

STORIES
POETRY

The Inglenook

SKETCHES
TRAVEL

BEING A SAINT.

Bridget, that lives at Eleanor's, is a Roman Catholic. She has a rosary that one of her friends brought her from a place in Canada they call St. Anne's. The priest blessed it. And they have holy water at her church, and images of the saints. They call their church—it's way over to the Junction—St. Francis'. I didn't know before there were any saints except St. Matthew, and the others in the front of the New Testament, but Bridget says there are hundreds of them. I know there aren't any women saints mentioned in the Bible, but she says many of the saints are women, and that she was named Bridget because he was born on St. Bridget's Day—the seventh of October. My birthday is the eleventh of June, and we looked that up in Bridget's calendar, and that's St. Barnabas' Day. Of course, mamma couldn't have named me that, but she could Max.

I told him about it and he laughed. He said it was silly to believe in all those saints—the Bible didn't tell you to. But Eleanor and I got real interested, and Bridget lent us a book all about the lives of the saints. They were just as holy! And a great many strange things happened to them: fire didn't burn them and water didn't drown them, and they were snatched away from danger. It was very interesting, and it made Eleanor and me want to be heroic, and live lovely lives the way they did.

So Eleanor said, "Let's us promise each other—solemly true—we will try to be saints for a month."

"Oh, Eleanor!" I said, "I never could be a saint so long as that!"

"Don't you think you could a week, then?" she asked. But I didn't believe I could.

"Well, three days, then, to try," she said. "Any one could be a saint just for three days."

I was ashamed to say I was afraid I couldn't be a saint three days, so we solemnly promised each other we'd try to be saints three whole days. Eleanor's birthday is the thirteenth of April, that's St. Catherine's Day; so we said she could be St. Catherine; and as my saint had a man's name, we decided to call me St. Mary Beata. That's Latin; it means Happy St. Mary.

We decided to begin on Friday, and keep it up through Saturday and Sunday. Of course it's easy to be good on Sunday—in church and Sunday-school and singing hymns with the family in the afternoon, just before supper. But I knew the other days would be harder.

We started Friday morning. Max and I and Eleanor always go to school together—she's generally a little later than we are, and we have to wait for her. But Friday morning she was out by the big elm, waiting for us.

"Well, this is a surprise!" said Max. Eleanor laughed and gave my hand a little squeeze.

Then Max said, "What have you done to your hair?"

I don't wonder he asked. Eleanor has lovely hair—not tight curls, but beautiful shining waves. And she had brushed it very wet and braided it all the way down, and it made the funniest braids, all crooked. I suppose she thought curls didn't look saintly.

I hadn't done a thing to myself but take off my pearl ring. I'm very fond of that ring, but thought saints didn't need any ornament but the one of a meek and quiet spirit—I don't usually have that, but I thought perhaps I could for three days. Max didn't know what to make of Eleanor's hair, but she didn't tell him why it was braided.

When school began Miss Forsythe gave us a little talk—she does pretty often. "She said she must have better discipline in the room, and she should make an example of the first one that morning who broke any rule."

Buddy Carr is such a funny-looking little fellow, so fat and always smiling. He came in late that morning. Leo Overlock had his foot out in the aisle, and Buddy didn't see it, but came smiling along. I wish I wasn't so easy to laugh; Uncle Max says my funny bone is on the outside. It didn't hurt Buddy a bit when he fell, but he was so surprised! I laughed right out before I knew I was going to.

Miss Forsyth said, "You know the rule, Mary; you may stand in the corner five minutes by the clock."

I was very much mortified, but I had to do it. Five minutes is a very long time indeed standing in a corner, with every one looking at you. And I didn't mean to laugh, either. Well, that wasn't a very good beginning for a saint, but I suppose even saints make some failures.

Max minded it a lot more than I did—he thinks girls ought to behave better than boys—and he lectured me going home. And no one likes to be lectured, especially by your twin brother, when he isn't perfect himself, either. He said his idea of the right kind of a girl was one that was always good-mannered and gentle, and kept her clothes neat and her hair brushed. My hair's curly and Max's isn't, and it's lots easier to keep straight hair smooth.

"Well, I suppose you had rather have had Cora Corruith for a sister," I said; "she's meek as Moses, and her hair is straight as his."

Eleanor gave me a little pinch to stop me. She hasn't any brothers—she might get; that vexed sometimes if she had—but I guess she wouldn't; she's a dear girl, Eleanor is.

