



The Shadow of Death

Jane Willan

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A charming and clever traditional mystery debut set at a bucolic Welsh convent, *The Shadow of Death* introduces Sister Agatha, a mystery-loving nun who finds herself in the midst of a real-life murder case.

The sisters of Gwenafwy Abbey have cherished their contemplative life—days spent in prayer, reflection, tending the Convent’s vegetable gardens and making their award-winning organic cheese, Heavenly Gouda. Life seems perfect, except for Sister Agatha, a die-hard mystery fan who despairs of ever finding any real life inspiration for her own novel. That is, until the Abbey’s sexton is found dead under an avalanche of gouda. Despite the reservations of the local constable, Sister Agatha is convinced it’s murder and the game is afoot.

Armed only with the notes she’s scribbled during her favorite podcast, *How to Write a Mystery Novel*, as well as a lessons learned from crime heroes ranging from Hercule Poirot to Stephanie Plum, Sister Agatha leads the nuns of Gwenafwy Abbey (and her unwitting sidekick, Father Selwyn) as they begin a race against time to resolve the death of Jacob, save the Abbey, exonerate a beloved postulant, and restore the good name of their cheese. Perfect for fans of G. M. Malliet and M. C. Beaton, *The Shadow of Death* is divine entertainment from a talented debut writer.

The Shadow of Death Details

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From Reader Review The Shadow of Death for online ebook

Ellen says

The first in a new mystery series set in the unlikely setting of a Welsh convent. Sister Agatha fancies herself a mystery writer in the vein of Louise Penny, so when things go awry at the convent, Sister Agatha is on the case. With the help of her friend, Father Selwyn, they work to solve a murder and figure out who is sabotaging their Gouda cheese production, in order to save the convent. I am looking forward to the next installment, I recommend to cozy mystery lovers.

Lisa Morin says

Unfortunately I was not able to read the entire book.

I could not connect to any of the characters and I had a difficult time following the story. It seemed to jump around a lot and some of the writing just did not make sense to me.

I voluntarily read an ARC of this book provided by the publisher and NetGalley.

Fred says

The Shadow Of Death is the first book in the Sister Agatha and Father Selwyn series.

I think this is a wonderful new series. It brought to my mind the Father Dowling series that I enjoyed watching on TV and also reading.

Sister Agatha is one of only ten nuns left at Gwenafwy Abbey, fewer women becoming nuns have had huge impact at the Abbey. Sister Agatha's main role at the Abbey is as its librarian and now that she has taken a course on writing mystery novels has been working on her first book in her spare time.

The convent, in need of a source of income has started making Gouda cheese and have aptly named it Heavenly Gouda and are looking forward to the annual Cheese Festival at Gwydion Castle. They are hoping to win an award they are hoping their sales will reach heavenwards. Sister Agatha heads for the cheese barn to confront Sister Callwen about a disturbing voice mail that she had heard, but upon entering instead of finding Sister Callwen, she finds Jacob Traherne, Sexton at St. Anselm, face down and bleeding having been crushed by the heavy metal shelving and many rounds of Gouda cheese. Constable Barnes rules it an accident, but Sister Agatha believes otherwise. Her belief is reinforced when there is a fire, confined to the roof of the barn. The Sisters hope that they will be able to salvage enough cheese to at least have decent sales and showing at the festival.

Sister Agatha, having read enough mysteries, knows she needs a "sidekick" and enlists the help of Father Selwyn, vicar of St. Anselm, to solve the mystery of who killed Jacob. They also need to learn who is trying to sabotage their cheesemaking operation.

This book has a very enjoyable cast of characters. I particularly liked Sister Agatha, as she knows she no

detective and is often referring back to podcasts, that she listens to, by retired Chief Constable McFarland and asking herself what would he do. Another interesting character is Sister Gwentydd, a young lady who shows up at the Abbey and wants to become a nun. Her past is a mystery, but she is an excellent cook and the Sisters love to eat, so they welcome her, hoping she will find her calling with the Abbey.

This is a wonderful start to this new series, with a well-plotted and told story. For me, it was a book that was hard to put down and am looking forward to learning more about the Sister of Gwenafwy Abbey and, of course, Father Selwyn, too.

I'm anxiously awaiting book 2, *The Hour Of Death*, due out in October 2018.

