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BENEDICT

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# SAINT BENEDICT

THE STORY OF THE  
FATHER OF THE WESTERN MONKS

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MONK OF ST. MEINRAD'S ABBEY

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For  
Reverend Benedict Brown, O.S.B.,  
Pastor of St. Mary's Church,  
Huntingburg, Indiana.



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ST. MAURUS

ST. BENEDICT

ST. PLACID

SAINT  
BENEDICT



## *Chapter 1*

### THE BOY WHO RAN AWAY

CYRILLA was worried. Young Master Benedict, whose parents had sent him to study in the schools of Rome, was losing interest in his work. Only last night he had said that he didn't want to be a leader in law or politics. He only wanted to be a hermit in a cave.

"The foolish boy!" thought Cyrilla, as she set about getting supper for Benedict and herself. "If he really wants to lead a holy life, why can't he enter a monastery? There are plenty of them here in Rome."

Cyrilla sat down before the open fireplace and scowled at a kettle of water that was almost ready to boil. She was a woman in her middle fifties, short and plump, with her dark hair already streaked with grey. For many years she had been with Benedict's family. First it had been just as a simple maid. Later, when Benedict and his twin sister were born, she had been chosen to be their nurse.

"I was happy then," she thought. "I liked living in that little town of Nursia. But here in Rome things are so different. So much noise and dirt!"

There was a sudden sound of footsteps outside. The door opened and Cyrilla looked up. Young Master Benedict stood on the threshold. Eagerly, she scanned his face.

“Well?” she asked hopefully, but her heart sank even as she spoke. There was the same light in the boy’s dark eyes. It was easy to see that he had not given up the idea of being a hermit.

“I told the schoolmaster I wouldn’t be coming back any more. Please don’t be cross, Cyrilla. There wasn’t anything else I could do.”

The woman got to her feet. “But Master Benedict! Your father’s going to be so angry if you don’t finish your education! After all, he’s made so many fine plans. Why can’t you wait until you’re older before taking any such step as this?”

Benedict smiled. “I’m seventeen,” he said gently. “Boys that age are old enough to go to war. Even to marry. But I . . . I just want to serve God. Surely you can understand that?”

The woman shook her head wearily. “I’ll be blamed for all this,” she murmured. “Just wait and see. Your father sent me here to Rome to be your housekeeper. What will he say when he hears I’ve let you run away from school? Ah, Master Benedict, you’re going to break my heart!”

There was no doubt about the way Cyrilla felt. Benedict looked at her uneasily. He didn’t want to hurt anyone, much less this kindly woman who had been his nurse since childhood. Yet what could he do? Rome, the great city where so many people spent their days trying to be rich and powerful,

was not to his liking. He himself longed for the quiet of the countryside, for some small cave where he could spend his days in prayer.

“Don’t worry,” he said kindly. “I’ve heard that a hermit’s life is really very healthy. Lots of fresh air, sunshine, simple food . . .”

“And cold winds, rain and snow! Master Benedict, you know you’re not used to such things. Why, you’d die of the hardship within a month!”

“Not unless it was the Will of God, Cyrilla. Remember how He looks after everyone on this earth, even the birds and the flowers in the fields?”

Cyrilla sniffed. “If you’re going off to be a hermit, it won’t be by yourself,” she declared. “I’ll go with you and see that you don’t starve to death.”

The boy laughed. “But a hermit has to live alone, Cyrilla, even if it is hard! That’s the whole point to the life. A hermit cuts himself off from the world, from friends and all the usual comforts, so he can belong more wholly to God.”

The kettle was boiling furiously now. Cyrilla went over and removed it from the fire. “You’re going to be a different kind of hermit,” she said firmly. “You’re going to have someone to cook your meals and mend your clothes.”

It was a few days later that Benedict and Cyrilla left Rome and headed eastward into the hill country. They had no real destination, save that the boy still had his mind set on living in a cave. When they had gone far enough, he said, they would surely come across some such place.

“I still think it’s a foolish idea, going off like this



“THEY HAD NO REAL DESTINATION, SAVE  
THAT THE BOY STILL HAD HIS MIND SET ON  
LIVING IN A CAVE.”



into the wilderness,” muttered Cyrilla. “How do you know there aren’t wild beasts in these woods? Or even thieves and murderers?”

Benedict smiled and shaded his eyes against the burning sun. “If there are, God will protect us from them,” he said simply. “All we have to do is trust in Him.”

Of course trust in God was built on faith in Him. Faith! The boy liked the sound of that word. It was something that all the saints possessed in abundance. It enabled one to “see” beyond this world to the things of God. Once he was a hermit, he would try to increase his faith. He would try very hard to pray well, to find God in his own soul, to honor and love Him for all His goodness.

“It’s going to be a wonderful life!” he thought. “I won’t have to worry about being a success in the world, only about getting to Heaven and praying that all my friends and relatives get there, too.”

But as the hours passed, Benedict became a bit worried. Cyrilla did not complain, but he could see she was growing tired.

“We’ll stop for a while,” he suggested kindly. “After all, we don’t have to find a cave today, Cyrilla. It may take quite a while before we come across the right place.”

The woman shook her head. “Let’s keep on going, Master Benedict. This is such a dreadfully wild looking country.”

Time passed, and the sun began to sink behind the hills. The sky turned from rosy pink to lavender, then to a deep purple. Presently it was night, with

a million bright stars winking down on the lonely mountain road. Fireflies glittered among the trees. A soft wind stirred the tall grass, and somewhere in the distance a nightingale began to sing.

Benedict smiled. Cyrilla was too tired to care about the loveliness of the scene before them. She could scarcely drag one foot after the other.

“We’ll spend the night under that big pine tree,” the boy thought. “Surely no harm will come to us.”

As he finished preparing a place for the two of them, he saw that Cyrilla was nearly asleep, her head heavy upon the little satchel of belongings she had brought. He smiled again as he settled down to keep watch over his faithful companion. In a way it was good to be adrift like this. It gave one a chance to rely completely on the providence of God.

The next day was clear and cloudless and Benedict and Cyrilla were up very early. The boy was still confident that he wanted to lead a hermit’s life, but he could not help feeling worried about his companion. Cyrilla was not a young woman. Walking so many miles yesterday had been too much for her, and Benedict realized that something would have to be done. Either they would have to find a cave very soon or else make their way to some village.

“I don’t want to be a nuisance,” Cyrilla muttered, “but I can’t keep on much longer, Master Benedict. My feet are so sore!”

The boy nodded. “All right. We’ll go slowly for the rest of the morning. By the time night comes, I’m

pretty sure we'll have found some good place to stay."

Benedict was right. Late that afternoon they glimpsed the spire of a little church. There were houses, too, and other signs that people were living in the neighborhood.

"Thanks be to God!" cried Cyrilla, as she stopped to gaze at a thin line of smoke rising from a chimney. "Master Benedict, you've no idea how glad I am to see this place!"