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DE PORRES

BOOKS BY MARY FABYAN WINDEATT

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SAINT MARTIN DE PORRES

THE STORY OF
THE LITTLE DOCTOR OF LIMA, PERU

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For
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CHAPTER 1

A BOY AND A BEGGAR

THE ROYAL city of Lima, in the far-away country of Peru, lay shining like a jewel under a burning sun. The streets of the city were silent, for it was the hour of the noon-day siesta, when every house and shop closed its shutters against the burning heat.

But in the narrow street of Espiritu Santo, a young colored woman stood staring out of her open door. She had no time to rest. That was only for the wealthy folk, for grand *Señoras* who could ride about the city in golden carriages, and dress in the best of silk and lace.

“Oh, how I wish I could be a great lady!” she thought. “Then I wouldn’t have to scrub and cook and wear old clothes. And my children could have a chance in life. But this way. . . .”

Poor Anna Velasquez! She was very unhappy in her small house, and even her little son and daughter brought her no pleasure. When she looked at Martin and Jane, playing together on the floor with their poor toys, she could have cried. What future

was there in the world for Negro children? In Lima the rich people said they were only fit to be servants.

"I'd rather be dead than live like this!" Anna often told herself. "If only I were white, and my babies white, then their father would never have left me. He would have been glad to stay here with us and build us a fine house."

The children's father, Don Juan de Porres, did not live with Anna. He was a very rich and powerful soldier, a Spanish gentleman with a fair complexion. He was also very proud and very handsome, and it pleased him that the King of Spain looked favorably upon him. The city of Lima belonged to Spain, as well as most of South America, and there were plenty of fine positions to be had for a man who remained in the King's favor. So now Don Juan looked at little Martin and Jane, and there was a shadow of disgust on his face. How could a knight in the King's service ever claim black-skinned children for his son and daughter? What a terrible blow it was that they resembled Anna instead of himself!

"I am going away on business," he told their mother presently. "I don't know when I shall be back. Here's some money for you and the children!" And throwing a small bag of golden coins on the table, and with a fling of his grand scarlet cape, he was gone—whistling a lively tune as he went down the street to where his horse stood waiting.

Time passed. For many days Anna just stayed in her small house and cried. It seemed that Don Juan

was ashamed of his own children! And what was Anna going to do when the money he had left her was used up?

Soon the little pile of golden coins had disappeared. There was nothing for Anna to do, if she did not wish to starve, but to get some work. And so, heartbroken and lonely, the young Negro mother finally decided to take in washing. It was the only kind of work she knew how to do. And as she scrubbed and scrubbed on the clothes, dreadful thoughts crept into her mind. She began to think it was a pity that Martin and Jane had ever been born.

"It's all their fault!" she thought. "If they had only been white children, like their father wished, he would never have left me to this awful life." And so, when little Martin or Jane came running to tell her that the Viceroy's golden carriage was coming down the street, or that there was going to be a great bonfire in the Plaza that night, Anna would only scowl.

"Go away, you little black brats! Can't you see I'm busy? Don't you know I haven't time for carriages or bonfires? It's all your fault we're so poor!"

It always made Martin sad to see his mother angry. Poor little boy, he could not understand what was so terrible about having black skin. There were all kinds of Negroes in Lima, and some of them very nice. And there were many nice Indians, too, whose skin was not a bit white. It was true, of course, that only the white or Spanish people in

Lima had money, but Martin did not believe that the noble Spanish ladies and gentlemen, whose carriages rolled so grandly past his mother's door, were really better than anyone else. Had he not heard the priest at the church say that God had made everyone in the world in His own image? That all men should be brothers? That Heaven was a place where Christians of all nations would be happy together?

"Mother has made a mistake," Martin told Jane one day. "It isn't the color of our skin that matters. It's the color of our souls. Jane, if we have white souls, if we do everything we can to please God, there's no need to feel sorry that we are only poor Negroes and that our father went away and left us."

Jane nodded. Martin was only a little older than she, but he was far more clever. He could speak so well, and everyone liked him. Even the dogs and cats that roamed the streets were his friends, and there was not one of them, even the wildest, that would not come when he called.

