



# The Rose Rent

*Ellis Peters*

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## **The Rose Rent** Ellis Peters

A late spring in 1142 brings dismay to the Abbey of Saint Peter and Saint Paul, for there may be no roses by June 22nd. On that day the young widow Perle must receive one white rose as rent for the house she has given to benefit the abbey or the contract is void. When nature finally complies, a pious monk is sent to pay the rent - and is found murdered beside the hacked rose-bush.

The abbey's wise herbalist, Brother Cadfael, follows the trail of bloodied petals. He knows the lovely widow's dowry is far greater with her house included, and she will likely wed again. But before Cadfael can ponder if a greedy suitor has done this dreadful deed, another crime is committed. Now the good monk must thread his way through a tangle more tortuous than the widow's thorny bushes -- or there will be more tears...

## **The Rose Rent Details**

Date : Published November 1st 1997 by Mysterious Press (first published 1986)

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Author : Ellis Peters

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## From Reader Review *The Rose Rent* for online ebook

### Gabi Coatsworth says

I enjoyed this gentle mystery with its medieval setting and its emphasis on human nature rather than technology to solve the crime. It's another time and place, but people's motivations don't change much - love and money. Ellis Peters makes the characters believable because they don't act or speak like contemporary people. And yet they're living in parts of England you can still visit today. A nice escape from today, for a while.

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### Adam says

Cadfael is an always irresistible, if a mildly formulaic mystery series. This one packed a nice emotional punch at the end, despite a strangely wandering midsection dedicated to the landscape around the English town of we Shrewsbury, where it is set. But good entertainment, for sure!

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### Lance says

*"Rather a sequence of events had set off each the following one, and called in motives and interests until then untouched, so that the affair had come about in a circle, and brought up the hapless souls involved in it where they never wanted to go."*

During *A Raven in the Forgate*, Abbott Radulfus had to accept responsibility for his detached scholarship in appointing a parish priest with great learning and very little compassion. Here, for his sins, he is much more attentive to the fragilities of his human charges. The story open with the predicament of young widow Judith Perle who has given up half her estate for a single white rose to remind her of the happiness which had once been there when her husband and child were alive. *"In happiness or unhappiness, living is a duty, and must be done thoroughly."* This one white rose will lead to two murders, a trial, and a kidnapping.

A really interesting premise. However, here Peters departed significantly from her hugely successful narrative formula of following Cadfael from psychological misgivings to forensic evidence. Here, both Cadfael and Hugh are slow to pick up leads, a factor which is compounded by scenes which Judith's kidnapper is identified directly. This can be an interesting framing for some novels, but here it did not work for me. Also, there were a lot of new characters in this novel, some of which did not appear for several chapters in a row which made it difficult to feel intimately involved in their development. I appreciate that Peters tried a number of new techniques here, but felt over all that this was not one of her best Cadfael novels.

*"You brought me here to this sordid hole, locked in behind your wool bales, without comfort, without decency, and do you expect gratitude?"*

There was lots of good though. I enjoyed the slowly intensifying romance between Judith and widower Niall as a more mature depiction of love. *"However late they come, they always bloom equally in the end."* Niall the bronzesmith was incredibly sweet, a dedicated father, and a gentle man without preconceptions. *"For her he would make a thing of beauty, however small and insignificant"* He has been one of the best secondary characters yet. I think Peters' writing was very sensitive to the loss they had both suffered. *"When a man suffers such a wound, he learns how to value such a mercy."*

It was also interesting to see Abbott Radulfus' growing misgiving about accepting child oblates into the monastery. "*The conversi were preferred for the responsible offices, perhaps as having experience of the deceits and complexities and temptations of the world around them.*" When the first victim is a socially anxious young monk whose cloistered life has driven him wild with love for the first woman he has spoken to, Radulfus' composure is shaken. More and more he is leaning on other members of the monastery as his serenity over the brothers is called into question. His philosophical rule is continually floated by the random mess of humanity. I'm really interested to see how this develops over the coming books!

But the best feature of this tale by far is *The Shoe*. Yes, *The Shoe*. Cadfael gets really really over-excited about shoes. "*Meanwhile, Cadfael betook himself and his waxen footprint into the town ...*" After the first murder, he finds a well-preserved footprint and makes a mold of it which he carries around lovingly for the rest of the story. He is constantly navel-gazing trying to work out if peoples' gaits match that of *The Shoe*, and even resorts to sending a nun to steal some odd shoes as some kind of strange sacrificial offering to *The Shoe*. Oh, Cadfael, whatever will you do next?

