaret Mary and Old John.

“So, within three days, my Lady, your life should resume as normal here at the monastery. But I have to warn you for the next three days it will be men everywhere you turn, and the noise could be horrendous. My advice would be to employ the nuns in other work than the Farm Work: I realise that the essential stuff, such as milking, must go ahead as normal.” He smiled. “Cows have no idea of cooperating with anyone; their time is set in concrete.”

The archbishop turned a page in his notebook. “Now, I need to know a few things, for the record.

1. “My Lady Abbess, have you contacted Sister Margaret Mary’s mother? And if you have, what are her wishes for her daughter’s funeral: is it to be here or in another cemetery? Could you answer that now?”

“Yes, Your Grace. I rang the difficult woman, and she was enraged at the death of her daughter. She DEMANDED that I send the body to a Funeral Firm on the other side of the country. She gave me the details of the firm to me on the phone. In one way I’m relieved, but I did want the poor, insane nun to have one ... requiem mass, at least. This way we shall never know.”

2. “Thank you, my Lady. I shall stay for five more days. I want to observe the community at work in normal times. I shall attend all your liturgies but only offer holy Mass each day down at the Hermit’s

Shrine, not here – it is easier there, they have the altar servers there. When I attend your Divine Office, I shall use the public section outside the grille so, hopefully, no nun here will even know if I am there or not.

3. “I wish to attend one talk by the Postulant Sister Mistress, the Novice Mistress and the First Vows Director. Please see that the times are made available to me so that I can work out my time schedule. I only want to see a typical lesson in progress to see the slant you take here; please tell the Directors not to try to do anything ‘fancy’: I can see through that smokescreen in a moment. I want to see just their ordinary, day to day, handling of their portfolio.

4. “I have a serious proposition to put to you, Lady Abbess at the end of my five days. re a ‘Daughter-House’.

5. “I forgot to tell you the police have begun the exhumation of the coffin in which it was assumed the body of Old John was buried. We should know in a few hours whether your theory was correct, or not. The Superintendent has promised to phone me.

6. “Last one: I would dearly love to know if Sister Mary Isidore has recovered ... But wait! ... What on earth *is that?*

There was a loud knocking on the door of the Abbess’ office.

Sister Josephine cried out, happily: “Oh, thank God! it is Sister Isidore....”

The Abbess opened the door and took into her arms a smiling and, laughing, Isidore.

Sister Isidore knelt before her Abbess. “Please forgive me my Lady. I’m never done anything like that before. ME, fainting away and nearly going out of my mind? Can you believe it? I’m ashamed of myself”, she then turned to the archbishop. “Please forgive me, Your Grace, I believe I caused a lot of trouble for you as well.”

The abbess was laughing. “Izzy, Oh thank God, you are back to normal; Neither the archbishop nor I have the slightest need to forgive you. But now listen to me seriously:

“Both the archbishop and I understand, exactly, what you faced in that dreadful room; I’ll tell you all about it later. It’s all over now and the murderer has been found, so our only grief was your very serious reaction to all you saw. But now we see you, smiling and obviously well, and that’s all we both wanted.... Is that not correct. Your Grace?”

“Absolutely, my Lady.”

“Now, Sister Mary Isidore, just genuflect to the good man and you can apologize later for causing him so much worry.” The abbess turned to address the archbishop, her lips quivering.

“Your Grace, we have a little problem. You see we have started our eight-day fast for the souls of the two deceased: Sister Margaret Mary and Old John. It’s a rather taxing fast, and Sister Isidore has not eaten for days now. With that in mind, for her safety, would you give her an exemption from the fast?”

The archbishop pretended to stroke his nonexistent beard and pursed his lips. "Well, all right! ... As a special favour ... But I insist that she eat no more than 11 meals in one day. If it is 12, then I'll excommunicate her immediately!"

After Sister Isidore had left the office, laughing, the archbishop was no longer smiling.

He asked, somewhat brusquely, if Sister Mary Gertrude was still in her office? When the Abbess nodded, he asked: "Then, would you please call her into your office. What I have to say is for your ears and the ears of your second in command. At this stage, for no one else."

The Abbess was perturbed. She quickly perceived the archbishop was looking severe and also strangely, deeply troubled. She realised now would begin *the problems*.

"Your Grace, are the secretaries to remain?"

"I'm afraid not, my Lady."

The Abbess went to the door connecting the two offices, hoping that Sister Gertrude was still there. She was.

Gertrude looking at the Abbess's face, guessed the worst.

Angela asked her to come to her office, immediately - the archbishop wanted her for a very private meeting.

Gertrude stood up from her desk, and said sadly: "So, now the blow is going to fall, is it? God protect us and the community." She picked up her notebook and followed the Abbess.

The Abbess whispered softly: "Yes, I believe it is!"

he archbishop spoke in a flat, lifeless tone, **T**his lips in a severe line and his eyes refusing to meet those of the two women facing him.

“I have to inform you that the Papal Nuncio, at the special request of the Holy Father, the pope, has asked me to see that the documents, ‘Traditionis Custodes’ and ‘Cor Orans’ are being put into practice, especially in enclosed female monasteries.

“To be more specific, the nuns are now required to attend the special series of lectures to be given by the more enlightened Sisters who are in line with the thinking of the modern world: and therefore it must be of the greatest importance to all Sisters that the needs of the Church be met – that must be their priority, not individual inclinations, or private pious practices: in order to keep them in step with the changes in the Teachings of the Church.

“It is my duty to inform you that you will only be permitted to have the old Latin Liturgy every second

Sunday at 3.00pm for those nuns still attracted to the old-fashioned Mass of previous times.”

The Abbess was outraged; she went to speak but the archbishop began talking over her.

“*Excuse me!* I have not finished yet! You will then be required to alter things here in your monastery as suggested in the aforesaid documents. The Grille is to come down and the people are to be encouraged to come into the grounds; the idea of the Cloister is obsolete. Individual nuns are only to be required to do the daily work that they feel would enhance their development, as modern women of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The habit is to be altered; the skirt to be no lower than three inches below a woman’s knee, while the guimpe is to go altogether. The veil is to be similar to a short, peasant scarf tied behind the ears. The Horarium is to be changed as well. Rising will not be before 7.00am and the Divine Office will be vastly modified. Matins will be dispensed with altogether.

“Each sister is to have a television set in her room and the choice of programmes is totally up to her. She is also permitted to have visitors, not just family, but friends, and acquaintances, to her room.

“All fasting will be reduced to Good Friday when only one full meal will be eaten. A Psychologist will be employed by each large monastery and Therapy will be encouraged for all members. A Physio will also be assigned to each monastery. In female monasteries, the physio should be, preferably, male: it is important that the sisters come to grips with their own sexuality....”

The Abbess could restrain herself no longer. She leapt to her feet and her voice was such as had never been heard in that place before.

“EXCUSE ME, YOUR GRACE, I DEMAND THAT MY SOLICITOR, SISTER MARY MUNCHIN, BE PRESENT. IF YOU REFUSE, WE WILL ESCORT YOU FROM THE PREMESIS”.

She walked to the door and opened it.

“Come in Sister Mary Munchin, and wear your lawyer hat, I order you.

“Sister Josephine, please come in to take notes in shorthand, *immediately*.”

Sister Munchin marched in ready to do combat with whoever was threatening the Abbess. Josephine came in, behind Munchin, and stood at the back of the Abbess.

“Sisters, I want a copy of the list of new changes that have to be made to this monastery, apparently by the order of the Papal Nuncio; at the request of the Holy Father himself. If the archbishop refuses to hand over the document he is reading from, then Sister Mary Gertrude and I will dictate the details of the iniquitous document.

Let it be stated at the beginning that I, the Abbess of the Monastery of the Transfiguration ... UTTERLY REFUSE TO COMPLY WITH THOSE INSTURCTIONS WHICH WOULD COMPLETELY DESTROY OUR MONASTERY ...

... BUT ... WHAT ... WHAT ARE YOU DOING? ... I DON'T UNDERSTAND....”

With great difficulty the Abbess controlled herself. “Why are you laughing, Your Grace? HOW DARE YOU? I don’t see anything funny in the slightest, and believe me, I am NOT in the mood for jokes!”

The archbishop raised his hands in surrender and spoke loudly.

“*My Lady, my Lady, my Lady!* How could you imagine that I could ever be in the slightest bit of agreement with those idiotic demands? They are the ravings of a lunatic, or one who has an evil agenda that he is determined to pursue until it is complete.”

“Then how could you put us through that agony of seeing everything we have given our life blood for, destroyed before our eyes?”

“I had to find out where you stood in this matter. Several monasteries of men, and those of females, have already succumbed to the pressure and done as has been requested – I might add that they are emptying fast – I didn’t think you would yield, but I had to make sure.”

He then spoke directly to Sister Mary Gertrude.

“Sister, are you in agreement with the Abbess?”

“100% Your Grace. I think the suggestions are designed to destroy all that is good and holy and precious to God. I also believe that anyone who has participated in the formulation of that document you are reading from, is doing the work of Satan.”

“Sister Munchin?”

“150% Your Grace.” The archbishop was wary of the next person to ask. He drew a deep breath. “And you, Sister Josephine?”

As always, Josephine was calm and spoke simply as if stating well-known facts that everybody would know.

“Your Grace, none of it makes sense; it is illogical and, in many ways, childish. Remember the efforts of both popes, St John Paul II and then Pope Benedict XVI who both tried, desperately, to save the ancient liturgy. Remember ‘*Summorum Pontificum*’ which came as a special Motu Proprio in 2007, by that great pope, Benedict. In that document, Benedict made the so-called ‘Tridentine Mass’ - the Traditional Mass - available TO ALL the PRIESTS ONCE AGAIN. Pope Benedict returned to the Church the ancient Liturgy, saying that ‘*what was held sacred yesterday is sacred today.*’ That same pope made it clear that St Paul 6<sup>th</sup> had never abrogated the old Latin Mass. He reminded us that the glorious pope, St. Pius 5<sup>th</sup>, in his great encyclical, ‘*Quo Primum*’ had made the Latin, ancient, form of the Mass, compulsory, and *he declared it to be the sacred Liturgy of the Catholic Church. This was codified by the Council of Trent.* There have been many arguments about whether *Quo Primum* could be changed, that is, abrogated, or removed, or not.

The answer, from scholars, is that it CAN be changed *in simple things*: such as, adding a new preface, or adding a newly canonized saint, but THAT WAS ALL.

“It is interesting, also disturbing, Your Grace, that as soon as that poor pope, Benedict XVI died, the hounds of hell were set loose to destroy what was left of the Catholic Church. The main question scholars say

today, now centres on AUTHORITY – and the use thereof. And rightly so, in my opinion.

“All of us know that a pope cannot abrogate the work of another pope when it concerns Faith and Morals that have been held and believed since the beginning, *The holy, sacred Liturgy is integral to our Faith.* Remember: *the way you pray reflects what we actually believe.*”

The young nun’s head was slightly elevated; she was staring straight ahead, as she continued: “As all of us here know, that particular maxim is a re-working of the maxim taken from the 8<sup>th</sup> Book of Prosper of Aquitaine’s book. Originally, it was ...’*ut legem credendi lex statuat supplicandi ...’* – that the law of praying establishes the law of believing. But it works the other way too, so we have this simple version which is more usually used – ‘*Lex orandi, lex credendi*’, that is, “the law of what is prayed [is] the law of what is believed.”

“My Lady Abbess, you know well that so called: ‘Traditional Catholics,’ like to use this simple maxim because it conveys the sense that *how* we pray reflects what *we actually believe*. That is simple and easy to understand.”

Sister Josephine turned and genuflected to her Abbess. “Forgive me, my Lady, I get carried away.”

The Abbess, trying desperately hard to pretend that nothing extraordinary had happened, smiled and took the hand of the young nun, holding it tightly.

Archbishop Wilkinson stood up, his face pale.

“Sisters would you please leave us now. I need to speak to the Abbess, privately, again. Thank you.”

Sisters Gertrude, Munchin and Josephine quietly left the office.

## XXIII

he archbishop and the Abbess sat speechless, staring at each other.

**T**he prelate was the first to break the silence. “No! I’ll never get used to her, my Lady. Never! How you are going to cope with that nun, I have no idea. If I were in your place I’d be asking for a transfer, but you don’t have such an easy option.” He looked closely at the Abbess standing motionless like a statue.

“Were you as shocked as I was, my Lady?”

“Was I? I really don’t know. More *puzzled*, I think. How did she know about the 8<sup>th</sup> book of Prosper of Aquitaine? I’d never heard of it.” She suddenly realised she was standing and sat down quickly.

“I am troubled, Your Grace, can I use her, like that? Or is that wrong? It’s like having a speaking encyclopaedia at hand ready to answer every question.”

“No, my Lady, *you cannot do that!* It would be *very wrong to just use her – not just for you – but for her, as well.* I think you have to face the fact that your future here

will be accompanied, all the way, by this miracle worker – who is not even aware that she has said anything unusual at all. That is obviously to protect this precious soul; she could destroy her gifts, through pride, if she did know. I think you just have to do as much as you can, yourself, and, if God wills, then he will direct Josephine to intervene, when and where, He decides.

“However, she has given us – me, as well as you – another weapon in our arsenal to fight against the horrors of what is in store for both of us.

“Now let us be perfectly clear with each other my Lady. I intend to fight with every weapon I have against this horrendous instruction; I believe it is wrong, totally wrong and, yes, we are obliged to obey the Holy Father... Sister Josephine is right; *it is now all about authority*.

“But we only have to obey when the pope is asking us something that is in line with what has been taught before: we are never obliged to obey something that is, not only wrong, but untrue, and therefore, is both sinful, and dangerous, to the whole Church.

“I was shaken as never before when this pope abrogated all the work of the great Pope St. Pius 5<sup>th</sup>; I couldn’t believe it. Has any pope ever done that before? I can’t think of one. This is taking away from us *our rightful inheritance*: our share of the ‘Common Good’.

“That is very important, as to safeguard the Common Good, **IS THE ONLY JUSTIFICATION OF AUTHORITY** – the Common Good that is due to us by virtue of our Baptism. That is the whole reason, Our Lord Jesus Christ, created the role of Peter – the

Rock – to protect THEN, and FOR EVER, our Common Good.

“Please remember this, my Lady: Our Common Good includes all those precious things such as our Doctrines, written by our great early Church Fathers, our saints, our glorious martyrs – who died in the arena, torn apart by wild beasts, to protect what was precious in our FAITH; and that includes our RIGHT to the Liturgy that is more than 1,200 years old, and is based on what was even older. Liturgical scholars declare that segments, even whole prayers, we actually use in the Latin Mass, can be found, written in Greek, in the catacombs.

“Let me tell you, in confidence, my Lady. When I received this instruction from the Papal Nuncio, I wanted to flee; to apply for the Missions and go to a remote place where the Vatican would have no idea what I was doing. In other words: to act like a coward and just run away. Then I stopped panicking and realised that, if God had seen fit to raise me to this extraordinary position I hold, then it must be for a purpose and that purpose was not for fleeing as soon as the way became difficult.”

The Abbess leaned forward. “Your Grace, I thank God for all that you have just said. I don’t feel so terribly isolated now. Even though you will go elsewhere soon – I know you must have a busy schedule – but I now know what you think and are prepared to fight as we are here; and fight we will, no matter where it takes us.” She began to tremble. “But, Your Grace, we must be on our guard that our resistance doesn’t take us *out of the*

*church! That is our greatest danger.* It is what happened to Martin Luther.”

