Brother Matthew and "Yardstick" The Three-Footed Cat

Story and Illustrations by Lucille Selsor
Brother Matthew
and
"Yardstick"
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Three-Footed Cat

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Jim Panhorst
DEDICATED TO ALL TRUE FRANCISCANS
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           “PRRRrrrrrrrr!”
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(Due to the fact that a cat has only nine lives, there are only nine chapters in this story.)

But YARDSTICK is very much alive, and doing well, living out his first life in good Franciscan style. He still has eight more lives to live - each more magical than the last!
“HMMMMmmmmm!”
“PRRRrrrrrrrrrr!”

CHAPTER I

Once upon a time there REALLY WAS a three-footed cat!

He belonged to a Christian gentleman who didn't dress like everyone else.

His dress style was not square, nor was it conservative, nor was it hippy. And it certainly wasn't stylish. It was just different.

He wore a long brown robe tied with a white rope cord. He wore heavy brown leather sandals with his toes showing - all through the year, even when it was cold and snowing! (Sometimes he sneaked on socks). The time was in the '70's but the Christian gentleman was NOT a hippy.

The sandals made the hippies think this Christian gentleman was just "one of the boys". The hippies liked him.

And so did the ladies.

And the little boys.

And ordinary people.

And the squares and the 'way outs.
The three-footed cat liked him too. The little cat was bran-new to the world.

He had no idea that most cats have FOUR FEET. He was perfectly happy the way he was. At first.

"Just three feet," said the Christian gentleman, looking at the tiny squirmly little cat. "HHHMMMMmnmnmnmnmnmn. I think I'll name you YARDSTICK."

"PPRRRRRRRRRRRRrrrrrrrrrrr" answered Yardstick. He didn't know that this was a very fitting name indeed! Yardstick didn't feel limited having only three feet. He didn't know that the Christian gentleman was a very kind Franciscan brother. Yardstick didn't know that there have been hundreds of Franciscan brothers since 'way back to the year 1208!!!

The nice Christian gentleman was named BROTHER MATTHEW. He was very much like the very first Franciscan brother, BROTHER FRANCIS, himself. (In some ways, of course).

Brother Matthew worked hard at being a good Christian gentleman. He worked hard at being a good Franciscan brother too. (However, the truth is, he worked a little harder at being a good Franciscan brother).

Brother Matthew was a fine artist. He worked hard at being an artist. He painted on canvas. And on velvet. And on rocks. And on old wood. And new wood. Brother Matthew painted on anything he could get his hands on!

He painted owls and eagles. And chipmunks and squirrels. He painted mountains, and rivers and lakes. He painted cats and mice. He painted clowns and kings. And old wagon wheels and old men. And angels and saints. People marveled. They often wondered if Brother Matthew had caught a rainbow.

(I don't know if he ever painted the town red or not).
Yardstick didn’t know anything about all of this of course. He was just a little newborn kitten. He could not yet walk around the old art studio where he was born. He snuggled up close to his Mama Cat in the old bureau drawer. Mama Cat had four other cats in the same cat family with Yardstick. She washed them up and down with her pink tongue. She washed and washed and washed. It was an entire week before she discovered that Yardstick had only three feet.

Then she pushed him out of the drawer onto the cold studio floor!

“What are you doing out of the drawer, Yardstick?” said Brother Matthew.

He held his paint brush over his head, smearing some green paint into his own curls. There was green paint on his Franciscan brown robe too. And red paint. And white paint. And turpentine.

Brother Matthew scooped Yardstick up with one hand and dumped him back into the Family Circle.

Mama Cat squinted her eyes almost shut. She revved up her purring motor - and turned her back! She pretended not to notice the little three-footed cat and the Christian gentleman.

When Brother Matthew went back to painting a big wide smile onto a sad clown’s face (on burlap) Mama Cat pushed Yardstick out of the drawer again!
This time Brother Matthew saw the unkind act.

"Shame on you, Magdalene!" said the gentle brother. "SHAME. SHAME. SHAME. With all of the different-looking gentlemen-cats that you've been friendly with - and mother to - you should be nice to this little three-footed kitty."

Mama Cat squinted. She had big green eyes. A tiny splinter of black showed through the center of her green eyes. She ignored Brother Matthew's pointed remark about her many cat friends. They had all been very handsome tom-cats. And ALL of them had had FOUR FEET! Where did this embarrassing little three-footed creep come from anyway?

"With the variety of friends you've had Magdalene," said Brother Matthew, "you should have expected to have a cat like Yardstick someday."

"It's called the 'law of averages'," said Brother Matthew philosophically.

