

ALEXI SARGEANT

SAINTLY ADVENTURES

14 TALES OF DARING AND DANGER
FROM THE LIVES OF THE SAINTS

ILLUSTRATED BY
ANITA BARGHIGIANI

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*To my parents, Kimon and Carol.
Thank you for your wonderful
example and for helping me set
off on my own adventures!*

—A.S.

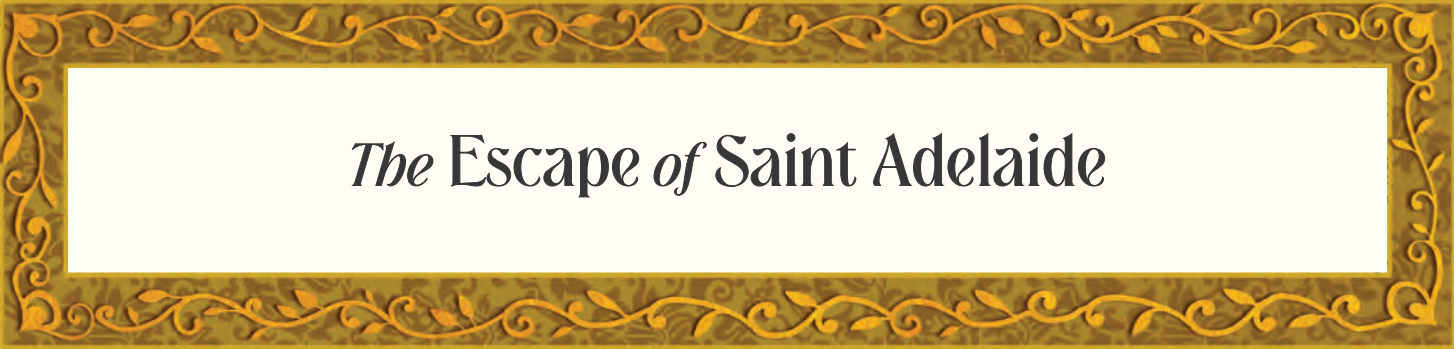
*To Oberon, whom I miss very much
and who will always be a part of me.*

—A.B.

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The Escape of Saint Adelaide

In medieval Italy, a castle stood tall, overlooking the peaceful and pleasant waters of Lake Garda. Within the stone walls, however, a queen cried bitter tears. This castle was no home at all to her, but rather a prison. Though she had beautiful dresses, she was denied her rightful crown—and confined to this guarded fortress.

At twenty years old, Queen Adelaide was a widow. Not only had she lost her royal husband, but she had become a prisoner in what should have been her own realm: Italy. Adelaide took a deep breath and dried her eyes. Crying would do no good, she decided. She would pray for God to deliver her from this prison. And she would roll up her sleeves and work for deliverance, too.

Her plan required hard physical work, not a familiar task for a woman brought up as a princess. Adelaide was born to Burgundian royalty in the year 931 and got married at the age of fifteen, becoming Queen of Italy. Her husband Lothair's reign was troubled by the plots of the unruly noble Berengar. In the end, Berengar had Lothair poisoned and stole the throne for himself.

Berengar not only arranged Lothair's death, he barred the widowed queen Adelaide from succession—unless, Berengar said, she would marry his son. This match would have strengthened Berengar's rule. But Adelaide didn't want to wed the son of her husband's killer, and she told Berengar so. Berengar frowned at her defiance. "Perhaps you'll change your tune with some time to think over your folly," he said, and sentenced her to imprisonment by Lake Garda.

Most of the servants in the castle were minions of Berengar. But Adelaide was left with two servants of her own: a loyal handmaid inside and a priestly confessor who visited weekly. Together, they talked over a plan for escape.

"It's risky, your majesty, but I will do anything I can to free you from Berengar's injustice. And the Bishop of Reggio is on our side—you will be safe if you can reach his protection once you have made it out."

