



The Traitor's Tale

Margaret Frazer

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Dame Frevisse of St. Frideswide's nunnery is in London to assist her cousin Alice, the widowed Duchess of Suffolk, in burying her husband—but the late Duke was so hated that even being in the presence of his corpse is unsafe.

Wandering player Simon Joliffe is also in London, on a mission with vital information for the exiled Duke of York: a list naming the English noblemen who purportedly betrayed their King by conspiring with the French, including some of Suffolk's men, whom Joliffe has been seeking—and now found dead.

Joining the player on his search for the men on the list, Frevisse starts to wonder whether or not the list is real—or part of an even greater conspiracy against the crown.

The Traitor's Tale Details

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Author : Margaret Frazer

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Linda says

If I had to choose only four words to categorize Margaret Frazer's *Dame Frevisse* novels, they would be: Intricately. Plotted. Historical. Mysteries.

This installment in the series is set in the year 1450, during the reign of King Henry VI, near the end of the Hundred Years' War. The duke of Suffolk, Dame Frevisse's kinsman by marriage, has been captured and beheaded; his wife, Frevisse's cousin Alice, asks for Frevisse's help in guarding her son's legacy. Thus it begins . . .

With the exception of "the letter," the centerpiece of the plot, Ms. Frazer has woven together several actual occurrences from 1450 into a plausible plot and a possible explanation for odd "coincidences" that year. She has also made Simon Joliffe a major character in this book, perhaps to transition to her other series *Joliffe the Player*.

Janet says

I was in the throes of a vicious sinus infection when I read this. Either my fever was higher than I thought, or there is a lot of incomprehensible politics in this entry. I gave up trying to follow the nuances of the plot about halfway through and simply enjoyed Frazer's writing instead.

Sarah says

A solid medieval mystery with much more action than the usual Dame Frevisse novel. (Really though, how much action can you expect in mystery novel in which a 15th century nun is the main character and slueth?) The thing I like best about this "a-something's tale", as Doug calls them, is the Frazer's use of the political upheaval and intrigue of England in 1450 as the center of the plot. I enjoy both trying to determine where the real facts stop and the fiction begins while reading the story and also the satisfaction of reading Frazer's afterward that explains just that. Much more satisfying than reading straight history, in my opinion and without all the inconvenience of having to stick to what can be proved in the historical record!

Nevertheless, unless you have an interest in medieval times (not the blood and guts, knights on horseback genre by the way) you most likely will find this a dry read.

Catherine Mustread says

The Traitor's Tale is #16 in the Dame Frevisse series. This historical novel, set in 1450, finds Frevisse meeting up with Joliffe (from Joliffe the Player series) and both working as spies for Frevisse's cousin Alice, the Duchess of Suffolk, in a time of great political turmoil in England. As usual there are murders and other

mysteries to be solved but also action, adventure and suspense kept me turning the pages.

I will be sorry to see this series end after I read the final book in the series, *The Apostate's Tale*. Assuming #17 is the end of the series – titles have been published approximately yearly from 1994 to #17 in 2008.

Jennifer says

I started reading this series after I finished all the Brother Cadfael books. Unfortunately Ellis Peters has passed away, but Margaret Frazier writes a pretty good historical mystery.

I really enjoyed Brother Cadfael. He was feisty and sweet hearted which is what I like in my hero sleuths. Dame Frevisse on the other hand is not as engaging heroine. On the other hand the setting is marvelous and I find the politics very interesting. Besides which, I'm a feminist at heart and (although it's by no means a feminist book) it's nice to see women empowered in the past, if only in a fictional setting. Quite frankly, I can't see many nuns getting away with traveling as much as this character does.

Frazer's latest book, as most of her recent books in this series delves deeply into the politics surrounding the Wars of the Roses. I would recommend the early books in the series to more general mystery readers. If you are already a fan, either of the series or the period then you will probably like these later books as well.

Mary Newcomb says

The situation in England in 1450 has turned deadly. While this book does not resolve the question of who is behind the array of seemingly unrelated deaths of prominent people, it presents an intriguing possibility. And once again, Dame Frevisse is involved in the drama.

Lisa says

This is probably my least favorite of the Sister Frevisse series, but still well worth reading. The book hews closely to the history surrounding the death of the Duke of Suffolk, the late husband of Frevisse's cousin Alice. Frevisse is once again called out of her convent to help Alice at a crucial time. Because the author had so much actual history to deal with, she often cannot place Frevisse and other characters in the midst of the action, and so they spend a little too much time waiting for something to happen or travelling from place to place. Nevertheless, the plot is brilliantly conceived and I especially liked the insight into the character of Joliffe, who eventually got his own series from the author. This is a book that depends on the reader knowing the series well, and so should not be the book to introduce the series.