Brother Matthew then painted a very bright-eyed mouse on an old piece of barn wood with a knot-hole for a mouse-hole. Knowing that the mouse had to remain painted there forever, Brother Matthew thoughtfully added a large painted wedge of cheese for the little mouse.

Then, thinking he had been severe with Mama Magdalene, he painted a big blue bow onto the mouse's trailing tail, thinking this would amuse her. Perhaps she'd even be nice to Yardstick.

But Mama Magdalene stopped the revved-up purring, took Yardstick by the scruff of his neck, and dropped him out of the drawer onto the floor!

The old studio had been an old chapel many, many cat-years ago. The floor was cold and splintery. It made Yardstick feel itchy. He tried to scratch himself with his rear left foot. But that was the missing foot! There was only a nubby little stump which couldn't scratch at all! Since the little nub was an inch or more shorter than his three good feet Yardstick couldn't stand on it either. So he tumbled over on his fat little side to scratch.
Mama Magdalene squinted her big green eyes very balefully at Yardstick. She thought he looked very clumsy. And ridiculous. She said so too. In a very cutting, catty, unkind meow!

Actually, Yardstick looked almost exactly like Magdalene. Both had beautiful long, buff-blonde cat fur. At first Brother Matthew had called her "Lady Buff" when she had come to his studio as a little girl-cat. But her habit of staying out all night, as she grew older, - and even for long week-ends! - finally forced the good brother to change her name.

"You're a party girl, Magdalene," he said. And he never called her "Lady Buff" again.

FRANCISCAN RULE
CHAPTER III

Magdalene pretended she had not heard the pitiful mewing of the little 3-footed cat. She washed and washed her other four kittens. All four had four beautifully shaped feet! Mama Magdalene resolved never to let the little 3-footed Yardstick ever again join the Family Circle in the old bureau drawer.

Brother Matthew soon knew that Magdalene did NOT intend to live by any rule of St. Francis. He hummed all of the beautiful words of the Franciscan rule in an effort to impress her:

"Prayer of St. Francis:
Where there is hatred-let me sow love.
Where there is injury-pardon.
Where there is doubt-faith.
Where there is despair-hope.
Where there is darkness-light.
Where there is sadness-joy."

As he painted and hummed, Magdalene revved up her purring motor, and made so much noise purring that she couldn't hear a word the good brother was humming!!!
She refused to even look at Yardstick. Somehow, he hurt her maternal pride in being a prolific producer of perfect cats. Magdalene had a very catty, unforgiving nature.

Yardstick was hungry. He mewed very pitifully. But Magdalene shut her big green eyes all the way. Not even one little black splinter of light showed.

"Never mind, Yardstick," said the kind Brother Matthew. He picked up the little 3-footed cat and placed him in the inside of the big brown Franciscan shawl which is a part of a Franciscan habit. This nice cat-nest on the Franciscan habit is called a monk's cowl.

So naturally, Yardstock thought a monk's cowl was a cat cowl! He fitted into it perfectly. It was a nice hammock-shaped cat cowl for Yardstick. Soon he was sound asleep.

When Yardstick awakened Brother Matthew went over to the infirmary kitchen and begged for "left overs". The big kitchen brother was kind too. He also had very sharp eyes.

"What do you have in your cowl, Brother Matthew?" said the kitchen brother. He reached down deep into Brother Matthew's cowl and pulled out the tiny, squirming 3-footed kitten.

"HO - HO - HO - HO - Brother Matthew! What next? What next? So the historic Franciscan cowl has now become a hammock for a stray cat! AND A 3-FOOTED CAT AT THAT!"

The big kitchen brother laughed and laughed. And laughed.

Then he thought of something even funnier. "A kangaroo and her pouch has nothing on you Brother Matthew - what do you call your little kanga-pussy?"

"His name is YARDSTICK," replied Brother Matthew with great dignity. He was quite used to the big brother's amusement. "Could I have the 'left overs' please?"

"You and your friends!" grumbled the kitchen brother.
But he was a kind brother too. (This is a rule of St. Francis, the first Franciscan brother - to be kind.) The kitchen brother stacked all of the infirmary left-overs onto a tray. It was piled high with good uneaten portions of fine Polish sausage.

“That 3-footed kanga-pussy still needs a mother’s milk,” said the kitchen brother. “We Poles might relish this highly-seasoned sausage, but it is too hot for a baby cat. He needs milk.” The kitchen brother was a wise man. His head was filled with all kinds of wonderful facts about nutrition, and vitamins and things. Even if he did have a big, loud laugh and a booming voice.

