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BOOKS BY MARY FABYAN WINDEATT

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SAINT ROSE OF LIMA

*The Story of the First Canonized
Saint of the New World*

By
Mary Fabyan Windeatt

Illustrated by
Sister Mary Jean, O.P.

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CONTENTS

Acknowledgments	ix
CHAPTER 1	
<i>What's in a Name?</i>	1
CHAPTER 2	
<i>Come, Holy Ghost!</i>	8
CHAPTER 3	
<i>The Secret.</i>	16
CHAPTER 4	
<i>Another Visitor.</i>	24
CHAPTER 5	
<i>Two Stories</i>	32
CHAPTER 6	
<i>A Saint Comes to Lima</i>	39
CHAPTER 7	
<i>A Friend in Need</i>	47
CHAPTER 8	
<i>Farewell to Santo Domingo.</i>	56

CHAPTER 9	
<i>A Daughter of Saint Dominic</i>	64
CHAPTER 10	
<i>The Hermit</i>	73
CHAPTER 11	
<i>A New Home</i>	84
CHAPTER 12	
<i>The Pride of Peru</i>	97
CHAPTER 13	
<i>Heroines in Black and White</i>	107

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CHAPTER 1

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

IT WAS a July day in the city of Lima, with the sun hiding behind the thick blanket of mist which generally covers the coasts of Peru and Chile from June until September. Maria de Oliva Flores shivered as she went out into the large garden behind her house. Such days as these, with no sunlight, did not please her. The air was heavy and damp. She felt like sleeping all the time.

"Marianna! Are you out here?"

From the other end of the garden, out of sight among the trees and flowers, came a girl's voice. "*Sí, señora*. I am with little Isabel."

Maria de Oliva turned into a narrow path, bending her head as she passed under a spreading fig tree. She might have known. Marianna, the Indian servant girl, always came out here after lunch with the baby of the Flores family. Three-month-old Isabel was definitely Marianna's favorite. Now Maria quickened her steps as she came to where Marianna was sitting beside the child's cradle. There was a proud smile on her face as she lifted the lace covering and looked down at her youngest child.

"Marianna, I've had many children, but I believe Isabel is the sweetest of all. Such pretty dark hair

and eyes! And those little pink cheeks. . . .”

The young Indian girl smiled, her white teeth flashing in the bronze of her face. “Isabel is like a flower, *señora*. And so good! I’ve never seen such a lovely baby.”

“Like a flower, Marianna? What flower?”

“A rose, *señora*. A beautiful pink rose. Just look at her now, smiling at us as though she knew what we were saying!”

Maria de Oliva was quiet a moment. This child had been born three months ago—on April 30, the feast of Saint Catherine of Siena. On May 25 she had been baptized by Father Anthony Polanco at the Church of San Sebastián and given the name Isabel. This had been to please her grandmother, Isabel de Herrera, Maria de Oliva’s own mother. But did that name really suit the child? Wouldn’t it be better to call her Rose, after the flower she resembled so much?

Marianna busied herself with her mending. The Flores family was not wealthy. With several children to feed and clothe, Gaspar Flores could afford only one servant. That meant Marianna had little free time. But she did not mind; now that little Isabel had come, it was especially good to be part of the Flores household.

“When this baby grows up, she will be the prettiest girl in Lima,” said Marianna. “She will bring us good luck.”

“We can use it,” sighed Maria. “Sometimes it’s a very hard struggle to make ends meet. Let’s hope that Rose marries a wealthy man.”

“Rose, *señora*?”

"That's right. I'm not going to call her Isabel any more. Rose suits her better. I know her grandmother won't mind if we change it."

Isabel de Herrera did mind, however. Her pride had been greatly flattered when Maria de Oliva had named her pretty little daughter after her, and she refused to hear of a change.

"She was called Isabel in Baptism, Maria. Why do you want to alter things now?"

"Because I think the name of Rose is better suited to her. Mother, please don't make things difficult for me!"

Isabel de Herrera had a hot temper. "*Difficult?* What are you talking about? The child's name is Isabel. That's all there is to it!"

"It's Rose!"

"It's Isabel!"

"Rose, I tell you!"

"Isabel!"

Sometimes Gaspar Flores lost patience with his wife and mother-in-law. "Call the child anything you like," he pleaded, "only let a man have some peace in his own house. *Please!*"

One year passed, two years, four years, and still the small Flores child was the center of a bitter struggle.

"It's certainly very foolish," said the neighbors.

"That poor little girl is afraid to answer to Rose because it displeases her grandmother. And she doesn't know what to do when anyone calls her Isabel because then her mother is angry. Why doesn't Gaspar put his foot down?"