Jill Holmes says

"The Traitor's Tale" is the sixteenth of Margaret Frazer's series centered around the medieval nun Dame

Frevisse. This story takes place in 1450 when all of London and southern England is in turmoil over the rebellions taking place, notably the one led by Jack Cade. Overseas, England's French possessions have slowly and painfully drifted away from the hands of King Henry VI and back to the French--at great cost in lives and money extorted from the citizenry. Dame Frevisse is cousin to Alice of Suffolk, the granddaughter of Geoffrey Chaucer and widow of the Duke of Suffolk. The latter was brutally assassinated with his remains scattered on a south coast beach. They have been recovered and hidden away; being associated even with the remains and burial makes other people targets because the Duke was so hated. Alice has called her cousin to her aid, not only for spiritual support but for practical assistance in solving what Alice thinks is a larger plot endangering the King and kingdom. Also involved in detecting the twists and turns of conspiracies against the King and others is the former player and sometime minstrel--now spy--Joliffe. Joliffe is a long-time friend of Frevisse; they have worked together on other puzzles before. Now, Joliffe has become a spy for Richard, Duke of York, who is in exile in Wales. Frevisse is highly suspicious of this new association, and, as the story progresses, she learns that she knows little about Joliffe, including his real name. Associates of Suffolk are being murdered left and right, apparently in search of documents related to Suffolk's estate as well as his spurious friends, notably the Duke of Somerset, who, like Suffolk and York, is a close relative of the King and holds the greatest position of power next to the King. Frevisse is forced to work with Joliffe, all the while fearing that whatever they uncover may endanger Lady Alice and her only son John. Pursuit of the mystery and of Lady Alice take Dame Frevisse to Kenilworth Castle and Henry's young French Queen Margaret of Anjou. The spectacular castle and audience with the Queen are heady experiences for Frevisse, and, when Lady Alice proves to be at Wingfield, her home estate, Frevisse happily returns to her convent of St. Frideswide. Her prioress, Domina Elizabeth, is none too pleased at all this traipsing around, yet Lady Alice has been a bountiful patron, supporting the small nunnery and its scrivening enterprise, so Domina Elizabeth must indulge Frevisse. An untrusted associate of Joliffe's is thought to have been murdered, but Joliffe finds it is another man just as the villagers reach final fury over their priest and behead him. Caught up in the riot, Joliffe is injured and seeks refuge with the nuns to recover from his wounds and fevered state. Helpless, Joliffe wonders if Lady Alice's envoy Burgate is alive and has the crucial missive and if the Duke of York will march out of Wales and immediately be arrested as a traitor. His injury does, however, allow Joliffe to merge his considerable brainpower with that of Dame Frevisse. The complex politics of a nation interweave with the day-to-day life at the nunnery where many of the key characters and the mystery finally converge. What does Frevisse know? Can she save her cousin and Lady Alice's son's future and fortune? Where is the pesky missing missive and what does it say? Are the guilty named and the innocent saved? The author brings the story to a suspenseful and surprising conclusion that neatly answers all these questions and more. Much is also portended about the future of the reign of Henry VI, even though the Wars of the Roses are five years into the future. Those who think medieval times were but a dull interlude between the vicious Dark Ages and the brilliance of the Renaissance are due for a marvelous awakening through any and all of the Dame Frevisse novels.

Judith says

I've been reading the Dame Frevisse mysteries, mostly in order, for about a year or so. Frevisse has very much grown on me, and as has Joliffe, through his occasional appearances (I have not read any of the Joliffe series). Although I like mysteries, I must say that I also very much enjoy the books that delve into political intrigues.

This series is absolutely excellent for the brilliant historical research put into it. It feels much more real and less romanticized than the majority of medieval historical fiction I've read, and I very much appreciate that. I also like the more nuanced, complex, respectful treatment of Christianity and religion.

The plots are generally good and most of the characters well drawn. Reading the series in order over a relatively short period of time, it's been really interesting seeing Frevisse's character development.

I'm going to hunt down the one or two books earlier in the series that I haven't read yet before reading the last novel. Now that I'm almost finished the series, I really don't want to finish it. When I finish a series, the character in it somehow solidifies. If there's still more to read, more character development, the character seems still somehow more alive, more fluid.

I don't think I've reviewed many of the Frevisse books, but I went back and re-read the last few paragraphs of this one several times before putting down the book and reflecting for a good while with a smile. A book that makes me do that, despite what felt like a slow start, deserves a review.

