



Salvation: Scenes from the Life of St. Francis

Valerie Martin

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The acclaimed author of *Italian Fever* and *Mary Reilly* takes a unique approach to biography in a fascinating work that enters directly into the world of the man who is at once the most radical and one of the most beloved of all Christian saints.

Inspired by the fresco cycles that depict the life of St. Francis of Assisi, Valerie Martin tells the life of Francesco di Pietro Bernardone in a series of vividly realized "panels" of moments both ordinary and crucial: on the road, in the company of friends, alone in his meditations. She draws from myriad sources, including Francesco's own words, and has arranged these scenes thematically, in the manner of the early hagiographies, moving roughly backward in time.

We begin with the dying Francesco and the rivalry for his body among the towns of medieval Italy. The old friar, exhausted by illness and the divisions within his brotherhood, gives way to the zealous missionary who joins the Fifth Crusade, confident that he can convert the Egyptian sultan. We see the unwashed and innocent revolutionary, unafraid to lecture a pope on Christ's message; his mystical friendship with Chiara di Offreducci, a nobleman's daughter who turns her back on the world to join him; and finally, the frivolous young Francesco on the deserted road where his encounter with a leper leads him to an ecstatic embrace of God.

Salvation is at once a window into a medieval world whose physicality and purity have never been rendered with such visceral power, and a dazzlingly original portrait of the man whose legend has resonated through the centuries.

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