The archbishop agreed. He turned over another page in his notebook. “My Lady, now getting back to the practicalities of the next three days. Is there anything you could particularly do to keep the big community busy for three days, out of the Farm Work area?” The Abbess looked away, thinking aloud.

“Yes, there is. I think it could be a good time to thoroughly clean and restore that block of rooms where Old John lived – God rest his soul. We won’t touch his room: the police have the keys of that room, but we have all the rest.”

She stopped and closed her eyes.

“I’ve just thought of something, Your Grace. Tomorrow, in the afternoon, could we take a time to assemble the whole community in the Chapter Room and explain the whole situation to the community, that we have spoken of in this room today? They, know, of course, of the document, ‘Traditionis Custodes’ but I think I’m right in thinking they never, in a million years, thought it would affect them.”

“That’s a good idea, my Lady. What do you think of inviting the priests from the Shrine to attend as well? I think we need a show of numbers of those who will resist.”

“It’s a good idea. I’ll ring Father Joyceson as soon as we finish here....”

The archbishop’s phone rang loudly. He apologized and then said “Oh, it’s the police ... Yes, Superintendent ... Yes, I’m with the Abbess at the

moment ... Yes, certainly, I'm sure it will be fine for the funeral firm to come and take the 'body' of Jacob Bloom. I'm sure the nuns will be relieved he's gone.... Yes, well, you clean out John's room and take from it what you need in your investigation, but when you're finished, just make sure you leave the keys - The abbess would agree with that - we'll repair that wall...." He looked up, and the Abbess nodded, her agreement vehemently ... "Well, no, that's not right; it's thanks to *you, superintendent*, that will be, now, one part, at least, of the puzzle cleared up. I thank you personally and the Abbess here thanks you as well."

As he finished the call, the abbess said softly, "Thank God for that at least. That room now, is 'creepy'; I'll be certainly glad when the body's gone.

"Now about tomorrow, Your Grace, I want, not only the community and the priests from the Shrine, but the Police as well; I want the Inspector to be sitting next to me.... It's important for the poor man...." The archbishop nodded his understanding.

**F**or the first of the two days of noise, the nuns were glad the waking bell went so early. By rising at 4.00am, they had three hours of quiet to chant the Offices of Matins and Lauds and were into Prime, when the first of the trucks began to arrive. Many of the community peeped out the side windows as they walked to breakfast. They could see many men with trucks and machinery being unloaded with machines, they had never seen before, near the Dam. During breakfast, the Abbess knocked on the table to indicate that the Reading be discontinued as the noise of the machines, so close to the wall of the Refectory made it difficult to hear anything at all.

The community were in the third day of their fast for the souls of the deceased, so breakfast didn't take long and soon they fled to the Chapter Room which was on the other side of the large building.

It was in the Chapter Room that the Abbess addressed her community each day and explained any

changes, or news that was relevant to their lives and their community.

This day, the Abbess began by welcoming back to them Sister Mary Isidore their precious Farm Manager. Many sisters actually clapped. Isidore was a popular figure in their monastery.

She then explained clearly what the men were attempting to do to make their Dam completely safe so that the situations they had all faced, would never occur again. She also explained the large group of men who were working clearing a new pathway down to the pool at the base of the waterfall. No doubt, she joked, the men would deafen them with their wretched chainsaws but there was one little blessing: the agony, wouldn't last long!

She then indicated that she would take any sensible questions concerning each activity, or issue, that they wished to raise.

Sister Mary Didacus raised her hand.

“Yes, Sister Didacus.”

“My Lady, certain large plant beds need watering each day. Is it possible that a couple of us could pop out and turn the sprinklers on?”

“That’s a Sensible suggestion.” The Abbess scanned the room looking for the nun in charge. “Sister Isidore, this is your province; what can be done?” Isidore stood up. “I’m sorry, my Lady, I forgot to notify Sister Didacus. I did that earlier when I had to see to the milking cows. But while we’re on that subject, could I ask permission for Sisters, Didacus, Anne, Scholastica and Bede to leave the Chapter Room soon and we’ll go

quickly to do the milking. It is nowhere near where the workmen are working, so we won't get in their way."

"Of course, dear Sister. We need the milk, and the cows have to be milked. I agree it's nowhere near the workmen. When you are ready, just leave this room, please Sisters." She noticed the hand of the Novice Mistress.

"Yes, Sister Boniface?"

"My Lady, I was wondering if, when that path is cleared down to the pool - which I have heard could hold the remains of many children of God - whether we could make it a kind of Purgatory Pool and make little pilgrimages down there to pray for the souls of all those poor men and women."

"Truly, I never thought of that, dear Sister. It is a wonderful and inspiring, indeed beautiful, suggestion. When I have tried out the path and if it is reasonably safe, we'll do that.

"You will note I deliberately said, REASONABLY SAFE not fully, 100% safe, and that is as it should be. We are not precious little fragile blossoms that must be treated with the utmost care; we are healthy - very healthy - intelligent women who have worked hard before we came here, and even harder here. We can cope with a few difficulties.

"Now our special work today. We are going to scrub from top to bottom the block where poor John lived. Please do not enter or touch John's room: the police are not finished with it yet.

"We will make that building sparkling-clean, then as we have a lot of paint left over from other jobs - it's

all in different colours, but that doesn't matter – so we'll paint the rooms with whatever colour we have. We'll call that block, 'Subiaco'.

"Now to practicalities – *off you go milkers; we'll catch up with you later* – now for the cleaners: go to your rooms and if you have any old, worn habits, aprons, and so on, please use them. I don't want you to spoil your good habits you are wearing now: to do that would be a sin against our vow of poverty.

"Sister Lucy and Sister John Baptist, I place you both in charge of restoring the Subiaco Block. I look forward to seeing the result.

"God bless you my sisters, and may we spend this day that God has given to us, happy in the service of our beloved Lord." The Abbess bowed to her community and left the room.

ack in her office, the Abbess looked at Munchin. “Well, Sister Munchin, tell me the worst. What am I forced to read today?”

“It’s relatively light, my Lady. Most of the easy ones I can do with Sister Josephine – I’ll dictate to her; she can type very quickly, so the reports won’t take much time. But I’m sorry, there is one from the Papal Nuncio forwarded from Rome. I’ve left that one on the top on your desk.”

The Abbess closed her eyes. She was dreading this letter; she knew it would come after the archbishop had spoken of the matter ... she knew it then was inevitable.

As she slowly used her paper knife to open the letter and extract the thick, beautiful note paper, her mind was trying to resolve a problem. She was pondering the exact ‘status’ of the Nuncio; was the title at the same rank of promotion – as archbishop Wilkinson? No, that couldn’t be right; the Nuncio must be higher, therefore more powerful. True, he was only an archbishop, but as in the case of ordinary archbishops, they are in charge

of only one Diocese while the Papal Nuncio, was in charge of all the Dioceses in the country. Obviously, he MUST have more clout with Rome.

She realised she had little knowledge of clerical appointments and their powers. She would have delighted in asking Josephine that question, but desisted, remembering what the good archbishop had warned her in regard to that nun.

As her two secretaries worked on the easy enquiries and everyday details in the correspondence, the Abbess was marshalling her thoughts in line with recent developments. She knew of one Congregation which had been erected simply to ensure that the ancient liturgy was maintained. After the Motu Proprio, 'Traditionis Custodes', had been published, that particular Congregation had gone to Rome and had received an assurance from the pope that they could continue, *as they had been constituted for that very purpose*.

With the report of that success, the word had spread that all those new Institutes and Congregations, which used the ancient Liturgy, *that were commenced for that very purpose*, would be safe.

Well, she pondered, what about our Congregation? Where did it stand? Was it part of the Benedictine Federation? No, it wasn't! She had not officially applied for it to belong; nor had she been ever invited to do so. Had her monastery specifically been constituted to have the Latin Liturgy? Well, not really on paper; it had just been taken for granted.

As she considered these points, the ground seemed to shift under her feet. She didn't feel they had any

room at all, to manoeuvre; none of these things had seemed necessary in the beginning as all the churches then only had the Latin Liturgy.

No, wait a minute! that wasn't true!

The Abbess suddenly realised it was only the Hermit Shrine that had the Latin liturgy; nearly all the other churches had the vernacular liturgy – the New Mass – which had become law in 1969.

She, herself, was the problem. She had known only that Shrine, and the Liturgy used there. She had heard of other liturgies in English but had dismissed them, in her ignorance, thinking the two forms would just continue indefinitely after John Paul II – with the 'Celebret' to say the old Mass – then Benedict XVI's great *Motu Proprio*, 'Summorum Pontificum.'

But now they were screaming about Vat II Council, and the demands it made for the implementation of the new Mass in the vernacular. The Council fathers had demanded it.

*But that was not true!*

Both she and Sister Mary Gertrude had spoken of this enough.

They were both in accord with the suggestions that the Readings from Scripture should be in the vernacular – that made it easier for both Religious and lay people to learn, and to love, Holy Scripture.

She forced herself to read, slowly, the Nuncio's letter. It was flowery and full of expressions which caused her to wrinkle her nose in distaste, but she gasped when she read, silently, the implied threat to their very existence.

In her shock she called out: “Munchin! Josephine! Listen and tell me what to do!” As they looked up, she then read aloud:

‘I am sure your work in the Monastery is very fine indeed. However, to be in line with the Church and to be an active and living member of Christ’s body – which is the Church – it is my duty to inform you that all Latin Liturgies and prayers must cease in your community FROM THE 15<sup>TH</sup> OF THE NEXT MONTH. ENGLISH MUST BE THE LANGUAGE IN ALL YOUR LITURGICAL OFFICES AND THE HOLY MASS FROM THAT DATE’.

The letter went on: ‘That is the Holy Father’s demand as the means needed to bring your community into line with the modern Church. I’m sure you, as you have always been, will be an obedient and humble instrument of God’s Will in this matter. A CANONICAL INSPECTION WILL BE ORGANIZED FOR A DATE SOON AFTER THE 15<sup>th</sup> OF THE MONTH.’

There was a deadly silence when the Abbess stopped speaking. For once, Sister Munchin was silent. However, she was the first to recover.

“Before I entered, my Lady, I belonged to a gun club. I’m a good shot. Do you want me to travel to the Papal Nuncio and shoot him? I could be there and back in one day.”

Josephine was gasping. “But, why, my Lady? What have we done wrong?”

“What we have done wrong, my dear child, is that we have been weak and silent in the face of increasing evil.... I think I have been most negligent, IN FACT, I

WAS BLIND to the reality of what was happening in the Church. I honestly don't know how to respond."

Munchin had a suggestion: "I think I would write as follows, my Lady, 'OR ELSE?' At least we'd then know what we were facing." The abbess nodded at that sensible suggestion.

"Could you consult our archbishop Wilkinson?" suggested Josephine.

"Yes, I'll certainly do that, Sister". She smiled crookedly. "Munchin, your suggestion re shooting is duly noted, but I don't think it would work; they'd only send another Nuncio."

"But if we kept up the assassinations, my Lady, they'd give up eventually; they'd have to resort to just letters, and they are so easy to mislay, aren't they?" The Abbess laughed gently.

"Thank God for you, Munchin. You make me laugh when there is nothing whatsoever to laugh at. It saves me from hysterics."

Josephine was deeply distressed. "But, my Lady, what would they do to us if we refused?"

"Well not having been in such a situation before, I have to guess, but I think they would replace me and put in a sister from a modern congregation. And, unfortunately, I suspect they would not permit the priests from the Hermit Shrine to offer Masses for us, so they would, most probably, install a priest who would not be able to read Latin to ensure that the Liturgy would have to be changed into English.

"And. Munchin, there is no need to write the letter with, 'or else'. In the letter, it is made quite clear.

Despite the flowery language, the consequences of not obeying are shown clearly. We are being told to obey or else; the canonical inspection would follow very quickly after the due date."

"They would replace you?" asked Josephine again, speaking as if she was coming from a long way away. "No, that *cannot* happen; IT MUST NOT HAPPEN!" She began to sway on her feet, her eyes turned upward, and she started to fall – Munchin, trying desperately to catch her, but failing ... the young nun hit the floor. She was in a dead faint.

"Munchin, get Raphael! Quickly! This one is precious in the sight of God. I completely forget how fragile she is."

While Munchin was absent, the Abbess rang the archbishop and asked if it were at all possible, could he come to see her; she had heard from Rome.

Both Raphael and the archbishop arrived at the same time. The abbess, silently, handed the letter from Rome to the prelate and went to Raphael. This fragile young nun was her responsibility; Rome could wait; it was nothing compared to the treasure that God had given into her hands.

Raphael sat on the floor and took the head of the young nun onto her lap. She affixed the oxygen meter on the small fingers and with the help of Munchin was taking the Blood Pressure. Josephine was breathing raggedly but was well and truly conscious again. Raphael was feeding her small sips of water; gradually the breathing began to steady. The abbess helped lift the nun to her feet again and then took her

out to the waiting room of the office. "Sister Raphael, I want you to take Sister Josephine, when she has recovered a little, to the chapel and let her sit in her own pew." She turned to the sick nun. "Sister Josephine, I want you to pray for us; for me in particular, that I shall be guided what to do in this situation. Will you do that for me?"

"Yes, my lady", whispered Josephine.

The abbess went back to her office and the archbishop.

## XXVI

**T**he archbishop spoke first. “My Lady, I knew you would have received this letter; the priests down at the Shrine received theirs last Friday. They conducted a survey of their parishioners – they have 3,000 people in their very large parish – and less than 4% wanted the change to an English mass with the priest facing them. They actually DEMANDED that the Mass should be left alone. I might add that at the Shrine, as you would know, they use English when reading the Epistle and Gospel. But that is as far as the priests dare go. They said there would be a riot if they tried to implement the completely new form of the Mass – in its entirety.

“The people’s one united cry was that it had produced the Hermit Father, hadn’t it? Then why would anyone want to change it?”

“Your Grace, thank you for that heartening news. I think I have been hiding my head in the sand. I have prepared nothing to save my poor community from the

ravages of these barbarians whom, I believe, have simply lost the Faith.

“I have been negligent. I should have tried to get affiliation with the whole Benedictine Federation: there are many different Congregations of Benedictines who are under the Benedictine Abbot General’s umbrella....”

The archbishop held up his hand. “Just stop, my Lady. You have been working like a slave for the last 25 years creating this magnificent monastery. It is false humility not to see and admit the good you have done. Yes, it probably would have been better had you done this, or done that, but we have to deal with the NOW. This is what we must tackle, together.

“Now, my first question: Are you on good terms with your own local bishop. I believe it is His excellency, Leo Clark; I’ve met him at conferences, and he seems a reasonable man, not young, but not old either.”

“Yes, Your Grace, he has paid a visit to us each year on his tour of his diocese. He always is charming and says nice things about us – at least to my face, anyhow. He is interested in our farm work and always spends a lot of time in the Farm Area. He’s not really interested in Liturgy – I could be wrong about that, but when I have tried to speak of liturgical things, he quickly changes to a prosaic, more common topic of conversation.”

“Has he ever offered Sung Masses, or even Solemn Masses for you here?

“Well, yes, of course, he has to, whenever we have Receptions of Novices, or First Vows, and of course for

our big one: Final Vows.” She shuffled a little in her seat. “Your Grace, I might be wrong, but I don’t think he likes those big liturgies. He has arranged – for the last few years – to avoid all but ‘Final Vows’ liturgies, by delegating them to Monsignor Joyceson, our own precious link to the Father.