Max didn't laugh. "Well," he said, "I think Cora Corruith is a lady, anyway, and that's all I want you to be. I don't expect you to be a saint."

We'd got to Eleanor's elm, and she said quick, before I could answer, "Oh, Mary, do come right in the house, I want to show you something." So I went, and Max went on.

"What is it?" I asked, when we had reached the house. "Have you got a new hat?"

"No," she said, laughing. "It's just my grandma's Japanese teapot." And she took it out of the closet.

"Why, I've seen that before, lots of times!" I said.

"I know it," said Eleanor, "but I wanted to get you away from Max till you cooled off."

I couldn't help laughing. "You didn't want me to make any more saintly failures, did you?" I said. "Oh, Eleanor, I guess you'll have to be a saint for us both!"

"Not a bit of it!" she said. "Of course the saints themselves made some failures, and you can begin all fresh again now."

"Do you think I can?" I said. "Of course you can, Mary," and she went a piece with me, almost as far as our front walk.

We had roast chicken for dinner that day. Mother is teaching us to carve, for father is away so much; a doctor is always being called off. We take turns and it was my turn this time. It was a very slippery chicken, and I suppose I pushed the fork in too much sideways—you want to stand it up very straight—or else the platter was too small, or something; anyway the chicken slipped way over to one side and the gravy and dressing splashed right out onto the clean table cloth. I hate to do anything awkward, and father's Aunt Martha was our guest, too. She was very fond of children. She never had any; if she had had she might not expect them to be perfect. And she said:

"Why, Mary, child, what's the matter? I never knew you to be so awkward before!"

Mother has taught us never to laugh at mistakes, and she is always very gentle, so I'm not used to being spoken to in that way, and I felt my face turn very red, and Max looked uncomfortable, too—he never can bear to have any one else blame me. But mother smiled at me, and said to Aunt Martha:

"Mary is just learning to carve, and it's rather a difficult art to master at once, I think, don't you?"

Aunt Martha said she supposed it was, and I felt better, and went on carving. I managed to do it well enough so we all had some, anyway.

After dinner, before it was time to go to school, I thought it would be polite to talk to Aunt Martha, and so I did. But she didn't seem very interested, and I heard her say to mother, as I went out: "What a nice little girl Louise is—so quiet! I like quiet children."

Nothing seemed to go right that afternoon in school; my head ached, and I couldn't remember the capital of Montana, and it was hot, and I didn't wait for Eleanor to go home. I just ran, for I wanted to tell mother all about it.

I knew she wouldn't laugh, and she didn't. Father just can't help laughing when things are funny, and I can't, either, nor Max. But mother never hurts anyone's feelings—and you know laughing does, sometimes. So I told her all about being saints, and that I didn't think St. Mary Beata was at all a good name for me, for I had had a very unhappy day. And she put her arm around me and kissed me, as she said:

"I don't want you to be a saint—only a healthy, happy little girl. And beata means something better than happy, dear; it means blessed. And you are always my blessed little Mary."

"And can I stop trying to be a saint, right now?" I asked.

"Yes. Just keep on trying to be good and sweet and patient and kind that's all."

Well, I felt so happy, and just like the song does when it says, "The burden of my heart rolled away"; and my head didn't ache any more.

Aunt Martha had gone home, and we had a jolly time at supper; father was there, and he's always jolly when he doesn't have what he calls a "critical case" to think about. He said he'd take Max and me to the Junction the next day.

It was a lovely morning, and we had such a jolly ride, and we had dinner at Aunt Lisbeth's—she's father's sister, and as fond of fun as he is, and she has three children of her own, so she doesn't mind them a bit. They had such a lot of little chickens—new ones, raised in an incubator, but they looked just like the natural-born ones, and were just as fluffy and cunning as anything.

I didn't see Eleanor Sunday, as she goes to the Baptist. But Monday morning she was waiting for us, under the big elm. She was pulled me back behind Max and whispered, "Are you going to keep right on this week?"

I said, "Oh, no, Eleanor, I'm not! I don't believe I ever could be a saint anyway."

She looked disappointed, and then she said, "Well, then, I'm not, either, if you're not, for you are my very dearest friend, and I love you the best of any girl and I want to do just the way you do."

"What a dear you are, Eleanor!" I said. "We'll keep dearest friends for ever and ever and ever, won't we?"

"And she said, 'Yes, we will.' And we're going to—it's lots easier to be dearest friends than it is saints; but Eleanor would make a pretty good saint just as she is.—Selected.