“Thank you, Father. And I know we can count on you to pray for us to have the courage and perseverance we will need.”

“And I also will help, my lady. I’ve been watching for when the guards are most likely to be distracted or nodding off. If we dig just a little each day, we can escape this place.”

And so, slowly, Adelaide and her friends dug a tunnel. The priest dug from the outside of the castle under cover of night. When the guards were not paying attention, Adelaide and her handmaid took turns digging in a corner of the courtyard hidden by a bush. After each time she dug, Adelaide shifted a paving stone over the tunnel’s entrance. Whenever the priest came to hear Adelaide’s confession, they also discussed the tunnel. For four anxious months, they dug at every opportunity they could find.

At last, however, Adelaide’s prayers were answered. It took a lot of digging and a lot of sneaking around, but the escape tunnel was finished. The two parts of the tunnel met in the middle, and Adelaide now had the chance to slip free from Berengar’s clutches.

It became clear to Adelaide and her handmaid that God was truly with them, for shortly after their tunnel was complete there came a night when all Berengar’s guards nodded off. Murmuring prayers of thanks, the queen and the handmaid shifted the paving stone aside and squeezed through the tunnel. When they emerged at last, their faces and dresses were smeared with dirt, but they didn’t care—they were free!

Free from the castle, at least. Now they would have to evade Berengar’s search parties. For weeks they traveled under cover of night, taking refuge in



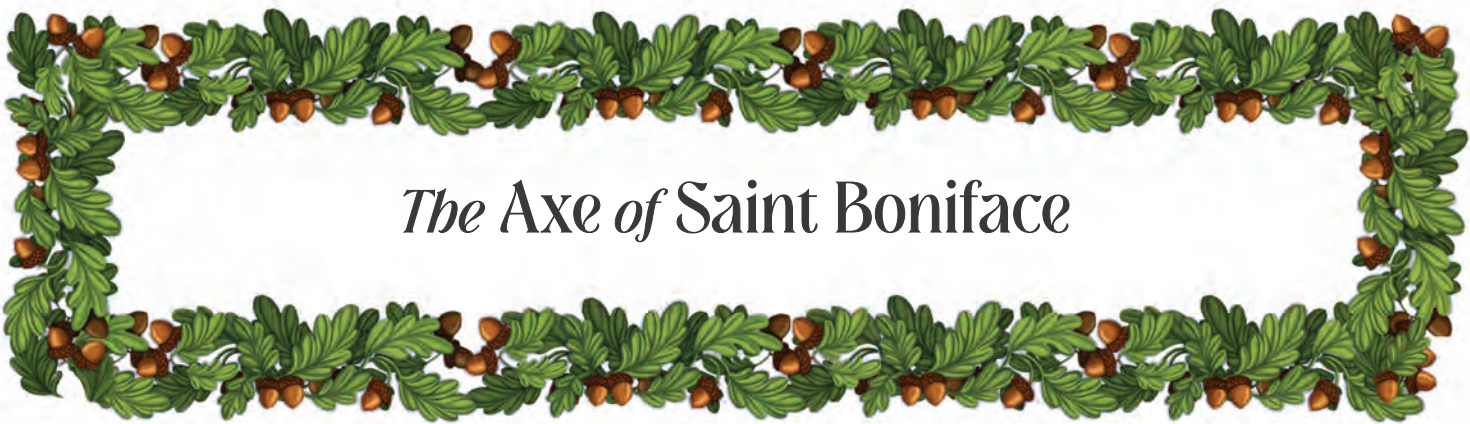
rough shelters during the day. It was wise of them to be cautious! Enraged, Berengar not only sent out search parties but rode himself at the head of an army, trying to catch the runaway queen.