“I could be wrong, as I said, but I don’t think he is very interested in the Liturgy at all. Therefore, I hold out little hope that he would be even interested in defending our use of the old Latin liturgy.”

The archbishop looked very stern. “My Lady, remember we have an appointment here tomorrow afternoon with the whole community and with the priests from the Shrine. I’ve informed the priests, and they will all be present.

“Now I want you to trust me. Write a short email to Bishop Clark asking him to be present tomorrow as well; stress that it is urgent and concerns information from the Papal Nuncio, which will affect him as well as you and your community. Stress your dependence on him to advise you what you should do in the present situation.”

“Do you think he will come, Your Grace? And do you think he will side with us?”

“Yes, he will come as I shall send another email telling him I *EXPECT* to see him there, and NO, I do not think he will side with us at all. However, it is necessary to put him on the spot. We can’t do anything until we know where the local Ordinary stands on the matter.”

“Yes, that makes complete sense to me.” She picked up her notebook from her desk. “Now, Your Grace, how is the work going? You told me the Dam is finished and the work on the track down to the pool is underway. Can you tell me how they are going with the path?”

The archbishop relaxed. “Thank God we can talk of something ordinary and normal, for a change. Yes, the Dam is great; you’ll have no more problems there I should think, Now the track, or path: some parts were very difficult with the removal of many large trees in the process, but the majority of the hard work is now over. The underwater experts were able to get down and have explored the pool and, yes, it is very, very, deep and at its lowest part there are a heap of human bones. It would be virtually impossible to get them out, but Sister Margaret Mary and old John were close to the top and have been collected, put into canvas ‘body bags’ and are ready to go to the Funeral parlours. I believe, from what you said, the nun’s body will be flown to the other side of the country.

“If you give me the details of that, the police will take it from there and will make all the arrangements with the funeral people and they, in turn, would then send the body to the poor soul’s mother.” The Abbess quickly wrote the details for the archbishop and gave him all the names and addresses that were given to her. She made clear how grateful she was in having all that taken from her mind.

“We will have a proper Requiem Mass for the poor nun when all the strangers have left the property. I’ll get

Mgr. Joyceson to offer it, as our little gift; may God have mercy on that poor tortured soul.”

“What about old John? I think he deserves a Mass, doesn’t he?”

“Thank you, your Grace, for remembering our dear old John. I didn’t think it fitting that we should have a Mass for him, seeing as he was a multiple murderer, but I think all the dreadful things he did, were done through his total ignorance, and his utter simplicity and obedience, to his Master: he was, really, a modern-day slave.

“I’d feel unsure if we had a Requiem; I think we can leave it to the sisters to pray privately for the beloved old man.”

She then remembered to tell the archbishop of the desire of the community to make the pool a place of pilgrimage and they wanted to call it, the “Purgatory Pool”. She was delighted to receive his full approval of the plan.

Before they left the office, the Abbess asked the archbishop to remind Inspector Smart about the importance – for his own squad – of the two of them: Abbess and Police Inspector – sitting together at the meeting. She suggested that the important meeting with the bishop, might be a suitable time to put that in place. They settled on 2.00pm on the following day as the time to meet. The archbishop asked her if she would like to walk down the new track as far as it was safe to do so.

The abbess jumped at the chance and asked the prelate to go on ahead; she would bring Sister Mary Josephine. It would be a little break for that frail young

nun. She'd fetch her from the chapel and met up with him - at the beginning of the path - unless something turned up and she couldn't be there.

Ten minutes later the Abbess had her arm linked with Josephine and there being no sign of the archbishop, they walked, slowly and carefully, down the new track. The Abbess was loud in her praise of the way the steps had been made by using the wood that had been cut down, then the round trunks had been sawn flat on one side which then became the 'stepping part'. These logs were placed horizontally at intervals of three to four feet and the 'bushman's steps' - as they were called - proved ideal for the purpose.

The path was cut in a zig zag manner which was a way of coping with the sharp descent and making it safe. Neither the Abbess nor Josephine had any difficulty in walking all the way down to the Lower Pool. They saw the canvas bags containing the two bodies and stood near them for a little while praying for the departed souls quietly.

The Abbess came from a long line of hard-working people so, seeing the pride which the men had put into their work, was lavish in her praise of their skill and their way of solving an enormous problem for them. She and Josephine then stood on the side of the pool for a few moments looking deeply into the turbulent waters. What a gruesome and horrific thing to find in their own backyard! An idea began to simmer in her brain as to what they could do about that.

She then shook hands with the workmen and began the climb back up the path. This was certainly not as

easy as going down was, but it was manageable, so that was enough.

As they came to the top, the Abbess gave Josephine a little shake and smiling, said, “Well, you can easily see who is not young anymore, and that’s me! I am puffing like an old steam train, but you look as if you have just been for a walk in the park. Let’s get back; I have to see what the sisters have done to Subiaco; I can only hope the paint is on the walls and not on them, or their clothes.” As they walked back to the monastery building, the Abbess told Josephine that the local Bishop would be attending a special meeting tomorrow afternoon to discuss the future with them. It should be very interesting. She suggested they pray that it may go as God intended.

She then sent Josephine to the Subiaco block and returned to her office. Poor Munchin was still there and still working on reports, reports, reports. She greeted the Abbess with a complaint. “Now I want you to know something, my Lady. If there are reports to write in Heaven, I’ll ask – respectfully of course – that I may receive permission to try the other place, instead.” The Abbess laughed, then told Munchin of the path and then spoke of Sister Josephine.

“She worries me so, Munchin. She has received great mystic gifts, I know, but at what cost! She is so frail I’m frightened for her; in many ways she’s like the helplessness of a little child. I really was unaware of the extent of her frailty before.”

She sighed and wearily picked up the first report; she had to read the lot and affix her signature to each

one - that would take an hour at least. She stifled a complaint and began to read.

**T**he next day the Diocesan Bishop arrived early for the meeting. He had been expecting a lavish lunch only to find that it was day six of their eight day fast for the deceased nun and old John.

He pretended to admire the nuns for their piety, but the Abbess could tell he was furious. She decided to take him for a little walk down the new path to the Purgatory Pool. He was curious to know the history of the pool and could hardly believe the gruesome use made of it by the previous owner of the mansion. He attempted to be funny and asked the Abbess if she was sure that the bodies were not sisters that she didn't like, so had used it to get rid of them in a convenient killing machine right in her own backyard. His words were cruel and simply nasty. He continued in his 'unfunny' allusions to her method of dealing with unsuitable nuns, so much that the Abbess decided enough, was quite enough. They were halfway down the steep path. The Abbess let him go on ahead and stood still. She

then spoke from three steps higher than he was. “I’m sorry, your excellency, but I don’t have much time. I’ll leave you to see the Pool and just remind you that the meeting is in the Chapter Room; it will begin at 2.00pm. Thank you.” She then turned and hurried back up the path to the safety of her office.

Sister Munchin then informed her that the Superintendent of Police and Inspector Smart were waiting in the Chapter Room with His Grace, archbishop Wilkinson.

“Munchin, make sure I have all the notes I need for this meeting. God alone knows what the local Bishop will be like. I think he is seething with anger at the moment: no big lunch and then to be left half-way down a mountain side, after sharp words from me! Well, it could certainly be a challenging meeting.

“I love that word, ‘challenging’, Munchin: that’s a polite way of saying it could be absolutely catastrophic. Are we ready? Right!” She took the big microphone and spoke to the whole community.

“Sisters, I want every one of you – except those in the Infirmary – to be in the Chapter Room by 2.00pm. I suggest you need to take note pads with you. I believe it is important for you to take notes.

“The police are present and so is our Local Bishop, His Excellency Leo Clark, and all the priests from the Shrine are there as well. This is an important meeting, my sisters, possibly the most important we will ever have, as it could determine – to a large degree – our future lives in this monastery. I shall be there with my two secretaries to take notes.

“Please, my sisters, pray that God’s Will may be done in this meeting: our whole future could well depend on it. Thank you.”

She stood up. “Come with me Munchin, into the arena. Josephine will already be in the Chapter Room.”

Arriving at the large room, the Abbess paused to see how it had all been arranged. She found the VIPs were sitting in a row across the top of the room. There was a space left at the Abbatial Chair for the Abbess and she was amused to see that, once seated, she would be at least one foot higher than Bishop Clark. The archbishop was waiting for her at the door. She spoke quickly to him to ask him to welcome the guests, police and the bishop to the meeting. She told the Prelate she would speak first, then hand it over to him. He nodded. He had chosen a seat to the extreme right of the abbess; in that way, he could see if she wanted him, or needed to speak to him, as he could then see her face from that angle.

As she looked around the room, she saw that it appeared that all nuns were present, and noted with surprise, that the police squad – the special murder squad of Inspector Smart – were standing across the back of the room. Of the VIPs, the only one who looked uneasy was the police inspector; and well he might – she thought – he would have no idea in the world what would happen at this meeting and would be worrying that he wouldn’t understand anything that was said, either.

The Abbess had put on her great cowl, her Pectoral Cross and used her Crozier as her staff, to walk slowly

to her chair. Her secretaries were sitting on slightly lower chairs behind the throne. She stood tall and erect.

She looked magnificent, majestic, and unconquerable.

There was complete silence. The Abbess then spoke. "Good afternoon my sisters in Christ. Firstly, I wish to thank the gracious, and learned, Archbishop, His Grace, Edward Wilkinson, who has been a tower of strength to us over the past week. I have asked His Grace to welcome all the other great and important people who have made time to be here this afternoon – the police, especially, who have been magnificent and I, personally, want to thank Inspector Smart for his invaluable work; we will never forget that."

The nuns burst out clapping – at the instigation of Munchin – while the Inspector turned a beetroot red.

"I'll now hand over to His Grace the Archbishop who has been so good to us that we will never be able to repay him for what he has done". The archbishop took the microphone and welcomed the Bishop, Leo Clark, who nodded in a surly manner, then the wonderful priests from the Hermit Shrine; he also paid tribute to the Abbess for her inspirational handling of all the difficulties over the past week; he also paid tribute to her endless life of toil, in keeping this huge monastery alive and flourishing, with 15 candidates still waiting to enter. He then honed-in on the singular nature of this monastery.

"This monastery already is one of the largest in this country now having 41 nuns; most of the few remaining monasteries have only a handful left, while the active

Orders are nearly finished. They seem to have lost all understanding of what exactly Religious Life is about, in their mad desire to be ‘modern’.

“Indeed, the state of Religious Life in this country is near complete collapse, so it was a gigantic relief, and a spiritual joy, for me, to come to a thriving and happy Religious Community, secure in their belief – in their Faith; they are united as one, in their love of their precious, glorious Master, Jesus Christ.

“I have visited each and every section of this establishment and I found nothing but fervent, contented, hard-working nuns, secure and united in their vocation which is firmly directed to sanctity. And, perhaps most wondrous of all: united in their love of their Lady Abbess.”

There was another burst of clapping, this time utterly spontaneous. The archbishop paused then continued.

“But now we must come to the reason for this remarkable meeting. As you understand well, sisters, you use the ancient Latin form for the liturgy of the Mass, using the 1962 edition of the Roman Missal, and the Latin Divine Office and you use Latin in most of your prayers. Those prayers and practices have been sanctified by nearly 1200 years of unbroken, dearly loved, continued usage. It could be even much older than that. Indeed, many scholars argue that our Liturgy goes right back to the beginnings of the Church as some of the prayers we actually use today, were used – in the Greek language – in the catacombs.

“In our day, the older Liturgy and the language of Latin was universally associated with the Catholic Liturgy – until 1969.

“That was the year when the reigning pope, Pope Paul 6<sup>th</sup> issued a new liturgy which was to be said in the vernacular. We were then informed that this was decreed by the Second Vatican Council. That was not quite correct; in fact, you could say it was a bare-faced lie.

“The Council – and its aftermath – caused a great deal of misunderstanding and, indeed, straight-out lies and deception.

“In the years immediately following the Council, *when the documents were not even available in many countries including this one*, the false belief that the Council wanted everything changed and all old beliefs and practices to be jettisoned, was introduced.

“That ushered in the frightful period when most communion rails were ripped out of Churches, priceless statues of saints and of Christ and His Precious mother Mary, were torn down and thrown onto rubbish heaps. It was like a whirlwind which was energised, I personally believe, by Satan himself.

“In common language, the Church was ‘gutted’. All the beauty of the churches... both exterior and interior were gone. We were left with bare, ugly churches – not, ‘Churches’ in my opinion – but meeting halls; with music that was, in the main, moronic, and in general, an era when all that was beautiful was torn away.

“After this, they then attacked the liturgy.

“It was claimed that everything *old* must make way for the *new*. Who demanded that? Vat II Council certainly did not! The cry went up for the new Mass in the vernacular *that the Council demanded*.

“To say that, IS A COMPLETE LIE. The Council never ONCE said a new vernacular mass had to be manufactured; instead, it demanded that the Mass of St Pius 5<sup>th</sup> – the ancient Latin mass – be even more protected. In the document on the Liturgy, ‘*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, we read the Council Church Fathers demanded that Latin be retained; they emphasized that Gregorian Chant be made the norm in all churches.

“Were any changes in the Liturgy recommended? Yes, there were.

“The Council suggested that the Scripture Readings be in the language of the people i.e., in the language of every nationality and there were a few changes to the classifications – very sensible changes – in the ranking of feasts – and of Masses, but as they would only be of interest and significance to priests, they did not cause angst to the ordinary good, Catholic faithful ... but THAT WAS ALL!

“Let me say this: *anyone, cleric or lay, who says that what I have said is wrong, is a MORON, AN IDIOT AND A TOTALLY IGNORANT tool of Satan. I do not exempt anyone from those remarks – layman, cleric, bishop or pope.*”

The local bishop stood up. “So, you would then consider the new vernacular Mass invalid?”

The archbishop was ready for him and charged into speech: “I have never denied the validity of the new

Mass said in English; I said it myself for several years and they were, I believe, fervent, reverent valid Masses. I defy anyone to say they were not.

“However, I began to study the Council Documents more closely and discovered the errors in what, so called, ‘Experts,’ were saying. I found that they were often contradicting completely the council documents they were supposedly following. I gradually concluded that *I was safer, and surer of not offending God, by returning to the ancient Liturgy*, which I then did. So, I rejoiced when Pope St. John Paul II gave every priest, in the West, the choice of which Mass they could use – by giving them the ‘Celebret’; then the good Pope Benedict XVI went further. By confirming this law, Pope Benedict, issuing the Motu Proprio, ‘Summorum Pontificum,’ consolidated firmly the old Latin Rite.

“In fact, I actually came to believe exactly what that remarkable archbishop, Marcel Lefebvre said about the new Mass, all those years ago: ‘*It is valid, but it is dangerous.*’ How true that statement was!

“Now, that was just the preliminary to what I have to say. I shall speak on this a little later. Now, I want you now to hear a letter from the Papal Nuncio of this country to your abbess. She has suffered with this terrible knowledge, for days now. My Lady, would you please read the document you received, slowly and carefully, so that every sister understands the grim situation you and they are all now facing.”

The archbishop handed the microphone to the Abbess and sat down quietly in the front row.

The Lady Abbess stood erect with her Crozier and Munchin held the relevant document so the Abbess could read it.

She read slowly and clearly. When the community heard the news and the fearful deadline they had to reach, they gasped and began to shout in anger, raising their voices.

