



@ Bruno Watieaux

QUI QUÆRIT, INVENIT*

*To Edith Parteger, alias Ellis Peters,
In Memoriam and as a thoughtful tribute*

The general belief is that 1145 marks the final farewell of Brother Cadfael, a herbalist and retired physician from the Benedictine Abbey of Shrewsbury, in the County of Shropshire. As a dilettante detective he had solved twenty blood crimes over eight years..., but that's not true. In

* He who seeks, finds (Mt 7,8)

1153, just before his final retirement from active life outside the walls of the monastery, when finally everybody thought that the civil war that had devastated England for fourteen years, was at last over, Abbot Radulf entrusted him with the mission to represent him in the last homage to Bernard of Clairvaux that was to take place at Eberbach Abbey, of which he was the refounder... And this is how, without having had anything to do with the matter, Brother Cadfael felt compelled to investigate if anything weird had occurred regarding the Abbess of Bassum's death, the ill-fated Richardis von Stade; for a decade she had been the personal assistant, soul mate and favourite of the mystic First Abbess of Rupertsberg, Hildegard von Bermersheim, later known as Hildegard von Bingen. But, let's start at the beginning: *quis, quid, ubi, cur, quomodo, quando...*

It was the year 1153 and an urgent message arrived at the stables of Eberbach Abbey. It was addressed to one of the occupants of the guest wing, the Welsh monk Brother Cadfael. The missive bore a highly significant seal –that of King Frederick Barbarossa of Hohenstaufen– and the message content urged him to present himself at Ingelheim Palace as soon as possible, as his assistance was required in a matter.

It turns out that on the way to her appointment with the sovereign of Germany, the sublime noblewoman had been aware that, near the palace, at Eberbach, the famous Benedictine detective had been lodged. She had heard about him and how he had solved many seemingly unsolvable cases. Without giving it a second thought, she sent an urgent message to the red-bearded king asking him to arrange a meeting there. The Sibyl of the Rhine wanted Brother Cadfael to reopen a case that her own heart refused to shut away: the demise of Richardis von Stade. She had left her in 1151 after accepting the position of Abbess at the Monastery of Bassum; it was a position that her brother Harwig, the then provost of Bremen cathedral, had offered her. But her sudden death occurred the following year, once she had decided to return to her beloved *mater et magistra* Hildegard.

Although, the 73-year-old Brother Cadfael was not in a light-hearted mood in the slightest, he couldn't refuse such an unusual request and neither could the superior of the abbey that had given him lodgings and orders were given for a carriage to be harnessed the next morning. That's how, with the Abbot's permission and escorted by two servants, the most famous black monk from Shrewsbury set out on a long journey. He made his first stop at Ingelheim, to be briefed about the details of the mission from the Teutonic prophet herself, and then went on to Bassum. Upon arriving at the most important monastery in Bremen, the solemn royal seal opened every door for him and, three days later, as soon as he had interviewed the nuns who had had dealings with the deceased, Brother Cadfael gave orders to dig up Richardis'

body, in spite of the firm opposition of the Archbishop, who had been promptly informed by the former Prioress and the new Abbess. However, the Benedictine Welshman did not find anything suspicious, apart from the fact that after having been buried for almost a year, the young woman's corpse was incorruptible and exuded a pleasant perfume of lavender and verbena.

After the autopsy, Brother Cadfael concluded that the cause of death of the twentyish Abbess had to be attributed to natural causes, if nothing new came up. Nevertheless, his enquiries led to an unexpected outcome. While examining the corpse, he found a scroll sewed into one of the hems of the habit; it was the letter of a man named Sigmund, the secretary of the Archbishop of Mainz's –murdered in an ambush, as Cadfael had been informed–, addressed to Pope Eugene III, in which he accused his superior of negligence in the exercise of his position and the misappropriation of church funds, and he had formally requested the Pope to verify the alleged offences. Brother Cadfael sent the message to the Pope's Camerlengo and, thanks to the *in situ* investigations carried out by Cardinals Bernard and Gregory, enormous corruption with a thousand tentacles came to light. The name that always seemed to appear in these worrying matters was always the same: that of Henry I, Archbishop and Prince-Elector of Mainz, and also Arch-Chancellor of the Holy Roman Empire, who was quickly removed from office and replaced by Arnold von Selenhofen.

Henry Felix of Harburg only narrowly avoided a prison sentence by escaping to Saxony and there he spent his last days and died of sorrow in September of that same year. As for Arnold, he was murdered by a mob on St. John's Eve, 1160... But that's another story.

Encarna Sant-Celoni i Verger (translation by John Joseph Vélez)

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