

SAINTE
JOHN MASIAS

SAINT
JOHN MASIAS

MARVELOUS DOMINICAN
GATEKEEPER OF LIMA, PERU

By
Mary Fabyan Windeatt

Illustrated by
Sister Mary of the Compassion, O.P.

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MARY FABYAN WINDEATT

Mary Fabyan Windeatt could well be called the “storyteller of the saints,” for such indeed she was. And she had a singular talent for bringing out doctrinal truths in her stories, so that without even realizing it, young readers would see the Catholic catechism come to life in the lives of the saints.

Mary Fabyan Windeatt wrote at least 21 books for children, plus the text of about 28 Catholic story coloring books. At one time there were over 175,000 copies of her books on the saints in circulation. She contributed a regular “Children’s Page” to the monthly Dominican magazine, *The Torch*.

Miss Windeatt began her career of writing for the Catholic press around age 24. After graduating from San Diego State College in 1934, she had gone to New York looking for work in advertising. Not finding any, she sent a story to a Catholic magazine. It was accepted—and she continued to write. Eventually Miss Windeatt wrote for 33 magazines, contributing verse, articles, book reviews and short stories.

Having been born in 1910 in Regina, Saskatchewan, Canada, Mary Fabyan Windeatt received the Licentiate of Music degree from Mount Saint Vincent College in Halifax, Nova Scotia at age 17. With her family she moved to San Diego in that

same year, 1927. In 1940 Miss Windeatt received an A.M. degree from Columbia University. Later, she lived with her mother near St. Meinrad's Abbey, St. Meinrad, Indiana. Mary Fabyan Windeatt died on November 20, 1979.

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CHAPTER 1

SHEPHERD BOY



THE AFTERNOON sun was hot. It beat down on the dusty valley with such strength that the solitary traveler, making his way to the village of Rivera, paused for a moment to mop his brow.

“I’d better stop by that oak tree on the hill,” he told himself. “There’s no use going farther in this heat.”

The oak, gnarled and immense, was the only sizeable tree in sight. It cast a huge shadow on the ground, and the traveler gratefully sank down upon the parched grass. His eyes rested but briefly on the dazzling white ribbon of a road that wound through the valley to Rivera. How tired he was! And how far away America seemed—the land of his dreams! Yet he knew that in a little while he would feel more cheerful. Already Madrid was behind him, and Cordoba. Next would come Seville and Cadiz. With luck, there would be a boat there to take him to Cartagena in the New World.

“Gold,” murmured the traveler dreamily, “gold and more gold in Peru! Pounds of gold! Tons of it, if a man is lucky!”

It was fairly comfortable in the shade of the old oak, and the traveler felt his eyes closing. In a little

while he would be on his journey with fresh courage. Just now, though, it would be better to rest. So, with a deep sigh of exhaustion, the man stretched out upon the grass, his bundle under his head, and fell asleep.

Two hours later he stirred and unconsciously pulled his worn coat over his shoulders. The sun was moving toward the west and a little breeze had come up out of nowhere. It was cooler now, but the traveler still felt no urge to be on his way. He would sleep a little longer. Yet even as he settled himself once again, his ears caught a curious sound. Someone was talking, and quite near at hand. Rather, someone was praying. The words were familiar. *Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee . . . blessed art thou amongst women . . .*

The traveler opened one eye and squinted at the valley below. A flock of sheep was spread out along the river banks. Turning away from the peaceful scene, the man suddenly gasped with astonishment. A few yards away a boy about ten years old was kneeling on the edge of a little embankment. The rays of the setting sun were on his upturned face, a poor wooden rosary in his hands, his shepherd's staff beside him.

Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death. Amen.

The boy's voice was clear as a bell. He gave no sign that he was aware of being observed; the beads slipped through his young hands in a gentle rhythm. By now sleep had vanished from the traveler, and he stared with amazement at the boy before him. On

his journey from the north of Spain he had seen many a shepherd lad, but none quite like this. Why, the youngster was as devout as though he prayed in a cathedral!

Presently the boy completed his rosary and placed the wooden beads in a scuffed leather satchel that hung from his shoulder. Then, picking up his wooden staff, he jumped lightly down the embankment. As he did so, a ragged white dog appeared from nowhere and ran eagerly after him.

“Wait a minute!” called the man. “Shepherd boy! Wait a minute!”

The sound hit the still air abruptly. The lad turned toward the embankment, the dog at his heels, and the traveler saw that he had an intelligent face, tanned by the sun and wind. And his dark eyes were friendly.

“Yes, sir? You’re looking for the town?”

The man shook his head. “No, lad. I know the way to Rivera. But what were you doing a little while ago? Over there on your knees?”

The boy smiled faintly, while his fingers played with the dog’s rough coat. “I was offering the Holy Rosary for the Souls in Purgatory.”

“*What?*”

“I was praying for the Souls in Purgatory.”

The man laughed. “But that’s a work more suited for women than a likely lad of your years.”

“Men and boys go to Purgatory, too, sir. It’s well that all of us pray for them, that very soon they will be ready to see God in Heaven.”

Something in the little shepherd's voice caused the man to stop his joking. "You'd make a good preacher, young friend. What's your name?"