*"No one should take to the cloistered life as a second-best, and that is what you would be doing. It is not enough to wish to escape the world without, you must be on fire for the world within."*

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### **Angie says**

The Cadfael series continues to be the ultimate source of comfort for me; Peters' prose is enthralling and textured and visual, and reading her novels always feels like coming back to a warm house where a hot cuppa and friendly cat waits. Is it any wonder that I'm yearly driven to do a series reread once the colder weather sets in?

This outing is a particular fave largely because the central characters -- the capable and grieving young widow Judith Perle and the older, quieter bronzesmith Niall -- are so likeable; their relationship has such a sweet, subtle fire as the story builds. And it's always fun when the irascible Sister Magdalen makes an appearance.

Just an all-around winning historical mystery, rich with detail and description and with a clear-sighted take on humanity's flaws and virtues.

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### **Katerina says**

Another Brother Cadfael mystery is over and this one was again a mystery that I didn't manage to figure out clearly but a few pages before the end!

Besides Brother Cadfael, the main heroine of this book is the young widow Perle. She has donated her house to the abbey with the only condition to be provided of a rose from the bush in front of it on the day of the celebration of Saint Winifred. But she is still young and rich and strange things start happening in her life. Suitors, people interested in money and in the middle of this a young woman who doesn't want to get married and a rose bush.

I really like the way Ellis Peters writes and her books are always relaxing and interesting.

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## **Amalie says**

This is the thirteenth book in the Brother Cadfael series. As such, it is much like the others in a general way. That is, the mystery isn't difficult to see through, so you'll probably have figured out "whodunit" before the solution is entirely revealed. On the other hand, the historical events are precise, the author makes a single historical detail the basis for a wonderfully imaginative tale in which the rich fabric of medieval life is beautifully unfolded. Then as always the prose is elegant, and the characterization is outstanding.

I plan on reading the rest, so it's safe to conclude I'm enjoying them. I recommend this one. I also recommend reading them more or less in order from the beginning, as later books sometimes refer to earlier ones.

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## **Stephen says**

As I was reading this, the thirteenth installment in the Cadfael series, I began to wonder if I'd sated my taste for medieval mystery. This one seemed to drag a bit. Then I realized that Cadfael plays a more minor role in this one and this one is more like a traditional mystery than the unique blend of *"travelogue to the 12th century"* and mystery that the other installments are.

I also noted that several other reviewers picked up on this as well with folks mentioning that it dragged in spots and wasn't quite up to the usual standard. That said, this is a good story with interesting characters even if it's not up to the standard set by earlier books in the series. As with many of the others, this was adapted for TV and a number of liberties were taken with the story so the mystery as read varies from the mystery as viewed.

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## **Ron says**

Medieval life was hard, doubly so for a widow. And a rich widow had her own threats, some of them murderous.

Mystery did a decent job of their video of this story.

Cadfael series: excellent historical fiction. Ellis Peters draws the reader into the twelfth century with modern story telling but holds us there with a richness of detail which evokes a time and place which might as well be mythic. Though the foreground of each chronicle is a murder mystery, behind it a nation and a culture are woven in a wondrous tapestry.

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## **Sue says**

It is a few days before the 1142 festival of Saint Winifred's translation. It happens that is the same day when the Widow Perle is to be paid one white rose from her rose bush as rent for the property which she gave to

the Abbey. The young brother whose job it has been to deliver the rose asks to be excused from this duty, and his request is granted. But the next day he is found dead at the base of the very rose bush that supplies the roses for the rent. Even more disturbing, the following day after that, the Widow Perle goes missing. It's up to Brother Cadfael along with Sheriff Hugh Beringar to get to the bottom of the murder and the disappearance.

Another great volume in this series. As with the entire series, although there's murder, the language is clean and not graphic in description. As for this volume, there are so many characters who would have cause for being considered that it really isn't until the end that all comes to light. I certainly didn't figure it out ahead, but it makes sense once known. The one thing I figured out was a sub plot - I had a sense with about 60 pages to go and was correct. Although even that is left in such a way that it can be picked up in a later volume. That's another thing I've enjoyed: characters from previous volumes come back again and it's like revisiting with an old friend. I'm referring to characters other than the central ones of the monastery and town.