"I guess you're right, Martin. But it would be lovely to have a father who cared for us, and a nice house, and some nice clothes. Oh, Martin! I don't think I'd ever be unhappy again if I could have just one nice dress! A white silk dress, with some little red shoes to go with it!"

Martin and Jane grew quickly, even though many times they did not get enough to eat. They helped their mother around the house and it was always their job to take the clean laundry to the different

houses. One warm day Anna called Martin to her. She had three small silver coins in one hand and a large empty basket in the other. She was very tired and hot, for she had been scrubbing since early morning. Now she looked closely at eight-year-old Martin.

"Can I trust you to go to the market and get something for dinner?" she asked. "You see, I know you, Martin. You'd give away every cent I make to beggars if I didn't watch you. But remember what happened the last time you tried that?"

Martin nodded gravely. A week ago his mother had been furious when he had put a silver coin into an old beggar's hat. On his return, without the loaves of bread she had sent him for, she had beaten him with a heavy stick. His body was still sore from the blows, but his mind had not forgotten the smile on the old beggar's face. It was the first time in a week, the old man had said, that anyone had given him an alms.

"I'll try not to give away any more money, Mother. Only it's hard to see poor old people hungry and not try to do something about it."

"Humph!" said Anna. "Let them work for a living, just as I do, if they want to eat. Now, take these three coins and do the best you can with them at the market. I want some bread, some beans and some fruit. Don't let anyone cheat you, and hurry home as fast as you can."

Martin smiled. He liked to be of use to his mother. "I'll run all the way," he said, and with the empty basket slung over one arm and the three

silver coins clutched tightly in his hand, he ran out the door.

The sky was dull this morning, and the narrow street of Espiritu Santo crowded with people. Martin thought, as he ran, that the street was twice as full as it seemed, for every person in it, Negro or Indian or Spaniard, had a beautiful guardian angel at his side.

"How lovely it must look!" he thought, and if he had not been in such a hurry to reach the market, he would have gone into his favorite church of Santo Domingo and turned over this idea in his mind. But his mother was in a hurry for the food. He would put away the little thought he had just had and think about it some other time.

So on he ran, dodging peddlers with their wares, Indians with their donkeys, children with their dogs, until at last he reached the great Plaza de Armas. Upon this public square, that marked the center of the city, fronted the Cathedral and the palace of the Archbishop. Tall green palms grew here, and masses of colorful flowers. Here in the Plaza one could hear all the news and gossip of the day, for here rich men mingled with poor, discussing in loud voices all manner of topics.

The Plaza was an interesting place indeed, but Martin did not stop today. He had already passed on, his face flushed from running, when a pitiful voice sounded in his ear and a hand clutched his arm.

"An alms, child!" whined an old beggar woman, crouching on the rough stone sidewalk. "I have not eaten in three days. . . ."

Martin's heart sank as he looked at the ragged creature. A beggar had found him, and he with three little coins in his hand!

"I am poor, my child . . . in God's Name . . . something for bread!"

Martin looked at the pitiful sight and shivered. Never had he seen such a tragic creature as this, a ragged shawl over her head, her eyes all but lost in the wrinkles of her face. He knew that his mother would all but kill him if he returned without the things she wished. But what could he do, when someone far poorer than himself was in need? He smiled a faint little smile and squared his shoulders.

"Here," he said, reaching for the old woman's bony hand, "take these three coins. And may God bless you!"

Then, so he would not hear the beggar woman's mumbled thanks, he turned and ran as swiftly as he could toward the church of Santo Domingo. Because he had not gone all the way to the market, he felt he could spare the time for a short visit. Before the tabernacle he would tell Our Lord that he had disobeyed his mother once more.

The church was cool and quiet. Two lay Brothers, in white habits with long black scapulars down the front and back, were sweeping one of the aisles. Martin went slowly toward the main altar and knelt down. He joined his hands and looked straight in front of him. He would tell his story just the way it had happened. And he would explain, too, how much he dreaded his mother's anger.



“TAKE THESE THREE COINS.
AND MAY GOD BLESS YOU!”

“She works so hard for her money, and I am always giving it away to beggars.” he said softly. “Dear Lord, teach me always what is the right thing to do. And let me have a white soul, even if I am black on the outside. And bring my father back some day soon. And let me be brave when I tell Mother what I did with the three little coins. Amen.”