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OF SIENA

BOOKS BY MARY FABYAN WINDEATT

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SAINT CATHERINE OF SIENA

THE STORY OF THE GIRL
WHO SAW SAINTS IN THE SKY

By
Mary Fabyan Windeatt

Illustrated by
Helen Louise Beccard

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For My Mother and Father.

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SAINT
CATHERINE
OF SIENA

CHAPTER 1

SAINTS IN THE SKY

THERE WAS once a good man named Jacopo, who made a living at a strange business. He was a dyer, that is, he took cloths of plain colors and turned them into all the shades of the rainbow. When rich people saw Jacopo's purple silk, his scarlets and blues and yellows, they usually decided on some new clothes right away and bought yards and yards of the wonderful material. In such a way Jacopo became quite wealthy and built a nice house for his wife and family.

Now, Jacopo's house was a big place. In it lived Jacopo's numerous children, his wife, his servants and the men and boys who helped around the shop and sold goods to customers. Very seldom was there a quiet moment in Jacopo's house. Something was always going on, either a banquet, a business deal, a wedding or a visit from the neighbors. There was always food cooking in the kitchen, too, for it took a lot to feed all the people who lived with Jacopo or who came to visit him. It was a busy place, Jacopo's house. His children loved it, and when any of the sons got married they always brought their brides

home to live. In fact, as years went by, Jacopo's house became more and more crowded, so that one wondered how it could ever hold any more people.

One day in the year 1347 Jacopo and his wife Lapa, who lived in the Italian city of Siena and already had twenty-three children, were blessed by God with twin baby girls.

"Goodness!" cried the neighbors. "Where will they put any more children?"

"There was never a house like Jacopo's house," said the relations. "They will find room somehow."

And Jacopo and Lapa did, although as it turned out only one of the new little girls lived. They named her Catherine.

"I hope she grows up to be beautiful!" sighed Jacopo's wife. "Then she can marry a rich man and we can enlarge the shop."

Jacopo nodded. "Her hair is the color of red gold," he said dreamily. As he looked at his little daughter in her cradle, he began to think of making up a new color for some new silks which had just come in from the East.

Catherine grew up in her father's big house, amid all the noise and clatter of so many people. It was easy to see she would never be beautiful. Only her golden hair set her apart from other little girls in the town. It was really lovely, so long and soft and curly.

"Will you stand still?" cried her mother one morning, as she tried to comb the pretty locks. "Why are you so fidgety?"

“Because I hate having my hair fixed,” said the little girl. “I want to go out and play in the yard.”

“Well, you can’t play in the yard,” said her mother. “I have a package I want taken to your sister Bonaventura. And I want you to look nice when you go to her house. So stand still and let me fix you.”

Catherine’s brown eyes shone. Bonaventura, her favorite sister, was married and lived not far away. It was always such fun to go and see her because Bonaventura understood that little girls liked presents. And good things to eat.

“Can I go alone, Mother?” she cried. “It would be so nice to go visiting by myself just for once!”

“Nonsense!” cried her mother, who was suddenly remembering that twelve people were coming to dinner. “Your brother Stefano will go with you. And remember—go straight to Bonaventura’s. No stopping to play on the way, or to visit in church. You are too young to be out by yourselves for long.”

“But I am six years old,” Catherine started to say, then changed her mind. Company for dinner always upset her mother, who was inclined to be cross on such days.

Soon Catherine and Stefano, who was a bit older, were on their way to their married sister’s house. The sun was shining brightly. The streets were crowded with people. Ox carts jolted up and down. A group of wandering musicians had stopped to play and sing near the great fountain in the square. “Oh, let’s listen to them!” cried Stefano, running ahead. “They have a

dancing bear and a monkey!" But Catherine remembered her mother's words and shook her head.

"No, we must go straight to Bonaventura's," she said, and took Stefano's hand firmly in hers.

They stayed at Bonaventura's house for an hour only, and then started home with a package for their mother. This time they did not come through the crowded streets of the town but took a short cut through an open field. There were many flowers growing along the way, and Catherine and Stefano picked a few as they walked along. Back of the Dominican church, which stood over towards the town, they were even more plentiful.

"Let's go and get some daisies," said Stefano. "There are loads of them over near the church."

"Mother said to come right back . . ." said Catherine, and then suddenly her heart skipped a beat.