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## **Kathryn says**

1st Recorded Reading: February 11, 2005

One would think that Abbot Radulfus of the Abbey would have long since confined Brother Cadfael to his herbarium to keep him out of trouble; or, more accurately, to keep dead bodies from multiplying with alarming frequency. One wonders if anyone has written a parody of Brother Cadfael, in which he is insane (craftily so) and is actually the murderer of all the dead bodies that pop up near the Abbey. Having said all that, this Fourteenth Chronicle is good, and liberally supplied with red herrings to confuse the unwary reader.

Spring is late to arrive in Shrewsbury in 1142; in fact, the spring thaw does not occur until the first of June. This is a good thing (not least that the crops can now be sown), because the Rose Rent is due to the widowed Judith Pearle on the day of the Translation of St. Winifred, June 22. When Judith was widowed, some four or five years ago, followed by the miscarriage of her only child, she gave her house in the Foregate (where she and her husband had lived) to the Abbey, with the only proviso being that she is to receive one white rose from the rosebush at the house on St. Winifred's Day. She lives in Shrewsbury proper now, running her weaving business with the help of her cousin Miles Coliar and his mother (her aunt); Niall the bronzesmith lives in the property in the Foregate that was given to the Abbey; he is widowed, and his five year old daughter lives with his sister out in Pulley (some five miles distant).

A young monk, who has been resident in the Abbey since his early youth, has been the designated person to take the rose from the bush to the young Widow Pearle each year; but Brother Eluric asks that he be relieved from the duty this year, as he has fallen in love with the widow, and is tormented by his desire for her. He is relieved of the duty; but soon afterward, he is found dead under the rose bush in question, with the rosebush hacked but not destroyed.

It is true that there are those who would like to marry the Widow Pearle, who is in her mid-twenties, most notably Vivian Hynde (whose father owns the largest flock of sheep in the Shire) and Godfrey Fuller, another local merchant in the town. The Abbey (and Brother Cadfael) must determine who killed their monk, and why, and what it has to do with the annual Rose Rent due to Judith Pearle.

I enjoyed reading this book; while I was fairly sure WhoDunIt by the middle of the book, the Red Herrings distracted me (as they are meant to do).

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## **Deborah Ideiosepius says**

The chronicles of the 'mediaeval whodunnit' continue (that description, apt as it is, always makes me chuckle): Brother Cadfael, a Welshman who after a long, adventurous and varied life decided to renounce the world and become a brother in the Shrewsbury Abbey is faced with a new murder mystery.

A young widow, Judith Perle, has bestowed her valuable property on the Abbey, the only rent required is a single white rose from a bush in her former home, to be given into her own hand on a specific day. For a couple of years all went well, the widow has returned to her family home to command the valuable family weaving business, the roses are delivered to her hand and life goes on.

This year however, strange a fatal events seem to be surrounding the widow and her legacy. The rose bush is burnt by a mysterious invader, a brother is left dead, then the widow herself vanishes, leaving more dead bodies in her wake..

Brother Cadfael investigates in his quite unobtrusive way, the the course of which, we the readers get a lovely detailed picture into the Abbey and town of Shrewsbury in 1142 and beautifully drawn pictures of the people and their lives.

I am very fond of this series of gently intriguing mysteries set in the twelfth century. The historic element is the main draw card for me, but the writing is beautiful, rarely repetitious (which is unusual in a long running series) and the murder mysteries themselves are always intriguing with a very strong 'human' element. These mysteries are not about flash and thriller details, they are about people, there interests and small doings.

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## **Susan says**

Loved the ending and enjoyed the fact that it involved two older and more mature characters than some of the other books. I suspected the villain's identity but I needed Cadfael to explain all the ins and outs of the events. My only complaint (and I have felt this about some of the other books in the series) is that I can't follow when the author goes into details about locations. I look at the map provided and can't figure it out which is very frustrating.

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## **Deborah Pickstone says**

Happy re-read of an old favourite.