Kathy Martin says

This is a great country mystery with engaging characters. Sister Agatha has lived at Gwenafwy Abbey since she entered as a postulant at age 19. Now over 60, she has seen changes at the Abbey. From a peak population of 100 Sisters, the abbey is down to 19 and the bishop is looking at closing the Abbey.

Sister Agnes wants to write mysteries. The Abbey sent her to school and now the Abbey's librarian has a Masters of Fine Arts in Creative Writing. She is in the throes of writing her own mystery when a mystery appears at the Abbey. Their young sexton Joseph Traherne has been found dead in the Abbey's aging room for their award winning Heavenly Gouda. A metal rack holding their aging cheeses fell on him. The local Constable is all set to write it off as a tragic accident but Sister Agnes isn't so sure.

She decides to investigate and recruits Father Selwyn as her unwitting assistant since all the great detectives have assistants to bounce ideas off. But Joseph's death isn't the only mystery at the Abbey. The new postulant, the first in ten years, has secrets of her own and is fleeing a murder investigation. Also, Sister Callwyn who entered the Abbey with Sister Agnes is keeping some sort of secret and showing an interest in technology that was totally new for her.

As she investigates in her village, she discovers that Joseph had a boyfriend whose ex was jealous of his new relationship. She discovers that Joseph had a rival for his position as the lead singer of his choir and the rival's helicopter mother seems willing to do anything so that her son can take the position she feels he deserves. She discovers that one of the local farmers may have a motive to discredit the abbey's cheese production in order to steal business from them. Then there is the new young deacon at the church who might have a gambling problem.

I loved the references to other mysteries and the references to the podcast that Sister Agnes listens to religiously (sorry!) for hints about writing her own mystery. This was an entertaining story with great characters and plot twisty enough to keep me guessing.

Ann says

I really enjoyed this new series, *Sister Agatha and Father Selwyn Mystery*, about a convent in Wales. The nuns are getting older and money to keep the convent is hard to come by so they start to make and sell cheese. As they start to enter contests and win awards the business is starting to pay off but someone isn't

happy. When their sexton is found dead under a collapsed shelf of cheese wheels, Sister Agatha is sure it's murder. She is the Abby's librarian and an avid mystery reader. I was so glad to see this was the beginning of a series because the story is wonderful and I can't wait until the next group of nuns arrive. This appears to be Jane Willan's first book and she did a great job Enjoy. I received this ARC in exchange for a fair and honest review.

Jan says

This was a fun debut and first in series. It wasn't a typical story about a religious order – these nun's make cheese, write mystery novels, play pokemon and attend yoga classes. But I enjoyed meeting each of the characters with their individual quirks and following Sister Agatha and Father Selwyn on their hunt for the killer was a kick. There were a few inconsistencies with details but they didn't take away my enjoyment of the story. I will read the next installment when it comes out.

I would like to thank NetGalley and the publisher for an advanced reader copy in exchange for an honest review.

Marie McNary says

I enjoyed this book. It was fast paced, entertaining, and added an element of humor throughout the pages. The nuns of Gwenaffay were all interesting and complex characters with lots of room to grow in future installments. I'm looking forward to seeing where Jane Willan takes this series in future books!

Nicole says

I thoroughly enjoyed this debut cozy by Jane Willan. Sister Agatha, a nun and mystery lover at Gwenafwy Abbey in northern Wales, takes great pride in the fact that she shares a name with the queen of crime, Agatha Christie. When nuns at the abbey turn 60 the other sisters encourage her to reach for the stars and achieve whatever dream she may have, and for Sister Agatha it's to write her own mystery novel. After Jacob, the church sexton, is found dead in the cheese barn where Gwenafwy Abbey's Heavenly Gouda is produced, her education and all that she's learned from fictional detectives comes in handy. Sister Agatha is convinced that Jacob did not die accidentally and that he was in fact murdered. She enlists the help of her lifelong friend Father Selwyn, and together they try to discover who caused young Jacob's demise. There are other sub-plots woven throughout the story - a fugitive turned postulant, missing items from the church, the attempted sabotage of the Abbey's Heavenly Gouda cheese business, and a bishop who wants to close the doors on the Abbey. The Shadow of Death is a quick-paced page turner, and I certainly hope there will be more books in this series. Very well done, Jane Willan - 5 stars!