Some actually stood waving their fists. The most audible shouts were: 'How dare they?'; 'What shall we do?'; 'These people are evil' ... 'The hermit Father used it, and he was a saint' ... 'Pope St John Paul II gave it back to us'...

... 'Has Martin Luther come back from the dead?'

## XXVIII

he Abbess stood silently amid the uproar. **T**hen she raised her hand; the noise immediately ceased. “I shall now ask His Excellency, Bishop Clark, who is our immediate superior, to help us to continue as we are, and not to let the authorities in Rome destroy all that had been raised up here to glorify God.” She stopped to draw breath. “Surely,” she argued, “if the authorities in Rome had not been pleased with the nuns’ work, and with mine, in particular, they would not have raised this monastery to the status of an ABBEY and made me an Abbess. His Eminence, the late, great Cardinal McViver, performed the glorious ceremony of installation where I was given a Pectoral cross and a Crozier.

“I ask you; I beg you, Your Excellency, to help us in this unforeseen disaster we now find ourselves in.” She sat down.

## XXVIX

**T**he bishop stood up. He really was totally indifferent as to which version of the Liturgy they used; he was not really interested in either. But how could he get out of this? The Papal Nuncio has ordered it.

He was groping for an idea then thought of a way out. He realised *it might be safer for him* to just *delay any final decision*: there were still some weeks to pass before the stated deadline. He could take his holidays now and the poor dope who fills in for him, could deal with the burden. Yes, that would do, and do nicely.

“Thank you, my Lady. Now, you know, I am sympathetic to your cause. You have known no other liturgy than the old form in this monastery and it hasn’t hindered your growth in any way. You have nearly four weeks before the stated deadline, so I can only suggest that you pursue every avenue you can think of, to achieve the liturgy you desire. I shall try to see what I can do with the Papal Nuncio and the other bishops. However, I would be failing in my duty if I did not point

out to you, that if by the 15th of the next month, there has been no effort to comply with the directive from Rome, then I'm sorry, but I'll have to remove you as Abbess and replace you with a temporary Superior whom I shall send from a modern Congregation."

He was interrupted by a shattering scream, of 'NO,' from Sister Josephine. She screamed again, and again, the one word: 'NO!'

NO! NO! NO! NO!"

The nuns and visitors were seriously alarmed, thinking the nun had gone mad. However, as they saw the room gradually darken, then - in that very large area - soon there was only the young nun standing, bathed in a shining, brilliant light, amid the whole cloud of darkness. The nun's head was tilted upward, and she was - to the utter terrified, bewilderment of the assembly - quite suddenly, *radiantly beautiful*. It appeared as if Heaven itself had opened. The Sisters present began to weep, in awe, at the beauty.

The nun's lips were moving, but no sound was heard and then suddenly, as though a switch had been turned on within her, her voice, beautiful, clear, strong and vibrant rang out:

"NO, YOU WILL NOT GO, MY LADY, NOR WILL A STRANGER BE SENT TO REPLACE YOU OVER THIS AFFAIR...."

"Just a minute..." began Bishop Clark. The nun's eyes moved slightly in the bishop's direction. "Your Excellency, remember,

"T. S: *double homicide and fraudulent election*; remember T. S. - REMEMBER! No sin is ever

forgotten, unless there is heartfelt repentance, none at all. He is waiting for you; His name will be on your headstone, very soon ... in fact, very, very, soon ... now!"

Her eyes came back again to her Abbess.

"My Lady, THE SEE WILL BE VACATED; A FITTING REPLACEMENT WILL BE MADE WHICH WILL SURPRISE AND DELIGHT YOU ... but ... my very dear Lady, you have so much to do ... so much to do ... *and YOU HAVE SO LITTLE TIME* ... I'm so sorry, my dearest *Lady*, so little ... time ... ine ... ine ... ne"

Josephine closed her eyes. She was suddenly back, aware of where she was. She began crying, helplessly, in Munchin's strong arms. The Abbess handed her crozier to the next in line – it was the Inspector – and took the innocent young mystic into her arms and soothed her gently while she held her tightly.... She lifted her head and saw that the darkness had lifted; the room was as before.

But, not quite, as before. Bishop Clark was kneeling on the floor his back to the crowd and was crying, loudly – in huge heart-rending sobbing – pounding his chest in despair.

When he noticed the light was back in the room, he leapt to his feet and ran from the crowd. His car was obviously parked close to their enclosure fence; they all heard it being revved violently and driven away at great speed.

The Abbess handed Josephine back to Munchin, asked her quietly to take the distraught young nun back to their office, then picked up the microphone which had fallen.

She waited a minute until Munchin and Josephine were gone from the room, then spoke to the gathering. "My sisters. I'm sorry you witnessed that, in a way, and also glad you did, as well. Only the archbishop, Sister Munchin and I, knew of the mystic gifts that this child of God had received. I didn't even confide in my dear associate and second in charge, Sister Mary Gertrude. I was afraid to do so, as such gifts can be so misunderstood and so frightening.

"We read of these gifts, especially among those who give their lives to Christ, but they are rare indeed. I was the greatest unbeliever; I tried to explain Sister's gifts away, but the archbishop gave her specific tests and then declared the gifts have to be from God. That is the reason I took Sister Josephine from the Cleaning, and put her in my office as a secretary, to my main secretary, Sister Mary Munchin.

"It is stupid, and indicates our little faith, to be surprised at these gifts from God. We here, in Burnside, who have lived with the memory of the miracle priest - our beloved, Hermit Priest - we became so used to The Father's gifts that we just took them for granted.

"Well, we now have our own surprising recipient of such mystic gifts. I want now to issue three serious and very important statements to you:

1. "I order you, under obedience, not to ask Sister Josephine any questions concerning yourself, or those dear to you. Sister is not, now, a type of 'Fortune Teller' you find at Fair Grounds.

2. “I order you: Do Not Shun her as if she had the plague. She is the same, happy, friendly, hard-working nun she has always been so don’t shun her. You wouldn’t shun her if she were suddenly deaf, or blind, or crippled. Is she different? Yes, she is, but each one of us is different. And don’t go to the other extreme and treat her as if she were the Queen of the Fairies. What I’m asking of you is this: *just be normal with her; treat her just as you would treat any other nun.*

3. “With this admonition we shall wrap up this meeting and I thank every single person present. I appreciate the giving of your time to be here. The last thing I wanted to say to my community was: I order you to never ever mention again even the initials you heard in reference to Bishop Clark. Every one of us, if we search our hearts honestly, will find we all have something we have done wrong, or caused harm to someone, or interfered in the plans of God, by our sinfulness.

“That is all, my sisters. I don’t have any quick and easy solutions to give you in relation to our problems, or the situation for us, here, in our home – in relation to Rome – with its demands. I assure you as soon as I do have, I shall inform you instantly. Every one of us is affected by this situation. I beg of you to keep praying that God will intervene to save us.... But before we go, I would like to add a very ‘homey’ comment on the issue.

“The word ‘Catholic’ means ‘Universal,’ so all over the entire world where the Catholic Church was, the language of the Liturgy – the Mass – was Latin.

“Now I don’t know if there are any Catholics in Timbuktu, but if there are, if I travelled there before 1969 ... THEN, as I cannot speak their language – whatever it is – I could still pray with them and worship with them as they had the only language I had – when it comes to our Faith. No one remains a stranger when the one language is used. Now, today, every language in the world is used, in the New Mass, so no one knows anybody, anymore. We are back again to being strangers.

“Now to conclude, I can only assure you, my dear sisters in Christ, I shall fight as never before, to save our Abbey. His Grace Edward Wilkinson had promised me he will do the same. I have also been assured that our wonderful priests of the Hermit’s Shrine are with us 100%, so we are not facing this persecution alone.

“God bless you and keep you safe my dearest children. We will get through this problem; I am sure now. God will not let us down.

“And now ... drum roll please! ... some really good news:

“OUR FAST IS NEARLY OVER!”

The room exploded with laughter.

The abbess looking for her crozier, having forgotten she had handed it to the Inspector and who was still holding it. She then remembered, and advancing on

him smiling, said: "I'm sorry, Inspector, no, you cannot have it. I must have it. It creates a good impression that I am in control of this place."

The man laughed and not only handed the crozier back but kissed the hand of this beautiful woman.

As the Abbess was walking from the room, two of the policewomen came and spoke to her. To her astonishment, they said they were interested in the Religious Life. They had observed this monastery during their time here and would like to have the chance of a trial - a 'live-in' period - if such a thing could be arranged.

The abbess gave them a card, from her inside pocket, with the monastery details on it and asked them to wait a few days then to give her a call and she would see what could be done.

She then excused herself and hurried back to her refuge: her office.

**A**s the Abbess was opening the door of her office, she heard Munchin say, “I’m sorry, Your Excellency, the abbess is not back yet.... Wait just a minute, please.” She turned swiftly to the Abbess. “My Lady, it is bishop Clark,” she then whispered, “he sounds almost out of his mind.” The Abbess nodded. “Just hold him up for a moment, let me get this off.” Munchin immediately took the crozier, then helped the Abbess to remove her cowl; she then transferred the call to her Superior.

“Your Excellency? The abbess speaking. Of course ... *Really? I am astonished!* ... Do you really think you should do that? ... ... Well, of course you can take that for granted ... Please listen to me quietly. No, I shall cut this call, unless you speak quietly ... *Quietly!* ... that’s better. Now speak slowly, so I don’t misunderstand you.

“Now, that’s a very serious step to take on the spur of the moment ... well that’s today; you could feel differently about it all tomorrow....

“Do I believe that God has spoken? Yes, in fact, I do, Excellency ... but that is such an extreme step. Excuse me, may I ask if you have any family - close family, I mean? No? I see. Yes, that does make a big difference. Well, no I’m certainly not annoyed, we are honoured that you should think of us in this situation. And yes, we certainly could do that. The sisters have been working on that block repainting it and cleaning it from top to bottom. Your Excellency they are only tiny rooms ... ... I see.

“Could you slip over here after Vespers, and we could talk about the whole affair? Good! May I speak to Archbishop Wilkinson about this matter; I rely on his advice very heavily? Thank you, I’ll be I touch with him. What? You have already sent in your letter to our own cardinal-archbishop of this archdiocese. I see.... That complicates matters ... Let’s leave it there and we can discuss all the problems connected with that when I see you later this afternoon. Thank you, Your Excellency.”

As she put down the phone, she said quicky to Munchin. “Quick Munchin, get me the archbishop. This is explosive!”

Five minutes later, the Abbess was speaking to archbishop Wilkinson. She had asked Munchin to listen very carefully as that would save her having to repeat the whole thing to her.

“I’m truly sorry, Your Grace, to call you again after all the time you spent here this afternoon, but as soon as I had arrived back in my office, I had a call from Bishop Clark.

“Well, you will find this hard to believe, I think, but His Excellency Leo Clark has informed me he has personally notified the Cardinal concerned, that he is resigning his See and that, on the doctor’s orders, was seeking to spend the last months of his life, living – wait for it – *in seclusion – with the Benedictine nuns at their monastery in his diocese. He explained to his superiors that he was informed by the doctors that he was dying and wanted to amend his shameful and sinful life before it was too late to do so.*”

“Since when has he been dying, do you really know?” asked the bewildered archbishop.

“No, I don’t know; and I don’t know if he is speaking the truth or not, but it is too much of a coincidence – this decision following the revelation this afternoon by Sister Josephine:

‘THE SEE WOULD BE SOON VACATED’ ... and the sudden decision to retire. And even more bewildering ... that he would think of spending the next period of his life with us here.”

“Did you agree to having him?”

“I had to think very quickly. I decided that I must, in charity, assume that he is speaking the truth and, as he has no family at all, if he is ill and dying, then, of course, we must take him in. So, yes, I did agree.”

There was silence on the line as the archbishop was absorbing the extraordinary information. “I see. Thank you, my Lady. What an extraordinary end to the day! Did you say you were going to contact me?”

“Yes, I did. I asked him if I might, and he said to do so. Have I done the right thing? Can a bishop just resign

when he feels like it? I admit I simply don't know. He is coming back here this afternoon after Vespers to discuss the arrangement with me. He is talking about moving right in. Should I demand he wait for a few days? I think I should. If he is really ill - and as he is not young, so he could well be - then I don't think it is unreasonable to request a letter from his doctor. That's a tricky one: what do you advise me to do about that one?"

"Yes, I would insist that he wait for a week before he enters your establishment; and that he does bring a letter from his doctor describing the type of illness he has. You do not have the facilities for any strange and terrible illnesses - such as require machines etc - nor do you have the trained personnel. You cannot let yourself be led into a situation where you have a full-time disaster on your hands.

"I commend your charity to that man; he won't be easy to care for either, *I think*, but I could be wrong, of course. If it is not too late when your interview is over, please let me know how it went and, if he is coming, just when that would be." The archbishop made one more request: "With all this drama with the bishop, don't let us forget the life and death struggle we are engaged in at the moment.

"My Lady, as you have obviously realised from what you have already said, all that has happened is the reaction to that young nun, Sister Josephine's outburst this afternoon. God is working through your innocent lamb in a clear and unambiguous way ... I'll be in touch. I have to phone the cardinal."

When the archbishop finished the call, the Abbess leaned back in her chair. Sister Munchin was staring at her as if she had been shocked to her inmost being. "My Lady, he's resigned his See? I can't believe it! I've never heard of a bishop doing that, outside of a sudden death, of course." She closed her eyes, then opened them swiftly. "And he's coming here to live? Pray tell, my Lady, *where exactly?* Will he be required to wear the guimpe?"

The abbess started to laugh. "Stop it, Munchin! If, by any chance, he does come here, then there is the new block where the sisters have been working cleaning and restoring it. There are plenty of rooms there." She looked around. "But Munchin, where *is* Josephine? I assumed she was here."

"She's in the chapel; she asked to go there, and you were busy talking on the phone, so I told her to skip down there; we'd send for her later."

"Oh Munchin.... You have to help me to remember that young fragile nun. Every time she lets forth some mystic utterance, she is drained, and not well. I forgot that, yet again. Please go and get her and bring her back. Be gentle with her, please Sister."

Bishop Leo Clark arrived just as Vespers was finishing. He sat humbly in the public chapel. The Abbess was alerted and went quietly through the service door in the grille and sat with the bishop near the back row. She then quietly took him back to her office.

The state of the man intrigued the Abbess. He was no longer as she had ever known him. He was humble and appeared broken; he could hardly bring himself to look at the nun beside him.

The Abbess thought the best thing would be to concentrate on the simple, factual things: she told him of her call to the archbishop and their joint opinion that he must not come there until a whole week had passed; then, as he has said he was dying; well she had to have proof of that: of the type of illness and what would be required in terms of nursing; she must be aware of what lies in store for the future. She reminded him there were certainly well-run facilities, for clerics of his status, in his condition where he would certainly be

more comfortable than with the nuns. He listened and agreed with all that she said was fair, and he was grateful. He admitted he had feared that she would simply throw him out; not offer him a home.

She felt more at ease as he agreed immediately to get the letter from the Specialist as to his physical condition.

However, she had still to broach a vital consideration. "Your Excellency, what about daily Mass? I could...."

"No, no, no, no! No more Masses, my Lady. I must not: I'd go straight to hell." The Abbess nodded.

