



## The Prioress' Tale

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After Domina Alys was made prioress, St. Frideswide became nothing more than a guest house for her relatives. But when a long-standing family rivalry ends with murder, it is up to Frevisse to rid the nunnery of its unwelcome--and deadly--guests.

## **The Prioress' Tale Details**

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Author : Margaret Frazer

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## From Reader Review The Prioress' Tale for online ebook

### Alison says

Somewhere along the line by this point in the series, the nuns have all become slightly more like caricatures of themselves - so Sister Thomasine becomes a saint instead of a highly pious, scared girl, and Dame Alys becomes an incompetence tyrant, from a forceful, if efficient, cook. Nevertheless, the tension in this book rumbles along nicely making it a good light read.

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### Carol Flatten says

The Sister Frevisse mystery delved more deeply into the characters of the priory and the visitors who were involved in the story. Once again, she wrote so very well that I was not able to pick out the murderer. I will be waiting anxiously for the next book to see what happened to Domina Alys and all the other sisters.

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### Lisa says

Another favorite in the Sister Frevisse series, this entry tells of what happens when Dame Alys is allowed to run St. Frideswide's. Chaos and murder ensue. This is a great series.

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### Kathy says

As much as I enjoy medieval mysteries, I've never read any by Margaret Frazer, so this book served as an introduction to her books and I have to say that I was quite pleased.

The newly elected prioress of St. Fridewide's -- Dame Alys -- is about as vain a woman as can be found. She runs her priory with the proverbial iron fist, with little thought given to Christian charity. Then some of her relatives show up and are given carte blanche, eating the nuns out of house and home, and running roughshod over the locals. All this leads up to abduction, murder, and the violation of the holy foundation. It is up to one of the sisters, Dame Frevisse, to help solve the mysteries, all while on the bad side of Dame Alys for daring to question the prioress's actions.

This introduction to the Dame Frevisse series has made me eager to delve further into this series.

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### Jill Holmes says

The forward-thinking leadership of Domina Edith has passed away from the medieval Priory of St. Frideswide's, and their new leader--Domina Alys--is an altogether different kettle of fish. Domineering and skilled at tormenting, Domina Alys holds a special dislike of Dame Frevisse, the heroine of Margaret Frazer's masterful series. But then, Domina Alys has always despised any of the nuns with intelligence, gifts, or talents beyond hers and that includes all of them. It is 1439, and Alys has set about building St. Frideswide's into the type of priory she thinks it ought to be--one with a bell tower, finer food, and a showy

face to present to the greater world. She enlists the help of Reynold Godfrey (her cousin) and all the Godfrey clan, but they begin inauspiciously with the kidnap of a local girl and by alienating and driving away Master Naylor, the Priory's long-standing and most excellent steward. Food and other stores are being depleted at an alarming rate, the Godfreys are constantly battling anyone at hand including the stonemasons building the bell tower, and rivalries with other families are brought to the Priory's doors. Reynold promises his cousin that he'll bring the materials, food, and wealth his cousin demands; but the unknowing Domina Alys doesn't question his methods. Mayhem--and finally murder--ensues. Frevisse errs and is painfully punished, yet it is up to her to solve the mysteries of the kidnapping and murder and to oust her Prioress' miserable family. Fortunately, the player Joliffe, Dame Frevisse's old friend now temporarily a wandering minstrel, turns up and does a bit of sleuthing of his own. Can the mysteries be solved, and, more critically, can they be solved before St. Frideswide's reputation and existence are destroyed? Frevisse and Joliffe evade Domina Alys's wrath to do their best to resolve The Prioress' Tale.

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### **Catherine Mustread says**

Set in 1439, two year's after the ending of the previous book in the series, The Murderer's Tale, the mystery is set back at the priory, St. Frideswide, where Domina Alys has grand ideas but has failed the nuns, the church and the greater community as Prioress. Loved the appearance of Joliffe, the protagonist of the Joliffe the Player series. The plot and interesting characters carry the story until the crimes occur and the mystery evolves in the second half of the book.

Frevisse, as usual, comes across as a strong, intelligent and capable woman, despite the suffering she endures while under the rule of Alys.

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### **Booknblues says**

Margaret Frazer in The Prioress' Tale creates an interesting slice of medieval of life at the 15th century priory of St. Frideswide. The characters are ones you will want to meet again in other books. Domina Alys is single minded, mean spirited and petty in her vision of an improved priory. Those who do not join forces with her are her enemies, chief among them is protagonist, Sister Frevisse an intelligent and likable nun who is much worried about the downward direction the priory is taking. She rightly believes that nothing is as it seems to be.

The mystery itself almost seems secondary to the story of the characters and the priory. Frazer slowly builds to the mystery. In fact, the murder does not occur until late in the book. There are other secrets to be revealed besides "whodunit".