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## **Karin says**

A house is bequeathed to the monastery in exchange for one rose to be delivered to the owner annually. The young monk given this job is found dead, days before the rent is due, and the owner of the house, a wealthy

young widow being wooed by many men as much for her business as anything else, has vanished. This is one of the better books in this series (all are fairly good) that I've read so far (this being the last one I've read at this writing). This is one of those rare series that seems to keep a steady level of writing throughout and not wane out of good ideas and writing level.

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## **Girl with her Head in a Book says**

For my full review: <http://girlwithherheadinabook.co.uk/2...>

This book fulfills the 'published in the year you were born' obligation for my 2015 Reading Challenge – but really, I was long overdue for another Brother Cadfael mystery. I have mentioned before that I am easily scared and gore really does not interest me in the slightest. Increasingly, modern crime fiction seems to concentrate on progressively baroque incidents that really put the offensive into criminal offense, all of it solved using high-powered technology and borderline supernatural forensic techniques. I am thinking here in particular of Criminal Minds, which my family enjoyed for the first two series but then the rising levels of sexual depravity put us off. We were not alone – one of the show's chief leads left it for the same reason. It's interesting to me therefore that people such as my own dear Dad are turning towards vintage crime. Sophie Hannah wrote an Agatha Christie inspired Poirot story. More and more pieces of crime fiction are being set in the 1940s or even earlier. If you like *The Sweetness at the Bottom of the Pie*, or *The Railway Detective* – remember, Ellis Peters was doing that whole vintage thing several decades ago. Cadfael is crime fiction for people who don't like crime.

rose rentThis is Cadfael's thirteenth outing but given that I tend to read them in no particular order, I am not sure how far into the series I really am. Oddly though, this was the only story which I remember being adapted for television. I watched it aged roughly nine and tried to read it the book but gave up after only a few pages. Still, the mists of time had made the ending slightly fuzzy so I didn't feel like I was missing anything. The plot revolves around wealthy widow Judith Perle – still only twenty-five, she is mourning her husband who passed away four years previously, the grief of which caused her to miscarry a much-wanted baby. Mistress Perle has chosen to make a gift of the house she once shared with her husband to the abbey, requesting only one white rose a year as rent. However, with the deadline for the rent approaching, it appears that someone is very keen for the contract to be defaulted upon, with first the rose bush being attacked and then Mistress Perle herself going missing.

Ellis Peters is a very gentle writer, the very sentences of her prose feel dainty. Each book introduces where we are with the Stephen-Matilda conflict before zooming in to the action in Shrewsbury. Although it may stretch credulity slightly that all these crimes could occur in such a relatively small town and that the person best-placed to investigate should be a monk who has sworn to a life in the cloister, but somehow it works. Cadfael, as regular readers of the series are aware, is no ordinary monk. He fought in the Crusades, knew the love of several good women, lived in the world and travelled it and finally, when he heard the call, he settled down to a life tending a herb garden. He is no innocent, he knows his stuff and he should never have been played onscreen by David Jacobi. Here he is called upon for life advice by the mournful Judith Perle, garden tips by people interested in the rose bush and then also a bit of the standard crime scene investigation with a sideline in footprint analysis.

ellis petersThe lovely thing about coming to a series as long as *The Brother Cadfael Mysteries* is that for the returning reader, there are so many recurring characters and in-jokes. *The Rose Rent* takes place around the



festival marking the translation of St Winifred, patron saint of the Abbey. Hugh Berringar, local sheriff and Cadfael's closest friend, slyly notes that not all is as it seems about that particular figure. Sister Magdalena makes a welcome reappearance, having become something of a *deus ex machina* in her ability to assist Cadfael in sorting out issues of a delicate nature to do with ladies' problems – Sister Magdalena having made her first appearance as the mistress of a murder victim who chose the cloister because she was done with living in sin but wanted something with career progression opportunities. Ellis Peters may look sweet and prim in the photos, but she has such grace for her characters – there are few sins which she is unwilling to forgive and even the most culpable characters are generally explained as having been weak or foolish or having got themselves into situations which overwhelmed them. Nobody is ever wholly evil.