"Well, can you get a replacement for a week easily? If not, I'm sure the priests from the Shrine would fill in for you ... but wait a minute ... they would be offering the Latin Liturgy. What was that? Oh, I see. You can get a replacement easily. Right then, something more personal we need to deal with." The Abbess made her face, deliberately, perfectly blank.

"Your Excellency, what about Fr Joyceson? He is a wonderful confessor; why not go now, *today*, and ask him to hear your confession. No matter what your sins are, God will forgive if there is genuine contrition, and repentance. People make such a mistake about how cruel the Church is; it is the greatest source of hope, comfort, renewal and encouragement than anything else in the whole world. Look at St Peter; he denied knowledge of Christ, yet Christ made him the Rock on which the church rests; look at Mary Magdalen, the prostitute: yet she was saved from the savage, 'good' men, by Christ's piercing words: 'IF THERE IS

ANYONE PRESENT WITHOUT SIN AMONG YOU, LET HIM CAST THE FIRST STONE.’ ”

She suddenly realised something she should have thought of before.

“Your Excellency, forget what I said about going to the Shrine. It would be easier for you, if Fr Joyceson came here, wouldn’t it? In that case, only Father, you and I would even know you had been to Confession.”

The bishop raised a tearful ravaged face. “You would do that, my Lady, for me?”

“Consider it done. You go on out to the waiting room and let me speak to Father Joyceson. If he is free, I’ll ask him to come straight away.”

She stood up and helped the elderly man to the couch in the waiting room.

She then rang the Shrine Clergy house and was able to speak to Father Joyceson, personally. After listening intently to the Abbess, he told her he would start immediately so he should be there within minutes. True to his word, the good priest was there in a very short time. The Abbess told them to use her office; she would be in the chapel if she were needed.

Kneeling in the chapel praying for the bishop, the Abbess suddenly remembered something else that Josephine had said: '*you have so little time ... so much to do and so little time....*' I am a very stupid woman, she decided. How on earth did she come to forget *THAT*?

It must mean – *it had to mean* – that she was going to die ... and that, very soon.... But *how*, she wondered; she was in perfect health, wasn't she? Could Josephine had meant anything else? She prayed that if it were true, then please God, He would give her the right dispositions to die well.

She needed to discuss this matter with another. She longed to ask Josephine, but she had given her word. She slowly walked back to her office.

Arriving there she found Fr Joyceson and Sister Mary Gertrude waiting for her. The priest drew her aside for a moment and told her *the Confession was not finished*, he would have to contact the Nuncio regarding this matter. The Nuncio would then forward it to the

Apostolic Penitentiary in Rome, which would make the decision as to whether he could give Absolution, or not.

The elderly priest informed the Abbess that the bishop would stay at his own residence until the matter was resolved.

The good priest was severely troubled by the matter; he only mumbled, 'Good night,' to both nuns, and left quickly.

## XXXIII

**A**s soon as the priest had left the office, Sister Gertrude asked if she could sit down. The abbess smiling, assured her second in charge that she could, and sat down quickly herself.

This day was bringing endless surprises.

It was rare for Gertrude to seek her out after Vespers. It meant they would now, both miss yet another meal.

“My lady, I don’t know how to even begin this conversation but ... I was there, of course, as was everybody else, when Josephine uttered those astonishing words concerning YOU.”

The Abbess was relieved and smiled. “So, I didn’t imagine them, Gertrude....”

“I wish to God, you had done so, my Lady, then I would not have this heavy burden to carry of the possibility of losing you ... you understand ... you...” The poor nun broke down and wept as if her heart would break, her veiled head bent to her knees.

The Abbess took the nun's hand. "Sssh! Gertrude! No more tears. We don't know for sure if they were true or not. However, you now know what I have been dying to tell you ... about our extraordinary, young nun, Josephine. I wanted so much to tell you, and wasn't sure if her gifts were genuine, or not. But after seeing what she did to Bishop Leo Clark this afternoon, I am firmly convinced that God is speaking through that young nun."

"Then, if that is so, my Lady ... it means that it is inevitable, doesn't it?"

"I think so, Gertrude, *how and when, I have no idea.*"

"Are you ill, my Lady?"

The Abbess laughed quietly. "That's the strangest part, Gertrude; I feel better than I have for years."

"Can we ask the ... the ... *mystic?*"

"His Grace, the archbishop said under no circumstances, can we do that. If God wants something brought out into the public, then He will let us know, through Josephine." The Abbess's private phone began to ring. "Excuse me a moment, Gertrude.... Yes, the Abbess speaking Your Grace.... No! ... Really? you aren't! For how long? Will you return? Really? ... *How AM I?* So, you heard that as well? Now thinking it over, after considering what we've been through today, I think I'll live for another fifty years....

"No, you can send me a private email from Rome, I gave you that address before; it's written on the card I gave you...." She listened as the archbishop spoke at length ... "What was that? ... Well, for once, I'm speechless! ... I suppose so ... well, all I can say is: 'Safe

Flight and a Quick Return'." She slowly replaced her phone and turned to Gertrude.

"Gertrude, you won't believe this: the archbishop is flying to Rome in the morning. He has arranged a special meeting with the cardinal in charge of the dicastery for Religious in the Vatican to discuss our situation and to get advice. He also intends to see about us being linked to another, *approved* 'Traditional Congregation,' and he will also make application on our behalf to become a member of the Benedictine Federation, under the Abbot General; as a special Benedictine Congregation of the Extraordinary Form i.e., with full approval to use the 1962 Missal and books."

"Stop it, my Lady! That is too much for me to take in all at once," Sister Gertrude cried. "Could you take each one and explain it to me. I've had too many shocks today, I think. I can't seem to get anything into my head."

"Forgive me, dear Sister. Yes, you're completely right. My own brain is twirling like a spinning top.

"The First suggestion: Linking up with another already 'approved Congregation'. I think, myself, Gertrude this could be a way out.

"I do know of a male Congregation that has papal approval to use all the Latin 1962 books. I rang their Australian Superior and asked if they were open to the idea of having a female 'sister' congregation; he said he, personally, would welcome it. But whether the whole Congregation would agree with that opinion, or not, he had no idea. He'd have to send questionnaires to every

house for the members to vote; that could take a fair amount of time.

“I also mentioned to His Grace, that, perhaps I should have pursued membership in the Benedictine Federation which would then mean being put under the Benedictine Abbot General as our supreme Superior, vis a vis, Rome. There are many varied Congregations under that banner, quite disparate from one another, I believe. There are even monasteries that have always retained their right to use the Latin 1962 books.”

The Abbess started to feel sleepy and yawned politely. “Gertrude, I’ll have to retire soon, or I’ll collapse. Just one thing more.

“You know well, I’m not a great Canon Law expert, but I have an idea that we could escape by seeing what our classification as nuns is – I simply don’t know. If we ‘nuns’, in our monastery, are classified as ‘moniales’ in Rome, then we are sunk. That simply means, as you would know, Gertrude, ‘monastics’. But I happen to know an enclosed community here in Australia which has been left alone, in their monastery, and this is because the nuns are classified as ‘sorores’ i.e., Sisters. I might add that the reason those NUNS are classified as SISTERS and not ‘NUNS’ is that they are a Congregation that has many houses, but ALL UNDER THE ONE MOTHER GENERAL: each house was not autonomous. So, the Mother General had the last word on any question, not the individual monastery council.”

Sister Gertrude looked disturbed. “To tell the truth my Lady, I’m not too keen on that idea myself.”

The Abbess laughed. “Well, I’m not in raptures about it myself, but it might be our only way out. I’ve asked the archbishop to try to find out what our classification actually, is.”

The abbess stood up. “I’m sorry, Gertrude. I simply must get to bed. If you still have any energy left, go to the chapel and be there for the end of Compline which would ease the minds of the poor community who, don’t forget, all heard what you heard this afternoon and could be frightened, worried, unsure, of what will happen to us: together with the fear that they could lose the nuns they are most used to ... this could be the case, particularly with the older nuns.”

Sister Gertrude stood up, bowed to her superior and left the room.

## XXXIV

Angela decided she must stand up; then she must get to bed. She rose from the chair and quickly sat down again. What was wrong with her? She didn't feel sick ... she just felt *strange* ... *weird* ... what on earth was happening to her? She looked up quickly and glanced around the room: everything was as it should be. Perhaps it was imagination; it had been a terrible day, utterly fatiguing. She thought she would just sit still for a moment or two, then get to her room. She started to feel restless; she had forgotten something that she had to do ... what was it? She couldn't remember; well, it could wait till morning ... *No!* *It couldn't!* She suddenly knew it had to be done *NOW!*

*At that very moment, the Abbess of the monastery of the Transfiguration knew, with certainty, she was going to die that very same evening.*

With this recognition of her state, she very quickly sat down at her computer and typed her wishes regarding the future – the whole monastery needed stability; not to be thrown into the chaos of indecision, dispute and rupture. She must clearly nominate her wishes for a Successor.

Without pausing a moment, she typed quickly as follows:

Next Abbess: Sister Mary Josephine

Senior Prioress and Bursar in charge of all finance:

Sister Mary Gertrude

Primary adviser & Legal adviser to the Monastic Council: Sister Mary Munchin.

Co-adviser: Sister Mary Isidore. Isidore is also to be the Cellarer.

Their Religious Superior and representative in the Vatican: His grace, Archbishop Edward Wilkinson, DD, PhD, Theol. D.

## XXXVI

The Abbess sat back and slowly considered what she had written. Yes, as far as she could see, she had taken care of the monastery entrusted to her from God. After her death, the rest was up to God. If God was going to take her now, then He knows what He's doing; He will arrange it otherwise if He wants to....

## XXXVII

**S**he knew she must get a priest so as to face God at Judgment with a clean sheet. She rang the Hermit Shrine priests and left word for Fr Joyceson to please return quickly, as she was dying.

She had one more chore to do before she left for the chapel. She walked as quickly as she could to Sister Mary Gertrude's room and slipped the page she had written on her computer, under the door.

## XXXVIII

**A**t the Shrine, the old priest had just returned when he then was informed, he'd been requested to return to the Monastery.

The priests couldn't understand the call for a priest ... how could the Abbess be dying; they had all been there in the afternoon and she was healthy and fit. It didn't make sense.

Father le Blanc suddenly jumped up. "Remember what that mystic said of the Abbess: 'she had little time left....' Merciful God, that extraordinary woman is truly dying.... I'll go, my Father, you've had a terrible day with the bishop; I'll do it."

And without another word, the young priest rushed to the car and raced to the monastery.

He found Sister Mary Gertrude, in tears, waiting for him and she took him, not to their chapel, but the public chapel where they found the Abbess praying at a prie-dieu with her eyes fixed on the tabernacle her hands resting on the book rest.

Angela smiled at the young priest and patted his hand. "Don't be afraid, my good Father; I'm just an ordinary woman - no more - no less. Let me just make my confession.... I can't remember much, but I'll try. Then you can give me the healing oils and, please God, the plenary indulgence as I go to God."

The priest was trembling as he listened, to the little slips and slides, on the road to perfection, then gave absolution, anointed the humble, good woman, then stepped back and knelt where he could be seen by both the Abbess and Sister Mary Gertrude who knelt far back near the door of the chapel.

They stayed until midnight, then the young priest gave the Plenary Indulgence and left, while Gertrude stayed one more hour then thought she also should go; she feared what she had to face on the morrow.

## XXXIX

In the total silence of the chapel, the Abbess was surprised at the reality of dying: she thought she would be writhing in pain, and she was not; she was just so tired, so desperately tired. She thought of the archbishop working flat out in Rome, on their behalf, and all she could think of was resting. Ah well! God has to face all kinds of people, even saints who have been preparing for death for decades while she, certainly had prayed for so many who were dying, and for the dead, but never ever thought of herself ... dying ... young.

Her thoughts flew to the saint in her life: the Hermit Father. Well, she could ask 'the Servant of God', NOW to help her to die well - if it pleased God - that was.

She shifted slightly on her knees and, for a moment, rested her head on the book rest. Her mother Molly, now dead, seemed to smile at her while her beloved father, Fred, took her in his arms and held her tight, while her brother, 'Billy' was crying for some reason.

She wanted to tell him to stop; there was no need - she had no pain - but she was too tired ... she would dearly like to see Fred again ... perhaps, maybe soon? ... ... her mind started to roam over all her children: Munchin, and Isidore and Josephine and Gertrude, Didacus, and ... Bede and Anne and ... Boniface ... ... Raphael ... ... Benedict ... Isidore ... Gertrude ... ... Felix of Valois ... *now a camel* ... she smiled at that thought ... a camel ... that dear little, old woman ... that's funny ... a camel ... ell..ell..ell... ... ...

Ugh!

The lady Abbess's head fell to one side; her body was held up by the front of the prie dieu.

*The abbess was dead!*

**T**he morning waking bell was designed to get sleepy nuns out of bed, and on their knees. Sometimes that was difficult to do.

This morning it was instant!

The gentle, waking bell, had been replaced by the huge bell clanging for the death of a nun - counting all the years of the nun's life. This morning the bell rang fifty-one times: Its harsh, booming, echoes ringing through all the rooms of the big building and, indeed being heard by the priests down at the Hermit Father's Shrine. There were frantic phone calls from everyone in the vicinity inquiring as to what had happened. The nuns hurriedly dressed, did the minimum of teeth cleaning and washing and rushed to their chapel.

From every corner of the large building nuns were running - unheard of before - to know what disaster had occurred or, they feared...who could possibly have died!

**I**t was Sister Isidore who had found the Abbess dead in the public area of the chapel, when she was opening up. She actually screamed aloud in her shock and anguish and had rushed to the big bell. It was she who then hastened to inform Sister Mary Gertrude of what had happened.

It was Gertrude who had then to tell the shocking news to Sister Munchin.

Munchin, gasped and screamed a piercing: "NO!" and then, for the first time in her life, actually fainted.

**A** short time later, Sister Gertrude had to face the assembled community in the chapel. Her own voice was shaking badly as she told of the death of their truly beloved Abbess.

“We will alter our prayers this morning my dearest sisters. We will begin with the Litany for the dead and then begin the Office for the Dead. But before we start, I have to tell you a couple of things:

1. The Abbess knew she was dying, *but not WHEN*. The doctor has been and certified that our Abbess has been dead for, at least four hours; but you will be relieved to know that the Abbess rang the priests at the shrine and asked them to come to her as she was dying. So, thanks be to God she had the chance to go to Confession, be anointed and then had the plenary indulgence and all the blessings of the last Rites.

“When our wonderful Sister Raphael, and her assistants, have done what is necessary with the body, it will be brought in here and remain throughout today

and tomorrow, so that we can all mourn as we watch and pray for the last time with our Abbess Angela. Please Sacristans, get the catafalque and the sanctuary ready.

2. "I have to tell you that our Abbess was working to the last. Under my office door this morning I found a copy of her wishes for her successors, as Abbess and other duties.

I will remain as the second in charge, but the new Abbess will be SISTER MARY JOSEPHINE . . . .

Sister Gertrude waited until the shock of that appointment had had time to settle, then added: "Sister Munchin is to be the Primary adviser, both legal and otherwise, to the new Abbess, while Sister Mary Isidore is raised to the position of Co-adviser, along with Sister Munchin. Sister Isidore will also be the Cellarer while our Roman Superior will continue to be His Grace, archbishop Edward Wilkinson. The archbishop had to fly back to Rome this morning, but I think he would be back within the week. He rushed off there in order to try to save us.

"I have to tell you, my sisters, I dreaded having to be the one to inform you that our beloved Abbess is dead.