This is a good quick read and I am looking forward to reading other Margaret Frazer books in the Sister Frevisse series.

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### **Laura Edwards says**

This book was as chaotic and disheartening as Domina Alys' rule. I really hated the parts told from her POV.

Very grating personality which comes through very well in Frazer's writing.

I was annoyed at one point with Dame Claire. She was arguing with Frevisse about Alys and how Frevisse only focuses on the negatives. Her point is valid, but Claire was also being stubborn regarding the motivation behind Alys' faults. Being willfully ignorant is no better than Frevisse's stubbornness.

This particular entry was barely a four star rating. I was glad to see Sister Thomasine had a larger part to play in this story which is the main reason I rounded up the rating. I know she annoys Frevisse at times and I even understand why, but I really like her character. And there is definitely more than meets the eye to Thomasine, as Frevisse is continually finding out.

I was really hoping Domina Alys would be gone by the end. The only plus. I can't imagine she'll be around long enough to spoil the next book.

I did like the mystery as well. A lot of red herrings which throw the reader off the scent of the real killer. And I think I was as shocked as Frevisse when finding out Lady Eleanor's true colors. Frazer did a wonderful job in weaving the plot to a satisfactory conclusion.

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### **Katie says**

This was definitely one of the best entries in this already very well-written series. I've said it before, but I really appreciate how the characters grow from book to book. Frazer writes well developed characters and thoughtful mysteries.

As in the previous books, the murder comes late, but that gives time to create a tense, tightly-woven narrative that precedes it. Unlike in the previous book, it wasn't clear who would be murdered and who the culprit was.

I'm very much hoping the events in this book lead to the come-uppance of Domina Alys in the next ... I'm sure Frevisse feels the same way (although, then she would have to pray about it, while I has the reader share none of the guilt).

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### **Kathy Davie says**

Seventh in the Sister Frevisse medieval mystery series revolving around a group of nuns in a priory near Oxford.

Nominated in 1988 for an Edgar Award for "Best Paperback Original".

### **My Take**

Oh, I've just been dying to find out what's happening in St. Frideswide's now that Dame Alys is the prioress. And she is definitely running true to form. The priory is falling apart, prayer is a nuisance, and the Benedictine rules are falling out the window so fast it looks like snow.

She's talking relatives into entering as nuns and she got her aunt to commit a chunk of money and come to live there. Money that is supposed to be used for her aunt's living expenses for as long as she lives. Instead Alys is spending it fast on luxuries for herself and material enhancements to the priory itself. Some of it is having to be spent on entertaining all the relatives who come to stay. Including her loud mouth cousin who is

just like her. More interested in getting what s/he wants and damn the rest.

Most of the novel is Alys whining, bitching, and moaning about what she will have, must have, needs to have and finding all sorts of excuses as to why. She complains about how stupid the other nuns are as well as those few who are too much above themselves. No one is allowed to disagree and she is quick to find fault and punish.

On a side note, I must say it's awfully irritating that the series is named "Sister Frevisse" and yet she's addressed as "Dame" in the book. Why not just name the series "Dame Frevisse"?

Lady Eleanor makes an interesting point about Domina Alys that her heart is in it but not her mind.

### **The Story**

It's a losing battle for Domina Alys. She needs Sir Reynold's support to keep the mason and to ensure that he fulfills the promises he's made her, but he and his men are eating and drinking the stores that should have seen them through the winter and they are increasingly doing wrong. Kidnapping a woman off the streets to force her to marry one of their own. Beating and torturing a mad man they find. And Domina Alys is complicit in that she allows them to continue.

In between, Domina Alys delights in hurting those around her, ensuring that they all understand where they stand in the pecking order.

It's murder that brings it all to a head. *I was kinda hoping for a brain tumor...*

### **The Characters**

**Dame Frevisse** is currently serving the role as hosteler. She is an intelligent woman who does not brook fools gladly. A sin of which she is heartily aware and for which she keeps doing penance. **Dame Claire** is just as intelligent but with a more humane outlook; I suspect her absorption in herbs and healing probably helps.

**Sister Thomasine** is the saint in the group and, as we learn, extremely observant. I wouldn't be too surprised if she ended up as prioress one day. **Dame Perpetua** is another of Frevisse's allies although her time is taken up with teaching Lady Adela and disciplining the novices. Of which there are none at the moment. **Lady Adela** is a ten- or eleven-year-old living at the priory (see *The Boy's Tale* ). She has a malformed hip and it is doubted that her father will bother with trying to find her a husband. Domina Alys' hope is that she will enter as a nun and they'll get her dowry. Frevisse and Claire are praying not.