Betty says

A new author for me, the first book of a new series featuring Sister Agatha finds her writing a detective story. There are only 19 sisters left in the Welch Anglican convent. The descriptions of area and characters

were good. The writing did not flow smoothly and the story jump between characters. This made it difficult to follow the narrative and many commonplace says were used. Two themes are present and not connected to make one story. The church sexton is found dead under a rack of Gouda cheese. The constable considered it an accidental death. Sister Agatha believes it is murder and decided to investigate the death. Second, involved the latest sister and someone wants the acreage for a spa.

Disclosure: Many thanks to Crooked Lane Books for a review copy. The opinions expressed are my own.

Connie says

The nuns at Gwenafwy Abbey in a Welsh convent lead calm, contemplative lives while the rest of the world scurries on at an ever faster pace. The author, Jane Willan, does such a delightful job of describing them that I'd love to spend some time there. Each of the sisters has a different task that they excel at, and they work well together, having formed a family of sorts over the years. Now that most of them are ten years from retirement, and hope to live out the rest of their lives in the abbey, things are suddenly turned upside down when the sexton is murdered and the bishop threatens to close the abbey if they don't find a way to bring in more nuns, help save the planet and make money.

Jane Willan does a great job of bringing this book to life. I got a really good sense of what life is like for the sisters who live there. The mystery was well written and wrapped up nicely. This is one of the best cozy mysteries I have read so far this year, and I am looking forward to reading more books by this author. I also liked that the sex and swearing, so prevalent in every book these days, isn't found in this one.

I highly recommend this to anyone who enjoys a good mystery.

Carrie says

The Shadow of Death by Jane Willan is the first book in the new cozy Sister Agatha and Father Selwyn Mystery series. The story takes place at the Gwenafwy Abbey when unfortunately the Abbey's sexton is found dead and the local law is called in.

Sister Agatha is a diehard mystery fan and aspiring writer so while she watches on the death is declared an accident she immediately begins pointing out the evidence to the contrary.

To the sheriff it looks as if Jacob was reaching for the Heavenly Gouda on a high shelf when it all fell on him. But Sister Agatha is quick to point out he is facing the opposite direction. There are also a few other questionable things around to point her towards thinking this was a murder so what else could she do but try to discover the murderer herself.

The Shadow of Death looked like it was going to be a cute cozy mystery that I might enjoy but when finished this one was just not my cup of tea unfortunately. The story starts off feeling a bit info-dumpy with it being chapter three before the characters begin to interact and speak so a bit too much telling to begin for

my taste already leaving me a bit disconnected to start.

As the story gets going it also gets a bit bogged down with a lot of extra going on besides just the murder to solve. This brings in a lot of characters and action to keep track of for an opener when I'd rather be getting to know the main characters better. I also wondered here and there how realistic some things going on were. So while this one just didn't pull me in there are others that seem to enjoy it more than I did so feel free to give this one a try for yourself.

I received an advance copy from the publisher via NetGalley.

For more reviews please visit <https://carriesbookreviews.com/>

Leslie says

This remarkable debut mystery is similar to two of my favorite ecclesiastical mysteries--Father Brown (admittedly, the TV series) and Julia Spencer-Fleming's Clare Fergusson / Ross Van Alstyne set in Millers Kill. Here, the setting is an Anglican Abbey in rural Wales, with Sister Agatha determined to write her own mystery novel while stumbling onto a real-life murder to solve. Interesting characters, well-written plot--even if a bit overlong--foretells an excellent series to come. Cozier than the excellent but dark Sidney Chambers series by James Runcie, which became the equally excellent PBS series Grantchester.

Juli says

Sister Agatha has been a nun at Gwenafwy Abbey in Wales for 40 years. Besides God, there have been two great loves in her life since childhood....the nuns of the Abbey and books. She is the librarian at the Abbey and, in secret, she listens to mystery podcasts and is writing her own novel. Then she discovers the Abbey's Sexton, Jacob Traherne, dead under an avalanche of metal shelving and rounds of Heavenly Gouda (cheese made by the nuns) and has to put everything she knows about sleuthing to the test. The local constable has reservations, but Sister Agatha is sure that Jacob was murdered. She sets to work to discover the murderer, putting everything she has learned from literary detectives like Hercule Poirot and even information gleaned from her favorite podcast, *How to Write a Mystery Novel*, into practice. With the help of the other nuns at the Abbey and Father Selwyn, Sister Agatha sets out to prove the innocence of an accused postulant and save the day!