"Finally, my sisters, the Solemn Requiem Mass for the soul of our late Abbess will be offered here by three priests from the Hermit Shrine on the third day.

"Our chapel will be crowded to the ceiling, by most of the parishioners from the Shrine parish and the local Television could well be here." Gertrude's eyes quickly sought assurance from Josephine, who nodded.

“I now ask the new Abbess Josephine to address you.”

The lady Abbess Josephine walked slowly to stand with Sister Gertrude. The community was astonished at the tranquillity of the young nun. Her face showed signs of her grief, but when she spoke, she was assured and every nun was surprised and, to a large extent, bewildered – wasn’t this the young one who had cleaned the toilets?

“My sisters in Christ, I humbly ask you to pray for me: to follow in the steps of one such as Abbess Angela is certainly not a role, I would have chosen myself, given any choice. I honestly feel that all of you are better fitted to be the successor than I am. You realise, Sisters, that my position as your Abbess will have to be approved by Rome. I shall ring His Grace in the Vatican, not only to tell him of the death, but also to advise me as to what I am expected to do: for I tell you plainly, I have no real idea. I am relying fully on Sister Mary Gertrude and my, now secretary, Sister Mary Munchin to help me every step of the way. Our Abbess always called Sister Munchin, her ‘second’ rock: St Peter was the ‘first’!”

“I truly believe that the Abbess had unflinching love for the holy Church – her simple, beautiful faith was astonishing and glorious. I believe that was the reason she was so terribly distressed by the actions of Rome and particularly of the Holy Father; so intensely anguished that she was determined to fight until the last gasp to save our precious faith from dilution in any form – especially in the Liturgy where we live out our love, praise and our whole being – our oblation – to Christ

our beloved Lord ... ... *our Lord.*" Her eyes went around the chapel. "Lastly, my sisters, pray, pray, pray, for our beloved Church ... and in your charity, pray for me."

She walked slowly down to the stall of the Abbess and waited, ready to begin the Litany of the Dead. When the nuns were ready, she knocked strongly on the prie dieu.

... The Litany then was under way.

## XLIII

Sisters Gertrude and Munchin stood waiting for the new Abbess to remove her cowl and sit in the large chair in front of the main desk. Josephine's eyes were cast down and she refrained from looking at the two other women. Then, forcing herself to act, she looked up, waved the two sisters to their chairs and turned to Munchin first of all.

"Sister Munchin, I plead with you, as a fellow nun caught in this peculiar situation; to promise me you will help me. Until yesterday I was secretary *to you*, and now you are the main secretary to the entire establishment, and adviser to the whole council." She turned to sister Gertrude.

"Sister Gertrude, you have been the main backstop to our dearest Abbess for years, so you know how everything works and the order in which things are to be done. I beg of you to help me in this fearful position I am in. Don't be afraid, for one second, to say something HAS to be done, and done quickly. I know

well, through working here - for a relatively short period - how much bureaucracy we have to cope with: the reports, surveys, and, to me, the terrifying financial things we have to report to both Government and the Church.

“Please - I beg of both of you - never hesitate to advise me on *how to behave in difficult situations with dignitaries that I shall have to meet* - both clergy and secular. I come from a very poor farming family, and I worked on the farm. I haven’t even been to secondary school. I’m really, the last person that should have been chosen, I think. All I am trying to say is please treat me here in the office as you did before: just as before. If you are too formal, I shall clam up and be so nervous I could bring the title into disrepute.” She noticed that Munchin was wanting to speak.

“Yes, Sister Munchin?”

“My Lady, you begged us to tell the truth and be just as we were before, well let me contradict you in what you said. I think you are exactly the person who should have been chosen by that glorious Abbess. If Abbess Angela had asked me for my opinion that is what I would have said.” Sister Gertrude broke in.

“And that goes for me, too, my Lady.” Gertrude started to smile then laughed openly.

“Well, if we are to be as we were before, then I suggest we should ring the kitchen and ask them, as a special favour, to send us three cups of coffee and something sweet to eat.”

All three nuns laughed quietly and declared it the best suggestion so far this morning.



The coffee broke the ice and the three nuns spoke together without reserve. They discussed the archbishop's sudden dash to Rome, on their behalf; the local bishop who could be with them to live in a few days and the Requiem for, not only Abbess Angela, but also for Sister Margaret Mary to be arranged.

The two sisters waited while the new Abbess had rung the archbishop's number in the Vatican and were all disappointed as it was only possible to leave a message. Well, they thought, he would, at least learn, about the death, by her call. The new Abbess looked at her notes.

“Let's get to the immediate problems. The first one is, my sisters, is what we are to do with the local bishop. As I understand from what you have told me he could well be coming here to live. And, within a week. Is that correct?” the two nuns nodded.

“Well, we'll just have to work on the principle that he IS coming and prepare those rooms for him. I think

we *should* use old John's room: it already has the shower in place, so the plumbing for that is there. The shower should be suitably enlarged to take a plastic chair - a toilet could be placed next to the shower area. That room could become the bishop's bathroom while he could use the next room - that backs onto the new bathroom - for his bedroom and sitting room. That would then only need a hole made in the wall between the two rooms, the present door bricked up, the toilet and shower connected to the separate plumbing systems and one panel of the wall to be repaired. The entry to the bishop's rooms could be at the door of the second room. There would still be that back door which could be kept locked from the inside."

Munchin and Gertrude agreed that was a sensible and simple way of dealing with the matter. The Abbess nodded and continued.

"I understand he will not be offering holy Mass, so we have to discover if he can receive Communion; that will depend on whether the absolution has been obtained or not.

"Another thought struck me, Sisters. Do you think Sister Raphael will need more help in the Infirmary? With the bishop, an invalid - said to be dying - she will see him as her first priority and there could be, at any time, an emergency in the Infirmary. Let me know of nuns, who are either trained RNs, or at least, have been Carers or hospital workers. See if we can get two nuns to deal with everything in the Infirmary in normal times; more could be brought in from the community, if needed. Please keep a note of that, Sister Munchin;

also. please contact our usual firm to do a rush job on the 'Bishop' alterations? Plead with them for an early start on the work. We don't have much time to do a fair amount of work. Thank you.

"Now today, our first priority must be the Wake of the blessed Abbess Angela. I want to spend as much time as I can there, but there is such a huge amount of work to do here. All three of us will have to stagger our times, or we'll miss out entirely.

"Firstly, please tell Isidore to leave the door of the Public Chapel open all day, today - to 10.00pm - and tomorrow - from morning till night. All the good people of the district will be here - once the priests from the Shrine inform them of the death - to pray for the deceased Abbess: she was a local girl, remember, and then...." The abbess stopped and slapped her forehead. "Merciful Lord! ... I forgot her beloved father, Fred. He will be beside himself with grief - his beloved child is dead!

"Gertrude, would you get on to Mr Fred Harris at once, and explain what has happened ... that we understand his grief and if he comes, he is to be allowed to enter our cloistered chapel and see his precious daughter, but only he, no one else can have that privilege. When he asks, as he will, the cause of the death, tell him it was a sudden aneurism in the brain which burst, thus affecting the heart causing a massive heart attack - I think that is what the doctor said. You could check with Raphael if that doesn't sound right to you.

“Sister, please tell Mr Harris I’d definitely like to see him and speak with him. If his son, ‘Billy,’ is with him – as I expect he will – let him go, as well into the chapel to the catafalque with his father.

“Now, re all the visitors. Sister Munchin, I need you to be the senior policewoman to control, whatever there is to control, but I don’t want to deprive you of your chance to mourn your beloved leader, with whom you worked for so long. Could you suggest a couple of ‘helpers’ from the community who could be relied upon to mix with the visitors, as a kind of guide during this period of mourning. I think you would agree with my suggestion of Sister Isidore as a helper to you ... and possibly Bede, and Luke.

“And now, food! Do you really think it would be expected of us to provide refreshments e.g., coffee, tea and something to eat? What do you think?” Munchin looked up and spoke strongly.

“I’m totally against it, my Lady. They will all come in their cars, and we are only a ten-minute drive from all the shops that cater for pilgrims.”

“And you, Sister Gertrude?”

“I agree completely with Sister Munchin. There’s another aspect to consider. Those shops in Burnside totally rely on pilgrims for their livelihood. I don’t think we can, morally, take away their custom.”

“Good, that relieves me a lot. Now, as regards our request to have our own cemetery here in our grounds. As I understand it, the Abbess Angela had done the preliminary work in getting permission from the local Council, and the proper Government department.

Sister Munchin, are there any files on that I should read? The Funeral Directors will ask that of me, first thing."

Munchin frowned. "Well, there are numerous files, my Lady, but nothing concrete has been decided. They make me dizzy just reading all the nonsense about the area of land etc. Dear God, we have about 100 acres, how much more to they want?"

"Where exactly had Abbess Angela decided the cemetery should be Sister?"

"She wanted to use that small hill that rises at the back of Subiaco House. It is all cleared. It is not really a hill, but a gentle slope – except the top section which is definitely a hill and very steep. I think the area chosen is about five acres and, God forbid, but if we did need to have more space, there is plenty of room to move to the right, or the left, of what is fenced off now.... My Lady ... could I make a bold suggestion?"

"Please do, Sister Munchin. Remember that it is now your main task – to advise me."

"Well, knowing how Government Departments work, I suggest we go ahead and use that 'proposed' cemetery for Abbess Angela. Then it is done and dusted and that's better in relation to Government departments. If they kick up a fuss after the burial, I could write a letter of 'injured innocence,' asking how were we supposed to know that? It had been with the Department for years. I would say I advised the Monastery Council to go ahead and use the proposed area and to order the digging of the grave. "By the way, my Lady, the funeral directors will arrange for a grave

digger, when you have informed them WHERE they are to dig." She smiled at the Abbess.

"Look, getting back to the Government Department, the worst thing they could do, would be to write us a nasty letter. I'm so used to them; they just slide off my back."

"Thank God you are here, Munchin!" The Abbess turned over a page of her notebook. "Now I have to tell you that the priests from the Shrine have requested that the burial be down there next to the Hermit Father. I must admit that that is not displeasing to me, but it would mean that our own community would then miss out on the funeral. And that is not right."

Gertrude spoke quickly to get in before Munchin. "I agree with you, my Lady. The Community - some of whom have been here since the beginning, would feel bitterly deprived if they were not permitted to mourn and bury their beloved Mother. There is another reason, as well: if the 'Father Hermit' is beatified, then it would be wrong to bury the Abbess next to him. It could be construed as being presumptuous."

They were interrupted by the telephones which started their daily racket.

Sister Gertrude and Munchin grabbed one each. The Abbess heard Gertrude say: "Oh, Mr Harris. Our new Abbess was just speaking about you and your son ... she is busy on the other line, so let me tell you what she has said...."

Munchin was mouthing the words: '*The Archbishop*', so handed the phone to the Abbess. "Yes, your Grace. I am so glad you received my message.... Indeed, we are

still reeling from the shock.... You are returning ... when? ... Goodness! May I dare ask if you were successful? ... 50/50? Well, that means we still have a chance, doesn't it? ... Yes, please tell me what you want me to do ... yes, I'm listening ... go on ... Oh! ... yes, I understand ... to how many? ... including the pope? ... goodness me! ... Go to Rome? ... Merciful God, No!

“Please God, No! ... Yes, I understand. Please hurry back, your Grace, we need you badly. Me? I’m coping ... I’m coping, but if anyone takes away Gertrude and Munchin, I’m finished. Can an Abbess refuse? Can she have a sabbatical? Can she retire after only a few days? No! ... Oh well, looks as if I’m stuck with it, doesn’t it?

...

“Yes, the requiem for our mother Angela will be in two days’ time. The funeral will be here in our grounds and will follow the Solemn Requiem Mass. Yes, she had Father le Blanc from the Shrine to give the Last Rites...

“Oh, that’s good news. So, you might just be in time for the Funeral. God bless you, dear Archbishop. Thank you for everything you are doing for us. We’ll make sure we never forget it. God bless *and please pray for me*. Goodbye.”

Sister Gertrude was on her feet. “Mr Harris and Billy are on their way; they’ll be here in about four minutes.”

“Heavens help us! Sister Gertrude, please go down and meet them: I’ll come as quickly as I can. Off you go, quickly now!” Abbess turned to Munchin. “If I go now, Sister, will you hold the fort here for about one hour and I’ll then do the same for you? Thank you. Now

please, dear woman, help me on with this cumbersome  
cowl."

Abbess Josephine met the weeping father and brother at the door of the chapel. She took one look and folded the older man in her arms, as if he were her father, her tears mingling with his. She then hugged the younger man and whispered to both of them. “Now, I’ve asked that three kneelers be put near the body for us to kneel near your dearest daughter, Fred, and Billy, your loved sister. I beg of you NOT to touch the body in any way; it is strictly, eyes only, not hands. Mysterious things happen when a body is no longer living, and I don’t want to shock you in any way. Angela is still the glorious, wonderful, woman she always was, but she is now with Christ our beloved Lord.... I’m sure of that ... *absolutely certain!* And, to answer your unspoken question, NO, she didn’t suffer at all. God just took her away and you will see the smile on her face: that’s real, not put on by the undertakers. She actually died smiling! That is a miracle in itself! ... Come with me now: there are many

nuns in the chapel praying silently, so it's softly, softly ... OK? Off we go!"

The chapel was half filled as they entered and the two family members stood, staring at the body of the loved and precious woman. Billy had never seen anyone dead before; he was overcome and immediately, reached out his hand, Fred quickly came to the rescue, grabbed the young man's hand then held it close to his chest. After a few minutes they took their places on the kneelers.

There was near utter silence in the big chapel and the silence was only broken occasionally by the subdued sobbing of a distraught nun.

However, a startling event – a never to be forgotten miracle then suddenly occurred. The room darkened; light began to shine from the body of the Abbess and spread over the catafalque lighting up the body so that it radiated with light.

Fred and Billy stood up in fright. Fred had his arms around Billy. They were terrified at what they were seeing. As the light continued, the men knelt down again with the Abbess and remained there, not moving, for the next hour.

The Abbess sighed softly and stood up. She apologized to the family and withdrew.

On her way from the chapel, she told Sister Isidore to take Fred and Billy to the special room off the kitchen for tea or coffee to help them before they left. She also remembered to ask Isidore to inform the family that the Funeral would be on the third day and that those two would be permitted to come inside the

enclosure and stand at the graveside. Only Fred and Billy; no one else.

The crowds were as expected. The public chapel was nearly full most of the two days. Sisters Munchin, Isidore, Gertrude, Anne and Bede were kept busy with 'out of town' visitors and with distressed local people as well.

**B**y the third day – the day of the Funeral – all the nuns were exhausted by their grief and constant watching day and night.

The Sacristan nuns were busy, as they had never been before, preparing for the Sung Requiem. They had to borrow Communion wafers from the Shrine as the priests had set up temporary confessionals in the public chapel; they had been busy, with penitents, for the past two days. Every priest present, and the archbishop – if he arrived there in time – would be co-opted for the distribution of Holy Communion. This meant they needed a larger number of ciboria to hold the hosts – these had to be borrowed as well. While electricians were climbing all over the nuns' chapel installing a loud-speaker system that would be one way the crowds outside would be able to follow the Funeral Mass.

## XLVIII

**T**he sun rose in splendour on the Funeral Day even though they were in the midst of winter. The crowds came early to try to see if they could get a seat in the Public Chapel. Most of these were taken up by local people – to the Abbess's delight.

