

CATHERINE, CALLED BIRDY

SHE'S NOT YOUR AVERAGE
DAMSEL IN DISTRESS . . .



Karen Cushman

TRAS
INSIDE



September †

12TH DAY OF SEPTEMBER

I am commanded to write an account of my days: I am bit by fleas and plagued by family. That is all there is to say.

13TH DAY OF SEPTEMBER

My father must suffer from ale head this day, for he cracked me twice before dinner instead of once. I hope his angry liver bursts.

14TH DAY OF SEPTEMBER

Tangled my spinning again. Corpus bones, what a torture.

15TH DAY OF SEPTEMBER

Today the sun shone and the villagers sowed hay, gathered apples, and pulled fish from the stream. I, trapped inside, spent two hours embroidering a cloth

for the church and three hours picking out my stitches after my mother saw it. I wish I were a villager.

16TH DAY OF SEPTEMBER

Spinning. Tangled.

17TH DAY OF SEPTEMBER

Untangled.

18TH DAY OF SEPTEMBER

If my brother Edward thinks that writing this account of my days will help me grow less childish and more learned, *he* will have to write it. I will do this no longer. And I will not spin. And I will not eat. Less childish indeed.

19TH DAY OF SEPTEMBER

I am delivered! My mother and I have made a bargain. I may forgo spinning as long as I write this account for Edward. My mother is not much for writing but has it in her heart to please Edward, especially now he is gone to be a monk, and I would do worse things to escape the foolish boredom of spinning. So I will write.

What follows will be my book—the book of Catherine, called Little Bird or Birdy, daughter of Rollo and the lady Aislinn, sister to Thomas, Edward, and the abominable Robert, of the village of Stonebridge in the shire of Lincoln, in the country of

England, in the hands of God. Begun this 19th day of September in the year of Our Lord 1290, the fourteenth year of my life. The skins are my father's, left over from the household accounts, and the ink also. The writing I learned of my brother Edward, but the words are my own.

Picked off twenty-nine fleas today.

20TH DAY OF SEPTEMBER

Today I chased a rat about the hall with a broom and set the broom afire, ruined my embroidery, threw it in the privy, ate too much for dinner, hid in the barn and sulked, teased the littlest kitchen boy until he cried, turned the mattresses, took the linen outside for airing, hid from Morwenna and her endless chores, ate supper, brought in the forgotten linen now wet with dew, endured scolding and slapping from Morwenna, pinched Perkin, and went to bed. And having writ this, Edward, I feel no less childish or more learned than I was.

21ST DAY OF SEPTEMBER

Something is astir. I can feel my father's eyes following me about the hall, regarding me as he would a new warhorse or a bull bought for breeding. I am surprised that he has not asked to examine my hooves.

And he asks me questions, the beast who never speaks to me except with the flat of his hand to my cheek or my rump.

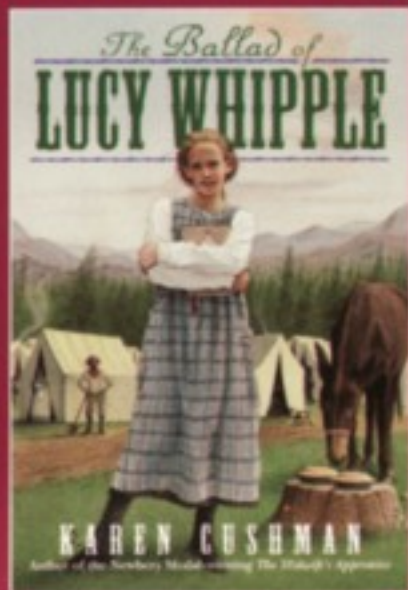
“Corpus Bones! I utterly loathe my life.”

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Can a sharp-tongued, high-spirited, clever young maiden with a mind of her own actually lose the battle against an ill-mannered, piglike lord and an unimaginative, greedy toad of a father?

Deus! Not if Catherine has anything to say about it!

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