

The seven deadly sins

Greyabbey the beautiful abbey with the modest name belying its majestic presence overlooking an inlet of the sea in County Kerry, had stood there for centuries, first as a home for Cistercian monks and later as a prestigious boarding school for young girls who came from as far away as Belgium, France Italy and Germany. The nuns who ran the school had moved away as the numbers dwindled and for the past thirty years it was a retreat house for people of all religions who wished to meditate quietly, close to nature, helped by the sound of the crashing waves and the crying of seagulls.

Unfortunately there was only a handful of nuns left, twelve to be exact when it used to be forty and their Reverend Mother had been in a car accident which had left her in a coma. She was not expected to recover. That meant that the Mother Superior of the order had come to decide who would take her place as the new Reverend Mother. She was staying for a week and observing the nuns quietly.

During the daily visits to the chapel for prayers and hymns the seven older nuns could not concentrate. Each one was tense and wondering who would be chosen. Their heads were buzzing with both excitement and dread.

Sister Jacinta was thinking "It will probably be me I've always carried out my tasks to perfection and everyone knows this. I would be the best person to liaise with the Bishop and indeed the Pope if circumstances merited it. Some of the other nuns and I'm not being nasty when I say this - but they've just not got the right breeding or education. Country bumpkins most of them!

Sister Perpetua mused Well I'm not a vain person heaven knows and I never push myself forward but I genuinely think I should take the lead here. I have had to watch Sister Maria sail in and out of her room right opposite mine and it's so superior with its views of the mountains and it's much bigger than mine. Sometimes I can't get to sleep at night with thinking about it and imagining how I would arrange the furniture in it. Maria has no taste! I would have a vase of fresh primroses on the windowsill and my lemon Laura Ashley cover on the bed. Oh if only! and the all important sign on the door of course Reverend Mother Maria

Please do not disturb

Sister Rosa was deep in thought too I'm the obvious choice I think everyone knows this but they'll never admit it. They say I have a lust for power and that I always have to be in charge of the finances. That is true but where would we be if some of these Holy Joes were running the convent? Merciful God we'd be out begging for food in the streets! Praying is all very well but it doesn't pay the bills. I would make sure our income was well invested and making a good profit I don't just read religious books in the evening I read the Financial Times! I must admit I love it when donations come in. I positively salivate when I lodge the Chequers in the bank. If I'm put in charge they'll hop to my tune by heavens they will. I know they say I'm power crazy - it's more that they are so lazy!

Sister Helena fumed inwardly. Why are they making this big fuss? I'm the nun that's here the longest 40yrs it should be automatic. I have earned it I was here foundering with the cold every night in bed before the central heating was installed, up for mass every morning at 630 am, having to wash with freezing cold water and fasting from the evening before having had supper at 5 30pm. It makes my blood boil to see

some of these young nuns-some even have those electric throws to wrap around them in the evening while they sit watching TV and what were they watching? Oh a load of rubbish called Celebrity Big Brother! They were actually voting on their mobiles and giggling like schoolgirls over a silly man called Louis Walsh whoever he is and Nikita a dancer if you don't mind from Strictly Come Dancing. They say they need to know what's going on in the outside world so as they can help troubled souls at the retreats. What nonsense it makes my blood boil. Hopefully Mother Superior will do the right thing.

Sister Mary Therese could hear her stomach rumble so she started to think about food. Will there be a party? I mean when the new Reverend Mother is announced. I think we should start getting the food ready soon. We need to cook a few roasts of beef and ham to slice down for sandwiches and a few quiches. We should order plenty of cheeses from Wilmont Farm up the road and my nephew Charlie could get us a good deal on nice big juicy prawns from Castlemara. Six large trifles should suffice and six strawberry pavlovas, plenty of double cream and six large tubs of ice cream. Oh it's making me hungry just thinking about it. I actually couldn't care less who is chosen. Oh please have a party. Would it be wrong to pray for one?

Sister Cornelius was trying to pray but resentful thoughts kept dripping into her head. It won't be fair that's for sure and it won't be me. The others have everything going for them. Look at Jacinta she's always boasting about her year at the Sorbonne and how she comes from an aristocratic background. Aristocratic my foot but she did go to a finishing school in Switzerland. I would have loved that opportunity, learning to dance and to speak three languages. I have the looks and the carriage I'm told I could have been so confident if I'd had her advantages. I think I'm a natural leader though.

Sister Lucia gave a stifled yawn as she thought I know I have what it takes to lead but it would be exhausting. You would have to be first in the convent chapel for early morning prayers which begin at 6 am. I couldn't pretend to be sick as I sometimes do and have a lie-in. We will soon be coming into Summer and I know I'll be tempted to skive off sometimes when there's cleaning or gardening to be done and lie in the woods with the sun on my face smelling the scent of the wildflowers. Oh it makes me feel like Maria in The Sound of Music. The other nuns would definitely be singing.

How do you solve a problem like Lucia! If my name should be called out I'll plead Nervous Debilitation. I've done it before and my doctor will write me a letter to prove it. He knows that I have a bit of information on him that he would rather not have made public. I worked for the Inland Revenue you see before I entered the convent.

As the prayers for Reverend Mother continued with the voices rising and falling, almost mimicking the waves outside the window Mother Superior swept into the chapel. I have had a call from Tralee Hospital she announced. Before she could continue sobbing and crying were heard from every corner. It's great news God has heard our prayers and Reverend Mother has come out of her coma and is expected to make a full recovery! She waited for cries of joy but a deathly silence hung over that part of the chapel where the older nuns knelt. The novices were uttering cries of joy and clapping their hands with glee. The other seven had their heads down obviously shocked. Oh the poor things prayers and tears of thanksgiving. They are so good, they never think of themselves. I will reward them with a special thanksgiving dinner tonight. Sister Mary Therese can arrange it. I hope that they never find out that I had chosen none of them to be the new Reverend Mother. I was going to bring over one of our younger nuns from

Scotland- she would have given the place a good shakeup!