The three priests from the Hermit's Shrine and the Undertakers came early as well. They helped the Sacristans set up the sanctuary while the undertakers moved the body into a beautiful casket which was placed on a high trestle which had wheels. Wreathes, very beautiful, which had been handed in from the local people were at the base and sides of the coffin. There were so many wreathes that all the nuns would have to carry a least one to the burial when the Mass was finished.

The Abbess had decided that the casket would be carried, by the Undertakers, the short distance to the cemetery. Following the coffin, the priests would walk first then she would walk alone, the nuns would follow

in a column behind her, most carrying the glorious wreathes.

As they walked the nuns would sing some of their familiar and beautiful chants from holy Scripture. They would sing 'In Paradisum' at the end of the internment.

## XLIX

Two hours later, as the Requiem Mass was finishing there was a disturbance at the entry to the Sanctuary. The archbishop was glimpsed briefly throwing a long, white surplice over his cassock and a black stole around his neck; he then hurried to join with the other priests as they formed the procession to the grave.

The Enclosure fence at the front of the Abbey was eight feet high and more than 100 local people, men as well as women, had their fingers through the fence and their hands gripped tightly on the wire. Most were weeping. The local people felt as they had done with the death of the Hermit Father, that something precious had been removed from them as a community. They watched the long procession to the grave with the nuns carrying in their hands the beautiful wreathes; they saw that only the Abbess's father and her brother had been permitted to walk in the procession and stand by the side of the grave.

When the casket was about to be lowered into the grave, the archbishop hurried forward and took a dozen wreathes and threw them into the grave so that the bereaved father and brother would not hear the clods of earth falling on the casket as the grave was filled in. Wreathes that still remained were taken from the nuns, by the undertakers, who then placed them on the mound of earth from the completed grave.

As this was being done, the priests joined with the nuns in singing the beautiful 'In paradisum.' Then the nuns silently returned to their monastery to gather in the Chapter room as Sister Gertrude had informed them. The Abbess would then speak to them there.

After the Abbess had spoken briefly with her community, she reminded them that it was time for Sext, then took hold of the archbishop's arm and hurried him to her office. She immediately asked Munchin to get them both a cup of their own coffee: the archbishop was nearly out on his feet. Sister Munchin had it done in minutes as usual and then joined the community for the Office of Sext.

“Now, Your Grace, I’ll try desperately to let you go and get some rest: you look – speaking frankly – dreadful. As quickly as you can, could you summarize what happened in that incredible couple of days you spent in Rome. Right, off you go!”

The archbishop smiled at the unflattering, but accurate, description of himself and began to speak.

“Firstly: I have applied on your behalf for you to be admitted to the Benedictine Federation under the Abbot General of the Benedictines. But I have insisted that the application should be listed as *a female*

*monastery of the Extraordinary Form* – using Pope Benedict's name for the TLM.

“Secondly: the ‘Classification Problem’. I’ve checked with the cardinal in charge of moniales, *as you definitely are!* So that escape route is out!

“However, this good cardinal said it really was a matter of just ‘wait and see’. This pope cannot last much longer and there could be some hope of reform with the next one.

“However, I’m not too impressed by that statement. Yes, it may be a short time until this one falls off the twig but, if something is not done *soon*, will there be anything left when he does go? He’s now dead set *on abrogating everything in sight*, especially all the work of the notable, great pope theologians in the past – and that includes the great St Pius 10<sup>th</sup> and St Pius 5<sup>th</sup>.

“Really the only practical thing I could see to do, was to pursue the application to join the Benedictine groups who are united under the Benedictine Abbot General. He has, at least three TLM monasteries in America, in his chain of Benedictine Houses. The three in America, male and female are all moniales, i.e., monastics. If we can get that acceptance from the Abbot General then you would be free of both local, and the whole Bishops’ Conference, of this country. I’m aware of the threat there is in the ‘Cor Orans’ Document, re that in joining a Federation, the individual monastery loses its autonomy. I think, however there is a way around that.”

The archbishop stood up.

“My Lady, I wish I could have brought you better news but that’s all I could find. I followed every lead I’d heard of, and they all suggested temporary remedies.

“However, this time in the Vatican I discovered another TRUTH: the Truth that, basically, no one knew in all those Dicasteries and important offices, just what was going to happen and *nearly all the Cardinals, Archbishops, Bishops and lay men and women employed there are just dreading WHAT IS TO COME.*”

The archbishop looked embarrassed. “There is only one last thing to tell you.

“My Lady, I am now your new temporary, local Bishop!”

The Abbess stood up in her shock. “But – I don’t understand! You can’t mean you are leaving the Vatican and coming to this far corner of the world ... to a tiny Diocese full of country folk?”

“That’s exactly what I do mean, my Lady. Don’t worry, it’s only temporary, possibly for a year, or at the most, two.” The archbishop stood up and took the arm of the new abbess. He realised the shock he had given the good woman.

“Sit, my Lady ... please, sit down. I’ll try to explain. I had this brainwave after Abbess Angela informed me about Bishop Clark coming here to live and that he had vacated the See.

“If course, the Vatican knew instantly about that; the Nuncio had notified them immediately. They were at a loss whom to send, or which priest of this country should be promoted.

“I jumped into the breech and said as I had worked there at the Vatican for years and had never, ever, taken a vacation – so I then had a stack of ‘LEAVE due to me – and it so happened that I wanted to write a book on the new, candidate for sainthood – the beloved Hermit Father – of Burnside – and that is true, I now do want to write that book.

“I argued, to write this book, I needed to be ‘on the spot,’ so I could spend my vacation in Burnside Diocese, writing my book and I could look after the little country Diocese at the same time. It would give the authorities time to carefully sift the local candidates and choose the right priest for the job.

“Then, one cardinal, who was slightly smarter than the others, said: ‘But you say the TLM Mass. You can’t do that there!’

“I pretended to be perplexed, then I said: ‘Well, I have to be able to offer my morning Mass, so I could offer a ‘private Mass’ – that’s permitted – and announce it as such. I will provide a Novus Ordo priest to say the main Masses in the episcopal church. I would just attend them from the chair.’

The archbishop chuckled softly. “You see, my Lady, I had remembered a valiant priest in your history, I think he was a Vincentian Father. He was forbidden to say the TLM for his parish, but he countered with the fact that he was entitled to say a private mass as long as he announced it before the Mass started. “I’ve heard he could have up to 500 people present and he would announce – with a perfectly straight face – at the

beginning of Mass, that he was not saying a ‘public’ Mass, but a ‘Private Mass.’”

“I pointed out, my Lady that I could do your ‘Installation Ceremony’ – incidentally, it will be on Saturday next – and while I was there, I could easily keep an eye on those nuns of the Monastery of the Transfiguration.

“They were dithering whether to accept my offer or not, when I demanded they fix it up ‘pronto’. I told them I had no intention of ‘hanging around wasting my vacation in the stinking heat of Rome, if I could help it.’

“My ‘performance’ sealed the deal: the appointment was made; the Installation was set for Saturday after next – notification as to the identity of the new, temporary bishop of Burnside Diocese and the name of the new Abbess have been forwarded to the Papal Nuncio who would inform all the bishops of this country. At the Installation, I shall be the main celebrant and Fr Joyceson will be co-consecrator; Fathers Tulliver and le Blanc will be there as well.

“I shall be living at the bishop’s house, and I believe there is a good young priest there now, filling in and offering the English Mass. Don’t worry, we’ll get on fine; he’ll be no problem.” He smiled and began to make comical remarks, when the Abbess suddenly left her chair: she stood in the middle of the room, her head titled upwards, and her hands outstretched – she was trembling violently.

The archbishop was deeply concerned. “My Lady, what is ....?

The Abbess screamed in terror. “No. No. No. No. No! Not that!”

There was a huge explosion which threw the archbishop to the floor. He shouted in fear: “*What in the holy name was...THAT!*” Is it an earthquake? The ground is shaking....” He began to climb up when he lost his balance, and fell, again, to the floor.

At that very same moment, the Abbess screamed loudly in terror as she was lifted up by another blast; she ended up under her own desk.

Crawling out from there, the abbess jumped up, her eyes terrified and enormous. She grabbed the hand of the archbishop to help him from the floor and attempted to move forward when the archbishop shouted to her to stop: the floor was opening between them. He dragged the young woman to his side of the floor. She was actually screaming in terror as she then pointed to where the back wall of her office should be – it was no longer there!

Her face was bloodless, while the eyes seemed to be the only thing left alive: she was like a dead woman talking ... the archbishop heard her whisper, ‘our Monastery’ ... ‘our home’ ... again and again.

He cried ... “Oh, my God! ... No! Please God, NO! *It's satanic I think ... God have mercy ... St Michael protect us!*”

They cringed as there was a terrifying crash of what sounded like a mountain falling, the sound of huge rocks in free-fall. This crash of cascading rocks was accompanied by the frenzied screaming of hysterical, agonized, terrified female voices.

The Abbess shouted loudly above the noise. “I must get to them....” The Abbess went to move forward when the archbishop pulled her back. “Stop!” he shouted loudly. “Look under your feet!” She did so, and trembled. Another section of the office floor had suddenly disappeared and was crashing down 40 feet to the mass of masonry below. Only the front wall was stable with the old clock still ticking the time. Without even aware she was doing so she noted the time: 11.45 nearly midday...

Were her children all dead? No, the screaming was still piercing and loud. The Abbess, trying to cope with this nightmare had only one thought in her mind:

*They would be looking for her – for their mother: she must get to them.* She shouted at the cleric, “Come!”

It seemed that only the tower, in which the Abbess had her office, was the only part of the building left standing...the rest was a war zone. Were the stairs still working? They found that they were. Both Abbess and archbishop almost ran down the two flights of stairs and then found their way impeded by huge chunks of the masonry walls as the huge, old stone monastery was reduced to the stone from which it had been made.

Tucking up the hem of her skirts, the Abbess began to climb over the lowest of the broken stone walls and found so many, many, nuns dead: crushed by the falling walls. She recognized each of the ones she found, paused to touch them and to mutter a brief prayer, then hurriedly, left them to the archbishop, and rushed on to those still alive.

The archbishop, grabbing his stole from an inside pocket, began to give the Plenary Indulgenced Absolution, and blessing, to all he found dead, while keeping the Abbess in sight as he, too wanted to get to the live ones that he might comfort them as they died.

As they worked with the dying, during the next hour, the archbishop and Josephine were aware, with dull horror, the future of the whole monastery was, literally, collapsing before their eyes ... they shuddered and were both terrified ... there was nothing left; it was a new Jerusalem: not a stone left upon a stone, Each one kept repeating, 'No! Please God, No! No! No!'

Were there any nuns still alive? They wondered. The few that they found, died swiftly after receiving Absolution. The good Sisters had hung on desperately hoping, praying for the relief of the Sacraments.

The archbishop tried to take in all the details of the scene before him: it was too much. The scale of the disaster was too huge. In the rubble were to be seen the bodies of numerous nuns, bearing hideous wounds, dead and even those who were still alive, were screaming in agony – as they slowly died.

Josephine dashed forward climbing over the stone blocks to get to the body of Munchin; she had caught a glimpse of the nun who had blood streaming from her body as she tried to get to Sister Gertrude who was bleeding profusely from the mouth; the poor, dying Gertrude was trying desperately to get herself off the ground. The abbess's mind tried to grapple with the sight of Sister Isidore's head – it had been hacked from her body – with the mouth stretched in a rictus of agony

- and was grotesquely perched, in mockery, on top of the empty tabernacle.... The sacred hosts were scattered all over the floor.

The bishop shut his eyes in anguish; this convinced him that it was a violent attack from Satan. The archbishop couldn't take his eyes off the destruction of the chapel which was awash with blood; it had obviously become the slaughtering ground for the majority of the nuns. That made sense, the nuns would instinctively rush to the chapel. Thus, it followed, the chapel had received the worst of the violence.

Besides the obvious physical destruction, even more ghastly was the mockery evidenced in the decapitation of loved statues, Holy Water fonts, vestments – *they found the bodies of some decapitated cows now wearing rich coloured vestments while the cows' heads now were stuck onto the heads of decapitated nuns. Many cattle lying in tangled heaps, now had nuns' heads, instead of their own.*

**S**ister Gertrude died just as Munchin reached her; Munchin cried aloud, begging God to help them; she turned to go and found the Abbess there with her hand out to her. She grabbed hold of this lifeline. Josephine lifted up the distraught nun and held her closely, uttering soothing words and trying to see where she had been cut with their weapons. She was instantly aware that Munchin's habit was torn wide open, and the Abbess saw with horror, that Munchin had a slash that had left one breast practically severed; she would undoubtedly die if the blood could not be stopped.

Josephine screamed to the archbishop; "Search the rubble for any part of Sister Raphael's equipment that is still available to save Sister Munchin's life. We need cotton wool, bandages and morphine, please God there is morphine there somewhere!"

The archbishop raced through the chaos and shouted in triumph when he found the cabinet of drugs and dressings lying by the side of the dead Sister

Raphael. The archbishop quickly absolved the good doctor nun, then searched for the medical things that Josephine needed. He found the drug chest, largely intact and hurried back. Together they patched Munchin as well as they could. Neither knew what to do with the terrible bleeding, but they padded as much clean tissue against the wound as they could, then bound the breast in layers of bandages tied as tightly as the poor nun could bear it. They knew that pressure was vital to stop the bleeding.

Josephine looked at the end result of their work and was troubled; she knew what they had done was not enough – the wound would have to be sewn.

“Archbishop, see if there is any strong surgical cotton to sew up the wound, in that box; we’ll try to do that, God help us! And look again for morphine and a hypodermic ... for the pain ... please God, let there be morphine!”

He did find the required thread, the needles and the morphine and brought them to the Abbess. He helped Josephine lie the woman down then, for the first time in his life, he gave a ten mg ampoule of Morphine into the vein on Munchin’s arm. He was sweating heavily. As the Abbess saw he was finishing the injection, she shouted:

“Right! Now hold Sister’s body tightly as I try to stitch her up; keep her as still as you can. I’ve only done this on sheep before.” Munchin, bless her, gave a faint giggle and whispered: “You have another stupid sheep here now, so go ahead. I’ll try not to scream ... much!”

After the operation, Josephine stayed with Munchin while the archbishop forced himself to go into the chapel in search of other nuns. In the chapel he carefully collected every host and put them on a small silver plate that had come from the sacristy then put them back in the tabernacle and closed it. He then went all around this devastated area; there was, now, *not one nun left alive.*

The Abbess joined him in the chapel. He gently removed the grotesque head of Sister Isidore from the top of the tabernacle and placed it reverently near her body. Josephine, weeping continually, tried to get each nun's body lined up with its proper head and lying respectfully. After they had both attended to the human bodies, they then tried to place the right heads near the plaster bodies of the statues. It was there that there was a deliberate attempt to emphasize the sacrilege by placing Christ's head and other heads of male saints, from their statues, on the remains of three cows and one pig.

## XLXII

**T**he archbishop was aware he was not only exhausted, but was now, ill. His stomach was churning with the horror. He suddenly turned aside and vomited violently. The abbess kept her eyes closed; she was frightened she would do the same any minute.

The shock of what they had faced had very nearly killed them.

What do we do next, he wondered. He had really no idea. When the Abbess caught up with him, the first thing she asked was: "What should I do now? How can I explain a Satanic attack or *explain anything*; there's hardly anyone left!"