There is a particular unhappiness at the core of *The Rose Rent* however, with a strong woman being got at by all sides because her unmarried state makes her an anomaly in a world governed by strict rules. Judith Perle is beholden to no man, she has neither husband nor father to order her but nobody is willing to let her be. Peters contrasts her life as yet unfulfilled with that of Sister Magdalena who flourishes as a nun and thus hopes to expiate her sin. On the other hand there is Niall the bronzemith, widower with a child who he has not the time to care for but who longs for a life with a greater softness. It may seem obvious that these two characters' paths will converge but it makes it no less lovely when they do. *The Rose Rent* is one of those editions of the series where Cadfael himself takes something of a back seat, stepping in only at crucial moments and holding his tongue when he thinks it wise. For all that Cadfael may play by the social mores of medieval Britain, written by someone with borderline Victorian sensibilities, it is a pure comfort read. While *An Excellent Mystery* was a hymn to love in all its forms, I think that *The Rose Rent* was more about finding a way back to contentment, discovering a way and a place of being. There are few authors who write with such a holistic sense of kindness as Peters and as always, I finished *The Rose Rent* thinking that the world was a nicer place than I did before I started it.

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## **Ed says**

I love Brother Cadfael and this is one of the better stories in the series.

It is Spring 1142. There is concern in Shrewsbury that the late spring will prevent the white rose bush in Niall the bronzesmith's garden from blooming. Judith Perle, a widow, leases the house to Cadfael's Abbey for the rent of a single white rose. If the bush fails to produce a bloom by St. Winifred's feast day, the contract is broken. The monk who has delivered the rose for the past three years is found murdered next to the rose bush which has been severely damaged. Brother Cadfael and the Sheriff investigate the crime and subsequent happenings to protect Judith and maintain the contract.

The plots in the Cadfael series are not meant to keep us in suspense, necessarily, but rather to provide a context for exploring the times, the characters and the culture of a medieval abbey and its neighboring village. This story is no exception but I was still entranced until I finished the book.

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## **Bettie? says**

[Bettie's Books (hide spoiler)]

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## Laura says

This was a really enjoyable installment in this series. The mystery produced several suspects, and there was a very sweet love story involved as well. I thought it was well-paced, though we don't get much of a glimpse into Cadfael's or Hugh's personal lives (which we have been in recent books). I love Sister Magdalen and hope to see more of her in the future.

This is a great, light read.

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## Athena says

One of my favorites of the 20 Brother Cadfael\* mystery books (The Cadfael Chronicles), this subtle tale revolves around finding the killer of a Brother of the Abbey, and solving an assault on a rosebush and a kidnapping. Unlike some of the books in the series *Rose Rent* has little to do with the Lordly political history surrounding 'The Anarchy' (civil war between King Stephen & the Empress Maud), instead focusing on the lives of the merchant & crafts classes of 12th Century Shrewsbury. Judith, the main character in the tale besides Cadfael, runs her own inherited & important weaving business. She is a widowed gentlewoman of great internal strength; a type of character the author has great affinity for and one which she portrays with realistic and moving grace.

As in all the Cadfael books narration often has the cadence of a mock/pseudo-12th century English language which enhances the feeling of the book. This complicated period is one Peters knows intimately and in addition to the complex political history of the time she also has a splendid grasp on the social life of the era. The merchants of varying social levels, their peers, and their servants are all nicely rendered with great economy of description. Readers who may know little of life in Medieval England will absorb a lot, practically by osmosis, and Peters' descriptions of the era are accurate and entertaining.

This is both a great mystery story and a very readable piece of historical fiction. *Rose Rent* does not need to be read in order of its publication to get the full benefit of the tale although it would be best to read at least the first two books beforehand (*A Morbid Taste for Bones* & *One Corpse Too Many*).

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\*for those new to the series, Cadfael is pronounced 'CAD-fi-ul' in English; a bit more run-together as 'CAD-file' in the delightfully musically accented Welsh.

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## Sarah says

After more turbulent and troubling reading, it was nice to return to the world of Brother Cadfael, where love, kindness, and mercy reign, despite being set during the 12th century, during a long period of civil war.

I'm also fairly impressed that thirteen books into the series, the author still manages new innovations, and while there are definitely some common formulas, the books are not mindlessly repetitive.

While there is usually some sort of romance that pops up, this particular book charmingly goes for the slow connection of two people who had been previously widowed.

The plot itself wasn't one I was particularly enticed by, in part because a good story so often needs a good villain, and this one felt a bit lacking and under-explained.

But still, a nice sojourn in Cadfael's little world.

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