**Sister Emma** and **Sister Amicia** are squealers with most of the sisters loving the relaxation of the rules and too inclined toward the worldly. **Dame Juliana** is cellarer and worried about replenishing the stores. **Sister Johane** and **Sister Cecely** are Godfreys. Relatives of **Domina Alys**, the too, too intimidating nun who lucked into the prioress role simply because she intimidated everyone else. **Katerin** is the dim-witted servant girl whom Alys has taken for her own personal servant. **Father Henry** is the slow, but honest priory priest.

**Ela** is the head of the guesthall servants. **Master Robert Naylor** has been the priory's steward for years. A good one, but he's had enough of Domina Alys.

**Master Porter** is the hapless stone mason who is very angry over not being paid for the work he's doing to build the bell tower Domina Alys just had to have. **Edmund Harman** is a clerk to Joice's uncle.

**Lady Eleanor Godfrey** is Alys' aunt and has retired to live in the priory after donating a corrody, a set sum of money intended to keep a lady in comfort for the rest of her life. **Margrete** is her very long-term maid. **Sir**

**Hugh** is her son and Reynold's second-in-command.

**Sir Reynold Godfrey** is another of Domina Alys' cousins and has taken up residence at the priory, eating them out of house and home. For all that he promises to replenish it. Because they can't leave a single stone unturned, they've kidnapped a young woman whom **Benet Godfrey** had met in London earlier. **Joice Southgate** is the daughter of a wealthy draper and has a large dowry. She is however about to be betrothed to **Sir Lewis Fenner**. A dowry that Reynold would prefer to see in Godfrey hands.

**Joliffe** makes an appearance; last time he showed was in *The Servant's Tale* . It seems that the players have disbanded and he's footloose and fancyfree. *I'll bet Joliffe is still working for the bishop, however.*

**Abbot Gilberd** leads St. Bartholomew's Abbey in Northampton to which St. Frideswide's looks as its daughter house. His interference would heavily displease Alys.

### **The Cover**

It's another of the new covers. This one has a colonial blue background with a squared inset framed by heavy carving at the top corners and lesser carving at the top center and bottom corners. The scene within is of two buildings---I'm guessing it's meant to be priory buildings. The one on the left is a two-story stone building with lovely Gothic windows while the other has a thatched roof which covers an exterior, pillared walkway.

In front of the building, a nun is talking to a hooded man mounted on a horse while a third person in secular dress is peeking out of an upstairs window.

Oh, it's definitely *The Prioress' Tale*. My suspicion is that she'll be out on her ear or demoted by the next book! Hee-hee.

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### **Tomi says**

Enjoyed reading this book; it is a good portrayal of life in a convent in the medieval period. The characters were believable...found myself wanting to slap more than one of them! As a murder mystery, however, it is a little lacking. The murder occurred late in the book and things moved very quickly after that. I would have preferred it if Frazer had devoted more time to solving the mystery. The ending felt a little forced. All in all, it was a good read and I will be looking for more in this series.

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### **Brenda Wilson says**

Margaret Frazer's Sister Frevisse mystery series is a treat to read. She has done her research about life in the 1400's in an English nunnery. Sister Frevisse, a nun at St. Friedeswilde priory, notices everything and understands people's weaknesses and strengths. When the head of the nunnery, Domina Ayles extends shelter and food to her cousin and his men, trouble brews which leads to murder. Sister Frevisse must try to solve this crime in order to save innocent people and her own priory.

Margaret Frazer's writing style helps evokes the feeling of what life might have been like so many hundreds of years ago. If you can, read this series in order to see the evolution of the characters who live in and around St. Friedeswilde.

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## **Sandra Strange says**

No romantic picture of medieval priory life, this mystery novel is peopled with Sisters one can like--or not. Even the protagonist isn't totally sympathetic. But the mystery presents an engaging puzzle, complete with kidnapping, murder, betrayal, and greed. So what else is new in mysteries? The Medieval priory background is well done and totally believable.

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## **Sienna says**

light & fun

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## **Andrew Doohan says**

There was a different twist to this iteration of the *Sister Frevisse Medieval Mysteries*. There's still the murder and intrigue we've come to expect in the small Benedictine house in which Dame Frevisse and her sisters reside, but this time much of the intrigue is internal to the Benedictine priory itself. We see, too, the return of some familiar 'faces' in this edition as well, likely I suspect to be recurring features right throughout the series as it unfolds.

At the heart of this story, however, apart from murder and mystery, is the story of greed, of revenge, and of inter-familial jealousy and turmoil. This setting provides the basis for the 'external' story that is the subject of this volume, while the 'internal' story echoes the external in some surprising ways.

Another wonderful tale from Margaret Frazer that grasps my attention from the very beginning.

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