At one point, Adelaide was hiding in a grainfield, lying still between stalks of wheat. She held her breath. Hoofbeats sounded nearby. Berengar was right there, furiously searching for his escaped prisoner! Adelaide trembled and prayed silently. Berengar's army trampled through the field, jabbing their spears through the grain. Miraculously, none of them found Adelaide, and at last Berengar left to search elsewhere. That same day, another man arrived at the grainfield: the good Bishop of Reggio, come to escort Adelaide to safety at last!

Adelaide's faith and courage were rewarded. Not only did she escape her imprisonment, but she would go on to marry again and, with the help of her new husband King Otto of Germany, defeat and humble Berengar. Adelaide became Queen of Germany and a mother and grandmother to kings—she was even crowned Holy Roman Empress at the side of her husband. As Empress she was famous for her wisdom, kindness, and zeal for the Gospel. Though she rose to great heights of power, Adelaide never forgot how God had led her safely through the very depths of the earth.







The Axe of Saint Boniface

It was the tallest tree in the forest by far: an ancient oak whose wide, stout trunk was marked with carved runes and old bloodstains. Piles of bones lay about its roots—from animal sacrifices, and maybe not only animals.... For centuries, German people spilled blood for the ferocious thunder god Donar in this grove. But one day in the year 723, a man in bishop's robes strode toward the looming tree. In his hands he held a sharpened axe.

A crowd gathered around the grove's edges, watching Bishop Boniface intently. Some were Christian converts, here to support the man who had baptized them. But many others in the crowd were pagans, worshippers of false gods. They thought this oak was sacred to Donar, to whom they prayed for fair weather for their crops and for storms to smite their enemies.

Bishop Boniface knew what the pagans thought about the tree. He knew many of them expected him to be struck down by their storm god for threatening it. He even knew some were cursing him in their hearts, perhaps readying to strike him down themselves. But he had come into this grove to do one thing: to show who the one true God really was. He prayed God would help by showing the pagans a sign. Boniface raised his axe to strike the oak.

Boniface could have chosen a less dangerous way of serving God. He had been born in England and was educated at a Benedictine monastery, where the monks' scholarship delighted him. From them, he learned to read and write. Most importantly, he learned about God. He learned that there is one true God and that he is more powerful than the false gods of the pagans. He learned that God's own Son Jesus died on a cross out of love for us—showing that his power was very different from the ferocious power attributed to false gods. Out of love for God, Boniface became a monk, a scholar, and a priest. When he was nearly forty, he was asked to become his monastery's abbot.

Surprising everyone, the scholarly Boniface did not accept the position. He felt called by God to a different life: not a peaceful life among scholars but a difficult life bringing the Gospel to dangerous territory. He left for a region

called Germania, said to be full of barbarians. Many Germans were pagans, and the few Christians there lived without much organization, not even permanent church buildings.

The pope supported Boniface's mission by making him a bishop. Boniface traveled throughout Germania, encouraging Christians, preaching to pagans, and building up the Church. He was discouraged to learn, however, that some of the German Christians were still acting like pagans: consulting with fortune tellers, practicing astrology, even sacrificing animals at Donar's oak. They were living like their superstitious neighbors, not followers of the one true God.

Boniface called together the most faithful of his flock and asked them: What would it take to get their fellow converts to live like Christians? The Germans told their bishop, nervously, that he would have to prove that the pagan gods were truly false and powerless compared to the one true God. Boniface took in this advice and gave a slow nod.

The next day, Bishop Boniface made an announcement to a crowd of Germans, Christians and pagans alike. "I, Boniface, promised blessed Pope Gregory, successor of Peter, that I would uphold the faith and purity of holy Catholic teaching," he said. "I find in my flock some who are not yet strong in the spirit, who secretly or openly offer sacrifices to trees. With God's help, I will show them who is truly worthy of worship. By this day's end, Donar's oak will lie in the dirt." And to show he was serious, he held aloft a woodcutter's axe.

And so the bishop prepared to fell the sacred tree, with a large crowd watching to see what would happen. Could he bring down the mighty oak? Would he be punished by Donar