Above the Dominican church, right in the middle of the blue sky, right above the fields of white daisies, were people. They were standing in the sky as though it were the most natural thing to do, and some were kneeling before a great white throne. A King was seated on the throne, and He seemed pleased with the people about Him. He even seemed pleased with Catherine, for He turned in her direction and smiled at her.

"Oh!" cried the little girl, falling to her knees. "How beautiful it all is!"

Stefano stared. "What's the matter?" he cried.



“NO, WE MUST GO STRAIGHT TO BONAVENTURA’S.”

“What are you kneeling down for?”

But Catherine did not hear. Her eyes were fixed on the sky, on the wonderful people in shining robes, on the King. She knew, without being told, that the King was really Our Lord, and when He raised His Hand to bless her, she could hardly believe it.

Stefano looked at the blue sky over the church, but there was nothing there except a white cloud, a very ordinary cloud. Certainly that was nothing to make Catherine’s face so happy, to cause her to kneel down in the field as though she were praying.

“What is the matter with you?” he asked. “Mother will be cross if we are late with this parcel.”

And then, since Catherine still did not answer, he began to be angry.

“Will—you—come—on?” he said.

Awakened from her vision, Catherine turned to Stefano, and her eyes were shining.

“Oh, if you could see what I see, you would not bother me! Look, Stefano, at the wonderful people in the air! They are saints, I am sure. And that is Our Lord, sitting on the throne and smiling at us.”

Stefano looked to where Catherine pointed. “Silly!” he laughed. “There are no people in the air. How could there be? And Our Lord is in the church, not over it. You know that.”

Catherine’s smile faded. Even as Stefano was speaking she saw that the wonderful vision had gone. There were no longer any saints in the sky. And Our Lord was gone, too.



HER EYES WERE FIXED ON THE SKY, ON THE
WONDERFUL PEOPLE IN SHINING ROBES.

“Well, are you coming?”

Catherine nodded. “I’m coming,” she said, but her heart was sad. The saints and Our Lord had been so beautiful. Now the sky seemed empty without them.

“You shouldn’t make up stories and tell them as though they were true,” Stefano said presently. “It isn’t right.”

“But I didn’t make up a story!” replied Catherine quickly. “There were saints in the sky, Stefano. And I could have been looking at them yet, if you hadn’t bothered me.”

The little boy shrugged his shoulders. What could you do with girls? They talked and talked and always wanted to be in the right. They would never admit they could make a mistake.

There was a great deal of confusion in Jacopo’s house as the two children neared the gate. Strange bearded men, whom they knew to be cloth merchants from the East, were standing in the courtyard. Piled high in the workrooms were great bales of silk and wool. Vats of dye simmered on the fire and young men stood over them, stirring them with large wooden ladles. It was a busy day for Jacopo, the dyer.

“There’s my cat!” cried Stefano. “Let’s make a daisy chain for her neck with these flowers!”

But Catherine shook her head. She was thinking about the strange people in the sky over the Dominican church, the strange people who must be saints. She was sure one of them had been Saint John, the cousin of Our Lord, and two others, Saint



STRANGE BEARDED MEN,
CLOTH MERCHANTS FROM THE EAST,
WERE STANDING IN THE COURTYARD.

Peter and Saint Paul. There were pictures of these great men all through the town. But why had they been in the sky? And why had she, a little girl, seen them?

"I never saw a saint before," she thought. "They seemed awfully nice."

And then an idea came into Catherine's head, as she stood watching Stefano playing with his cat. Why couldn't she be a saint, too? Why couldn't she be holy and love Our Lord as Saint Peter and Saint Paul and Saint John had loved Him? Why couldn't she be up in the sky over the Dominican church, and very close to Our Lord on His throne?

"I guess I couldn't be a saint at home," she said. "There is too much noise and there are too many people. But if I could go away . . . if I could have a nice quiet place where Our Lord could tell me how to be good . . ."

"Catherine!" called a woman's voice suddenly. "Come here at once!"

Recognizing her mother's voice, Catherine went into the house. Her golden curls were tangled from the wind and would have to be combed again. Her hands were dirty from picking flowers. But what did anything matter? She had seen a vision. She had seen a most wonderful vision in the sky. And soon she would be a saint, too, a saint with wonderful shiny robes like Saint Peter and Saint Paul and Saint John.