"John Masias, sir, although really it is John d'Arcos. But my father is dead and I use my uncle's name."

The traveler nodded and began to fumble in a pocket. "Here," he said, bringing out a small silver coin, "take this and pray for me, too, John. I'm not a Soul in Purgatory, but I do have troubles."

The boy shook his head. "I think you need all your money, sir. You're on a trip, without a home or anyone to look after you."

"Take it, boy, in return for your prayers."

"But I pray without being paid!"

The man threw up his hands in amazement. "What a lad! Here—look at this coin. Is anything wrong with it?"

"No, sir."

"Then, in God's Name, do what I tell you! Take it and put it to some good use."

Slowly the young shepherd stretched out his hand. "All right," he said simply. "I'll pray very hard that you find happiness in America."

"*America?* What makes you think I'm going there?"

The boy laughed. "Most travelers are going to America these days. In a few years I am going, too."

The traveler nodded shrewdly. "Ah, so you're an ambitious lad after all, in spite of your prayers! Well, America will have enough gold for both of us, I'm sure."

When the traveler had gone on his way, the young shepherd stood looking after him thoughtfully. Perhaps he should have explained his interest in America at greater length. He, poor orphan boy that he was, had no desire to obtain a fortune in gold or silver. He was going to the New World only because he felt it was God's Will.

"Why didn't I say so?" he wondered. "Too many people are going to America to take what they can for themselves. Hardly anyone is going just to be of use to the poor and ignorant."

He was lost in these thoughts when suddenly his keen ears caught the sound of someone scrambling up the hillside from the valley.

"That must be Mary," thought the boy. "But she's very late. I wonder why?"

By now the white sheep dog was barking excitedly, hidden from view by the bushes that screened the path leading to the oak tree. John seized his wooden staff and started down the hill. Was something wrong? The dog didn't usually bark like this when his little sister came to help him with the sheep.

"Here I am!" he called. "Over this way, Mary!"

The echo of his own voice filled the valley, but there was no reply. Quickly he pushed his way through the tangle of vines and bushes that hid the little path. Then he stopped. A seven-year-old girl, in the plain wool garb of a peasant child, was huddled on a stone a few yards away. And she was crying as though her heart would break.

The boy stared. "What's happened, Mary? What's the trouble?"

Slowly the child looked up at her brother, her little face strained and pale in its frame of long black braids. "Oh, John, I thought you'd gone away!" she choked between sobs. "I thought I'd never see you again! I wasn't even going to come here at first . . . and now I'm late, and we won't be able to get the sheep together before dark . . ."

The tears were falling again. "There, there," said the boy soothingly. "I've told you dozens of times that I won't go to America for a long time. Why can't you believe me?"

The child hid her face in her hands. "I don't see why you have to go at all," she whimpered.

The young shepherd sighed. This little sister was his closest living relative. Since the death of their parents, five years ago, the two of them had been living with a farmer down in the valley. They did odd jobs around the house and occasionally went to Rivera to see their uncle, a good man who regretted that he had no room for them in his own house. Actually, however, there was no one to give Mary the love and care every little girl should have.

John sat down on the stone and drew his small sister to him. "Listen," he whispered, taking her hand in his, "a traveler passed by a while ago and left you something. What do you suppose it is?"

For a moment Mary was silent. Then she peered timidly through tear-stained fingers. "What?"



"I THOUGHT YOU HAD GONE AWAY," SHE SAID.

The boy held out his hand. A ray of sunlight stealing through the vines and bushes glistened on the little silver coin. "Here," he said, "it's all yours."

Suddenly tears were a thing of the past. The child reached for the coin eagerly, turning it over and over to make sure it was real. It was the first time she had ever held a piece of money in her hand.

"Oh, John! The traveler must have been a very nice man! Who was he?"

The boy shook his head. "I don't know. Someone who asked our prayers that he would find happiness where he was going."

"It wasn't . . . the vision again? Saint John the Evangelist didn't give you this little coin?"

The young shepherd laughed. "No. It wasn't the good saint who came this time. Just a poor man on his way to America to make a fortune."

Mary sighed with relief. "I'm glad. You don't know how it hurts when Saint John comes and says God wants you to leave me."

"Mary! He doesn't put it that way!"

"What does he say then?"

The shepherd boy shifted uneasily. It was always hard to explain just what happened when the vision came. He would be watching the sheep, perhaps saying the Rosary, when all of a sudden he would know that his patron, John the Evangelist, was beside him. The first vision had come to him over five years ago, when he was just a tiny boy. Since then there had been several others. Each time, the holy Apostle brought the same message.

“What does he tell you, John?”

“He tells me I am to leave Spain and that some day churches will be built in my honor.”

“He doesn’t really say you’ll travel to America.”

“No, but I think I’m going there just the same.”

“What else?”

John smiled faintly. “Many times my patron saint gives me a glimpse of a beautiful country. Everything is clean and shining and the people are so happy. I’m very sure it must be Heaven. Oh, Mary! If only you could see it, too!”

The little girl looked down at the silver coin in her hand. The old sadness was stealing over her. She never had any visions. And one of these days Saint John the Evangelist was going to take her brother away for good. What would she do then?