Scot says

This is number 16 in the series, which I've come to really enjoy. Dame Frevisse is a strong-willed 15th century English nun with superior deductive skills and a caustic sense of irony. Here she reteams with her old pal Joliffe, a former traveling actor now a spy for the Duke of York. He is witty, clever, and beguilingly charming. (He was so popular he got his own spin-off series of mysteries that help one understand the English world of traveling theater in this time period.) This particular book is a bit heavy on exposition, but its topic, the intrigues and machinations of mighty lords vying for power just prior to the War of the Roses, is necessarily full of intricacies and convolutions. Frazer has researched and knows the era exceedingly well, so you not only get good mystery, but social, cultural, architectural, political, and religious history along the way, as you experience day to day life for a wide range of medieval English folk and you get to practice a bit of Latin too (not to worry--translations provided for the faint of heart or uninterested).

Helen says

Thoroughly enjoyed it. It's the first I've read in Frazer's series about mystery-solving Dame Frevisse in the 15th century (how have they not been adapted for PBS's Mystery! series?). I am a nerd, fascinated by England's Wars of the Roses, and this novel, set before anyone is deposed, appealed to me. It's not written in Olde English, but her word choices make it feel that the characters are not modern people. Dame Frevisse is a reluctant detective, but she's reserved, intelligent and not without sympathy. A knowledge of England's monarchy during the 15th century isn't required, though it's certainly helpful. My biggest issue with the book was that Frazer didn't include family tree charts for Edward III and his descendants (which I have in non-fiction books but I would've liked the convenience.) Still, I will be looking for more of Frevisse's adventures.

Martha Meyer says

This is the last of the Joliffe books, not from a pub date perspective, but based on Joliffe's age at the time of the book (almost 40). The world first met Joliffe when he was barely older than 16. The Traitor's Tale is a Dame Frevisse Medieval Mystery, but they actually both contribute equally to the final solution to the murders. Gail Frazer, the author, is doing some terrific and very research-based guessing as to some real historical murder mysteries tied to England's loss of Normandy to the French in 1450. The way she brings her fictional characters into the drama is brilliant. Gail Frazer very quietly battled cancer during the whole of both the Frevisse and Joliffe mystery series. She died 2/4/13. This very detailed and masterful book is

dedicated to her sons in 2007. The last sentence of the book is Frevisse watching Joliffe ride away home to his family -- having just found out he has one! She writes that this revelation made Frevisse feel "better by far than (the) thought of him riding out alone into a world empty of anyone waiting for him." I can imagine Frazer felt that way about her children as she thought of her own life trajectory. I am so sorry to read the last of this gifted writer's books dealing with that canny, mercurial, but always just, former actor turned spy whose real name even Gail Frazer never shared. Goodbye, Joliffe! Well met.

Carol says

Although her political books aren't my favorite, I cannot say enough what an excellent writer and researcher she is/was.

Laura Edwards says

You know, I read this series because I enjoy Dame Frevisse. If I wanted to read about Joliffe's adventures, I'd read the Joliffe series, but I don't. Therefore, it was rather disappointing and very annoying and frustrating that every other chapter in the beginning half of "The Traitor's Tale" was told from Joliffe's POV. Don't get me wrong. I do like him popping up from time to time, but it was just too much Joliffe in this one.

I'm so glad one of these last books featured Frevisse and Alice together. Margaret Frazer has fleshed out a wonderful and realistic portrayal of the relationship between the two women (too bad Frevisse isn't real, like Alice). It was regrettable they again parted on less than friendly terms, though I think both understood the reasons for the others taut nerves. And, because of the ending, I'm sure Alice will be grateful and the cousins will make up, even the Duchess of Suffolk does not make an appearance in the last book.

Some parts, such as when Dame Frevisse and Sister Margrett were at Kenilworth, had me on the edge of my seat. Other parts, such as near the end between the time Joliffe was injured and the meeting between he, Frevisse and Vaughn with York, were filled with people just talking round and round and round which bogged down the story. I am glad, however, Sister Margrett got her wish of seeing York up close. She deserved a reward for all her cooperation.

And I loved the little dig Dame Claire took at Frevisse while she was feigning illness, saying "she's not as young as she used to be". Ha ha! If looks could kill! One other thing I've noticed in the last several books is that a toll is being taken on the friendship between Frevisse and Claire. I would have loved to have seen where Ms. Frazer was taking some of these relationships. I also think she was doing a wonderful job of building and molding the different personalities living at St. Frideswide's. Too bad we'll never see where she might have went. I can't believe I only have one more to go. I'm going to miss Dame Frevisse.

Sandra Strange says

Another excellent bit of history and conjectures about the individuals making that history wrapped around murder--in this case murders of historical Medieval personages. The whole novel gives the reader a really good picture of what it was like to be in the upper reaches of English society just prior to the Wars of the Roses. Lots of tension, some action, lots of jeopardy. And the nun-protagonist shares the story with a

principled spy. The ambiguity of the title is one of the puzzles.