This book has such a refreshing mix of wit, humor and mystery. It reminds me of Hamish Macbeth for the quirky characters....a bit of Father Brown with its amateur sleuths of the religious persuasion....and a smidge of *Murder She Wrote* tossed in the pot as well. Several times I had to laugh out loud at the humor. For example, the sisters adopted two pigs not realizing they were potbellied pigs and not regular soon-to-be-ham pigs, and they ended up pets. Their names? Luther and Calvin. :) A little Catholic humor there. :) And their cheese....Heavenly Gouda. That's just too cute. I enjoyed this story from beginning to end. The characters are fabulous. The humor and wit is refreshing. And the mystery was interesting with plenty of suspects, twists, turns and sheannigans going on.

What a nice start for a new cozy series! It has a little bit of everything.....a postulant with a past, thievery at the church, a Bishop with bad intentions, a nun who loves whodunits and podcasts, and a great murder

mystery. Loved it from beginning to end!

This is Jane Willan's debut novel. I will definitely be reading more of this series!

I voluntarily read an advanced readers copy of this book from Crooked Lane Books via NetGalley. All opinions expressed are entirely my own.

Minx -The Genre Minx Book Reviews says

[This, though, th

Kristina says

The Shadow of Death by Jane Willan is the first installment in A Sister Agatha and Father Selwyn Mystery series. Sister Agatha is an Order of the Sacred Heart nun at Gwenafwy Abbey in Pryderi, North Wales where the sisters make their own gouda cheese known as Heavenly Gouda. Sister Agatha is the librarian for the abbey and, in her spare time, is working on writing a mystery novel. She enters the cheese barn to find Jacob Traherne, the sexton for St. Anselm's Church, on the floor under a heavy steel shelving unit that had held their gouda. Constable Barnes rules the death an accident, but Sister Agatha has her doubts. This is an opportunity for Sister Agatha to utilize what she has learned from reading mystery novels, her writing classes and her favorite podcast on How to Write a Mystery Novel. With help from her fellow nuns and Father Selwyn (her designated sidekick), Sister Agatha sets out to find Jacob's killer. But she cannot devote all her time to the case. The abbey is in trouble and they only have a short time to save their home. Plus, there is something fishy about their new postulant, Sister Callwen has been acting secretive lately, and their cheese is getting a bad rap. Join in on the adventure with Sister Agatha in The Shadow of Death.

I loved the description of The Shadow of Death and was eager to read it. The Shadow of Death starts out by sharing too much information. We are introduced to the abbey, the nuns, their gouda, the town, and so much more. It was an overload of details in the first sixteen percent of the book. I did enjoy the authors descriptions of the buildings and North Wales (makes me want to catch a flight to Wales). Ms. Willan is a descriptive writer who can get overly detailed at times (needs to find a balance). There are several storylines going on in The Shadow of Death. Unfortunately, they all do not tie together into a cohesive book. The author jumps around from one item to another. It makes for a choppy story. Sister Agatha reminds me of Mrs. Fletcher. I like that she is a librarian who loves mysteries and wants to write her own mystery novels. Sister Agatha has read hundreds of mystery novels and the names of numerous fictional sleuths are scattered throughout the book (they are her inspiration along with a pod cast). It was interesting to find out about the inner workings of a modern-day convent. These nuns have cell phones, computers, fancy sneakers, indulge in wine, and get to explore their dreams after age sixty. I was curious how they paid for all of these items when they were having trouble paying their bills. I thought the murder mystery was straightforward, and I could quickly identify the killer. I was more curious about Sister Callwen (she was being secretive). The pacing of The Shadow of Death was slow, the case details kept being repeated, and the book was too long (I did not think it would ever end). I wish the author had not put so much into this first book. The Shadow of Death was not the right fit for me. I do suggest that you obtain a sample to see if The Shadow of Death is the right cozy mystery for you. Everyone has different reading tastes.