But Gaspar Flores felt powerless. He felt that he could do little with his wife, much less with his mother-in-law.

“God help us all!” he often prayed.

One day Maria de Oliva, who was given to sudden fits of energy, decided to teach her little girl to read and write.

“Rose, you’re nearly five years old. I think you could learn the alphabet. Look—this is the letter A. This one is B. And here is C. It’s really very simple.”

Rose found a piece of paper and some colored chalk. This was going to be nice! Bernardina, her oldest sister, knew all about reading and writing. So did Jane and Andrew and Anthony and Matthew. Even seven-year-old Ferdinand could write his name quite well. Perhaps, thought Rose, she could catch up with her brothers and sisters if she worked hard.

After half an hour of copying letters, however, Rose’s small fingers grew stiff.

“I’m tired and so are you,” announced Maria de Oliva. “We’ll have another lesson tomorrow. Now I want you to promise me something.”

“Yes, Mother?”

“You’re not to answer to any other name but Rose. No—it doesn’t matter if your grandmother is cross. Your name is Rose Flores and nothing else. Understand?”

Rose nodded. The trouble about her name had always made her sad. She hated to see people quarreling, particularly her mother and grandmother. Ever since she could remember, however, there had been arguments between the two. Even though Maria

insisted that she had once had a vision in which she saw a beautiful pink rose floating over Rose's cradle, Isabel de Herrera would not believe it.

"That rose was a sign from Heaven telling me to change the child's name," said Maria de Oliva. "I'm absolutely convinced of it."

"A sign from Heaven, indeed!" the older woman cried out. "It was nothing but your own imagination!"

Maria soon grew tired of teaching her small daughter to read and write. She didn't have much patience, even at the best of times. And there was no one else to be interested in the child's great desire to learn.

"You're only a very little girl," Marianna comforted her one day. "There's plenty of time for you to learn reading and writing. As far as that goes, people can be quite happy without knowing how to do either of them. There's just one thing that's really important."

"What?" asked Rose eagerly.

"Knowing what is good and doing it. You'll never have any real trouble if you remember that, my child."

Marianna's words pleased Rose and she often turned them over in her mind. God was good. The more one thought about Him, the better one came to know Him. After that, being good and dying good were the simplest things in the world. Still, though, it would be nice to know a few things so that one might be useful to other people.

"I'm going to pray," the little girl told herself. "Since no one has time to teach me things, I'm going to ask God to do it. He can do anything, can't He?"

Maria de Oliva had a statue of the Christ Child in

her room. As was the Peruvian custom, the statue had a robe of its very own. This one was of red velvet with gold trimmings. Every day Rose knelt down before the little statue and said a prayer.

“Lord, help me to know and love You,” she said very softly. “And please teach me to read and write!”

Maria de Oliva didn’t know about these little prayers of Rose’s. She had a lot to do to run her big house, and sometimes the work made her tired and cross.

“It won’t always be like this,” she thought. “Some-day the children will marry, perhaps quite well. Then I’ll be able to take things easier.”

One morning Maria was baking bread. The kitchen was hot and steamy, and she was not in the mood to talk to anyone.

“Don’t bother me now,” she said, as Rose pushed open the door. “Go and play with Ferdinand until dinner time.”

“But Mother! Don’t you want to hear something wonderful? I know how to read and write!”

Maria de Oliva pounded the big mound of dough before her. “You mustn’t make up stories,” she said. “You’re not a baby anymore. You ought to know that to tell a lie is a sin.”

“I’m not telling a lie, Mother. I know how to read and write! Really and truly! Look!”

Maria glanced at the paper which Rose held out to her. It was covered with words, neatly written in a large round hand. For a five-year-old child, the writing was very good.

“Someone’s been helping you!” she said, a little



"Mother, I know how to read and write!"

sharply. "Your father or your grandmother."

Rose shook her head. "Nobody helped me, Mother. Only the little Christ Child. You're always so busy I didn't want to bother you, so I just asked Him to help me. And He did!"

Some of the flush faded from Maria's heated face. "Go and bring me a book," she ordered sternly. "Any book. We'll soon see if you're telling the truth."

In a few minutes Rose was back with a big green volume. "Look, Mother, there are four words in gold letters on the cover. I can read every one of them."

Maria de Oliva stared. If this child of hers was really telling the truth. . . .

"Well? What are those four words?"

Rose smiled. This was a wonderful day. She would remember it as long as she lived. The four golden words on the cover of the green book were Saint Catherine Of Siena. Inside there were many more words, telling the life story of the great Italian saint upon whose feast day she had been born. And she could read every one of them!