The archbishop took her hand, as though he were her big brother, and said, softly: "Let's see if we can get back to your office – if it's still there. We could sit for a while to see if we can recover." They went back the long way to the outside stairs and found they were, surprisingly, still there, so climbed wearily to the office with great relief. Entering, they collapsed into chairs

completely oblivious to the fact that the floor was once again in one piece and the back wall was now, also, back in place!

## XLXIII

**A**fter a few moments they began speaking, but NOT to each other; each seemed even unaware of the other; even so, the talking was antiphonal.

The archbishop was rambling:

His name is 'John'; I'll call him 'Jack' ... then the Abbess's voice cut in:

*... well Sister Munchin, it's like this, you see; we needed Isidore; she shouldn't have been sitting up there with a cow, but ...*

*... he'll be all right' his head is still on, I'm sure. I'll ask him if he would excuse me as I need to go to sleep*

...

*... Gertrude stayed on the ground for some reason; it's not polite to bleed in public ... then ...*

*... I need it after such long travelling with the cows to the chapel, and no rest ...*

*... then I couldn't find you either.... No, it's not good enough ...*

... Your Eminence, I've told you before, I've investigated all the bleeding ones; there's too much blood: I'll order more, but that whole problem ...

... *I need to know where you are, if you're dead, you must notify me at once, at all times of the day ...*

... you'll find the whole write-up, plus the photos of the slaughter, including the exact position of the cows' heads ...

... *You see I need to know why Isidore's head was there and not Margaret Mary; she has a difficult mother who breeds pigs ...*

... it's in your pigeonhole with a pig's head. No! I'm not doing the slaughtering all over again; I've no more blood ...

... *you see, she knows a special adviser to me, on heads. Isidore knows perfectly well I need someone sensible and strong to advise me....*

... the meeting is on Friday, not Wednesday ... we've swimming in blood Wednesday, Excellency, in the chapel ...

... *on sewing; especially heads – cows and pigs ...*

... No, excellency, I can't be there I have other duties.... No, it's the dicastery for decapitated heads, you need ...

... *I need help with the cattle. We must sew the heads back: we need ...*

... you'll have to answer for yourself.... Well, you should have stayed in last night ...

... *the milk; I have forty-one nuns to feed.... It was 42 once but they started to wear cows' heads, and I'll not stand for that....*

The archbishop started, slowly, to recognize reality again. He was suddenly aware he was filthy dirty; in fact, he was covered in blood! He suddenly wondered why blood should be so sticky! Ugh! It was disgusting! He made a decision: he would stand in the shower fully dressed, that might work ... he was ashamed; he must get clean again.

## XLXIV

The shocked, traumatized, man and woman, gradually ceased speaking. They were sitting, silently ... just staring into space. The Abbess was staring at the old clock. It was shown to be 11.45 ... her mind trembled ... that was the time when it had all begun ... it was, THEN, she remembered, 11.45! Had the clock stopped? No, it was till ticking away.

That's wrong, it took hours to finish. Didn't it? She looked at the clock again.

PERHAPS IT DIDN'T HAPPEN AT ALL? Perhaps it was a nightmare that they both shared. But that's ridiculous; you don't share nightmares. How could, she be sure? ... ... In her frustration she stamped her foot, then, startled, began to rise in her chair. The floor was all as it was before. She let her eyes roam around. The floor was perfectly normal! – just as it had been before! She looked quickly at the back wall: it was in place and everything in the office was as it always had been. Could it all have been her own illusion? Had she possibly gone

insane? She closed her eyes sitting perfectly still. 'God. Come to my aid', she prayed.

They were both startled by a brisk tap on the office door.

Sister Munchin came in and genuflected to both the Abbess and the archbishop, took her place at her desk and while booting up her computer, smiled sadly, and spoke quietly:

“My Lady I didn’t go to Sext, I thought you might need me here.” There was no response from the Abbess. Munchin continued.

“I have to say that was the saddest and most beautiful Funeral I’ve ever attended....” she began to clean and tidy the desks, but she paused as the archbishop stood up quickly.

“Excuse me, my Lady ... I am not well ... I cannot understand what this nun is saying ... this sister ... er ... um ... Sister Munchin ... yes, that’s it ... Sister Munchin, is saying. I’ll go back to Rome ... no, not Rome ... back to the bishop’s house ... ... which bishop is that?” He bowed distractedly and hurried through the door.

There was complete silence in the office as the two nuns listened as the archbishop blundered his way down the stairs.

Sister Munchin became uneasy. Something was terribly wrong, somehow. First it was the archbishop, now it was the Abbess. Why was she staring at her so intently? Had she put any part of her habit on wrongly? She knew the guimpe could cause some problems if it was out of line. Her hands went up to check the guimpe and she found a thick cotton thread hanging from her top button. She forced herself to listen to the Abbess, as she asked:

“Sister Munchin, did you come from the Chapter Room straight up here through the inner route, or did you come back here by the outside stairs?”

What a strange question, Munchin thought, but answered politely.

“By the usual inner route; that’s the quickest way, isn’t it?”

The abbess then noticed the thick, very familiar, thread that Munchin was absently winding round her fingers.

Holding onto the side of the desk, the Abbess asked:

“Sister, what is that cotton hanging from your habit?”

“Sorry, my Lady. Getting careless in my old age; must have been sewing but I can’t remember any sewing. I don’t know how I came to be wearing cotton hanging from my habit ... can’t remember it at all.

“But wait a minute: don’t worry, I’ll get rid of it!” Munchin grabbed the thread and jerked it savagely, and

out it came. It was quite long and was blood red in colour. She looked at her Abbess grimacing at the pain.

“That’s strange ... it hurt terribly.” A sudden fear overtook her. “My Lady, have I had an accident of some kind?”

Instead of answering, the Abbess closed her eyes. It was all REAL then! God have mercy on us: I am dreading what is to come.

She had to decide. No ... she couldn’t leave it ... she must pursue it.

“Munchin, please leave the desks alone – and the cotton. I want you to come close to me now – I want you to listen to me, then ... I want you to do something extraordinary for me.”

Sister Munchin realised that something serious had happened. She picked up her chair and quickly sat close to the Abbess. “Sister, put your two hands up, under the guimpe ... that’s right ... now, with your right hand carefully lift up your left breast....”

Sister Munchin reared back. “What in heavens name for...?”

“Now Sister, listen to me carefully. I shall now close my eyes. If there are no marks of a surgeon’s work on your left breast, then you can report me to Sister Raphael and tell her I am hallucinating.”

“Of course, there are no marks! Why should there be? ... I’ve never had breast surgery ... What in God’s name is going on here?”

She went to withdraw her hand. The Abbess prevented her by holding the hand in place ... her eyes then closed tightly again.

“Munchin, bend your head ... look at the row of punctures all around the breast. I know they are there, as I sewed them there a short while ago, to try to save you from bleeding to death.”

Sister Munchin impatiently took one swift look, then screamed in terror as she stood up. She was a very shaken woman.

She kept looking at the distinct punctures all around her breast - she saw the small dots of blood at each tiny hole. The cotton now made sense in a weird sort of way ... but ... what? She began to feel her head swimming. The abbess was aware of the anguish and went to hold the older woman. but Munchin moved away and again screamed loudly.

“Blood! ... there’s so much blood! Dear God, Sister Gertrude!” She quickly turned and grabbed the abbess’s shoulder: “We must save Gertrude.” She rushed to the connecting door and opening it, held it, gazing in astonishment: Gertrude was placidly typing away on her computer, working quietly as usual. She looked up and smiled at Munchin then went back to the sentence she was typing.

The distracted nun was utterly confused. She managed, with difficulty, to mutter an apology and close the door. She returned to sit close to the Abbess. She was totally lost and frightened. Nothing made sense. She was obviously going insane. She looked at her Abbess with the eyes of a dead woman. Josephine, seeing this, slapped her sharply on her face, to avoid hysterics. The nun automatically put her hand to her cheek and then, slowly, gradually, Munchin, began to

make sense of the words coming from her superior's mouth.

"Try, my good, my very good sister, not to faint. Just rest on me for a moment or two.... Muchin, for some reason, God has let you remember what happened - or to, at least, remember part of the picture of what has happened - and I think you do know now how dreadfully you were wounded."

Sister Munchin had quietened. She now spoke quietly again, her eyes seemed focused inwardly as if remembering. "I had climbed over a mass of masonry. I could see Gertrude bleeding so terribly and trying so hard to get up. I managed to get there at last but just as I reached her, that good, wonderful, nun gave a massive shudder and died." She rested her head against the Abbess's shoulder, then sat up suddenly and asked: "Am I going mad? Because there she is, unhurt in her office working away quietly as she always does."

A few minutes later, Munchin again lifted her head. "I think it was soon after I saw Gertrude die - which I don't understand - you operated on me after the archbishop had given me an injection." She began to smile, tearfully. "He's a terrible nurse. The injection hurt so much I thought I was sure to get a bruise the next day ... WAIT A MINUTE! ... BRUISE? ... DO I HAVE A BRUISE? ... THAT SHOULD CLINCH THE MATTER!" With her right arm she pushed up the sleeve of her habit and the two nuns stared - in utter silence - fixedly, at the huge blue-black bruise.

Munchin fixed her tearful, bewildered eyes on the Abbess. "I was so hoping against hope that there would

be no bruise. I could then dismiss it simply as a nightmare that is over and done with ... but, it isn't over, is it? ... It's just beginning, I think...." Munchin had turned away, weeping but then turned again to face the Abbess: "My Lady, what is going on here? What is happening to us? Is it SATANIC?" She shuddered and made the sign of the cross then dared to ask the question again: "My lady is it Satanic?"

"Yes, dearest child, I think it is!"

"But why attack the good, faithful nuns?"

"Munchin, you know Satan hates all that is good. He hates us here in this particular monastery particularly, as our blessed Lady Abbess Angela had defeated him: she had, through her own personal holiness, and her fidelity to the Hermit Father, done what no others have been able to do in these terrible, terrible times. She managed, through Christ's direction, to raise up a huge, functioning Monastery when all the powers of hell were trying to destroy such places. She has 15 women waiting for a chance to enter - there is not another contemplative monastery in this whole country that has done that. She also used her wonderful, sparkling sense of humour to keep the nuns happy and assured of their role in the service of God. She was unique in this country, and one of the few in the whole world who has done what she has done. No wonder that she was the focus of Satan's anger, his fury and his unspeakable cruelty."

They were interrupted by the Archbishop stumbling back into the room. He saw both nuns and raised his voice in relief. "Thank God! Thank God! Thank God!"

Both of you are back from where we were! I was sitting in the car and suddenly I realised what had happened and I was filled with anxiety for both of you.” His eyes filled with tears as he struggled to express his relief.

The Abbess Joephine kept hold of the good nun’s hand, but reached out her left hand , took the hand of the archbishop and pulled him gently to her side. She smiled in relief as she welcomed the archbishop back.

“Thank God indeed that we three are back in the real world and know what has happened to us. Now, Sister Munchin the archbishop and I have something very strange to tell you. You won’t believe what we’re going to tell you, but the archbishop and I - and now, at least partially - you - have experienced something that definitely concerns, YOU!”

“Concerns me? But how does all this concern ME? I’m not important.”

“You must believe me, Munchin. *God has shown us today that You are unbelievably, incredibly important in the work of God ... as ...*

“YOU, Sister, the archbishop and I, will be the only ones left to face the cataclysmic attack that Satan is going to launch upon us here. What we saw was a preview of what is to happen...

“Or” broke in the archbishop. “It could be that Satan has given us a hideous, filthy, monstrous display of cruelty in order to frighten us - to terrify us - so greatly that we will cave and agree to whatever stupid and evil demands are made on us from Rome and the evil that resides there.

“But” he continued. “The Lady Abbess, and you, Sister, I think, could well be the ... *the only two nuns ... left ALIVE!*

*“Somehow, in the divine plan for the three of us – – it will be up to us, three ... to start again! SATAN has given us a preview of what we could face – in one way or another – Why did God let us see that? I think this is the answer:*

“It is a strident, urgent call to intense, personal holiness: the holiness of the saints. Only that can defeat Satan.

*May God have pity on us and give us courage! For ...*

***“IT SEEMS WE WILL BE  
ALONE WITH NONE BUT CHRIST!  
AS ONLY HE CAN  
DELIVER US  
FROM  
EVIL!”***

## end notes

### GUIMPE

Pron: 'gimp'

1. A starched cloth covering the head, neck and shoulders as part of a nun's habit.

### Moniales:

Meaning, literally. 'Monastics' i.e., Nuns who live in monasteries, not Convents. (Sisters live in Convents)

2. The Cowl: a large form of cloak with deep sleeves that can reach the floor. It is put on over the habit and is worn, usually, by all monks and nuns as they Say/Chant, the Divine Office. (It is thought that St Benedict thought up the cowl as a means of covering up a work-stained habits that needed washing. In this way the monks would be clean in the chapel, before God.

3. The Pectoral Cross and the Crozier were the external insignia of a bishop AND an Abbot, or an Abbess, in charge of an Abbey.

4. The 'Hours' of the Divine Office which monastics chant consists of Matins, Lauds, Prime, Terce, Sext, None, Vespers and Compline.

5. Stations. It is the custom in various Congregations of monastics to ring the bells for the Divine Office five to ten minutes before the 'Hour' is to begin: this enables the monastics to put on their cowl and to 'quieten' themselves, so they are ready, mentally, to pray to God.

6. The TLM: a shorthand way of saying 'Traditional Latin Mass'

7. U.I.O.G.D (That in all things God may be glorified)

## epilogue

Well, little Angela has fulfilled the Hermit Father's prophecy, and has become the Lady Abbess of the imposing Benedictine Abbey of the Transfiguration.

It had been a difficult and demanding period, but the Lady Abbess Angela believed – after 25 years – the most difficult period was now over: the Monastery flourished, the applications to enter were still coming and the huge enterprise seemed as though it was through all its 'teething' problems.

It was then that disasters struck from within and without. Abbess Angela is soon engaged in a fight to the death for her monastery: the very real threat of dissolution was coming from an unexpected quarter: The Vatican itself.

Will the cost of victory demand the life of the Abbess herself?



OTHER BOOKS BY FATHER ANTONY BRENNAN –  
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*The Bexford North Mysteries*  
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Gertrude  
Jumpin' Jerusalem! He's Back!

# about the author



Father Antony was born in Australia to a family of Irish/English background. He taught for a time in universities, firstly in English Literature, then in Neural malfunctions of the brain. He then entered Religious Life.

He began as a monk then was transferred to the Diocesan priesthood where he worked in many difficult parishes, with major social problems and great poverty.

He was recalled to Bishop House and worked in close contact as an adviser to his bishop for many years.

Overwhelmed by the problems in the Church, he asked for, and received, permission, to go - for a time - and live as a hermit in an extremely isolated place, utterly alone. He loved it. He loved the utter silence, the benefits of a fixed unchanging timetable, the awareness of being alone with Christ, and the hard physical work he did in the wrecked church and grounds. When it was time to return to the Bishop's House, he knew the haven of peace was over.

Retiring from active life, eventually, with severe cardiac problems, he continues to use the 1962 Missal to offer the holy Mass. He writes for hours each day - his first degree was in English and Russian Literature - and so far, he has written nineteen books, including six in one series, and a Trilogy which he says was 'just for fun'. He has a quirky sense of humour.

## If You Enjoyed This Book, Check Out These Others at Saint Dominic's Media

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