“Magdalene threw him out,” said Brother Matthew. “Yardstick’s missing fourth foot offends her sensitive nature,” explained Brother Matthew. “She’s a real perfectionist. Very fussy.”

“Magdalene fussy? And a perfectionist?” chuckled the kitchen brother. “HO! HO! HO! HO!”

He gave Brother Matthew a jar of warm milk and dropped Yardstick back inside the cat cowl.

“Back inside your kangaroo pouch, Yardstick,” he boomed.

Yardstick snuggled up warm and snug and safe. He didn’t care what the kitchen brother had called his little hammock. Yardstick knew it was a cat cowl.

LIFE IN A CHAPEL DRAWER
CHAPTER IV

When Brother Matthew returned to his chapel studio he poured the warm milk into a small paint dish. All of the dried paint made the dish as elegant as a king’s dish! Yardstick had never seen so many colors in one place. He just knew that it was a dish for royalty.

But he did kinda wish he could be with his four sister-and-brother cats snuggled up with Mama Magdalene.

Brother Matthew took the big tray full of Polish sausages outside. Magdalene followed very leisurely, and daintily ate 2½ big plump sausages! Who could tolerate all of that highly seasoned Polish meat?

Yardstick knew one thing - he preferred milk!

Brother Matthew painted a dashing conquistador on old wood. He also painted daisies beside an old wagon wheel. And windmills and strawberries. The evening sun streamed through the studio windows as it dipped down - down - DOWN. Soon it was so dark he had to quit painting.
Yardstick was cozy and sleepy. He loved the cat cowl. When he felt himself being lifted from it by Brother Matthew’s gentle hands, he hardly awakened at all. He was placed in a corner of the old bureau drawer away from Mama Magdalene and the Family Circle. He snuggled up close to a fluffy stack of old paint cloths, smelling wonderfully of oils and turpentine and thinners and stains. Just like Brother Matthew! It was better than catnip!

Every day at the old chapel studio seemed alike. Mama Magdalene’s disposition didn’t improve. She was as catty about Yardstick as she had always been. She spent HOURS grooming and admiring her four perfect 4-footed kittens. She spent those same hours ignoring poor little Yardstick and his 3 feet.

But the people streaming into the art studio to buy Brother Matthew’s paintings were charmed with Yardstick.

“How clever he is with his 3-footed dexterity!” said all of the ladies. But little Yardstick knew that they were as careful and catty as Mama Magdalene about perfection! When it came to a pet for their little boys and girls - they wanted only perfect cat with four feet. They wanted no second-rate 3-footed cats!

All of the lady art patrons smiled fondly at the charming, frisky little four footed kittens. How could one explain Yardstick, with only three feet?

“He’s delightful, of course,” gushed the ladies, “but he’s probably NOT a good mouser.”

“Oh, do you have mice at your house?” asked Brother Matthew.

“GRACIOUS NO!” chorused the ladies. “Not a mouse in the house! But a cat ought to be functional!”

Mama Magdalene looked very smug indeed. She certainly knew how to catch mice. (And birds too, when Brother Matthew wasn’t looking).

When the very last of Mama Magdalene’s cat family had been adopted by one of the ladies, along with a still-life painting of a lively looking racoon, Yardstick felt very slighted indeed.

“I wouldn’t part with you, Yardstick,” said the kind Brother Matthew. “YOU ARE UNIQUE. Any cat can have four feet. It’s what is expected of cats. But you, my friend, are the unexpected.”
Mama Magdalene arched her back spitefully. She marched past little Yardstick proudly, without a backward glance, and leaped all the way down the studio chapel steps in a beautiful 4-point landing!!!!!!

Yardstick thought it was the most beautiful leap-landing he had ever seen. Mama Magdalene went out to look up some of her old friends. After all, her latest cat family had all found fine new homes among very exclusive people. The foster parents were all *art patrons* of her master. Very elite foster-parents indeed! All but Yardstick. Magdalene sniffed her graceful whiskers disdainfully. Yardstick didn’t count at all.

FLIGHTY FRIENDS

CHAPTER V

Magdalene was gone for more than a week. It was during this time that Yardstick discovered that he wasn’t the only creature who was a close friend of Brother Matthew. He pulled ‘round and ‘round and ‘round on the rope cord worn by Brother Matthew. He tried to pull it off. Through the studio window, as he staged this tug-of-war with the Franciscan cord, he could now see glimpses of the world beyond. Large chunks of suet from the infirmary kitchen decorated the nearby tree. He had often seen Brother Matthew bring this suet to the studio. Now he could see it firmly anchored onto big stiff branches of the trees just outside the studio window.

Darting, bright-colored, feathery birds sailed in and out to the suet. Beside this feast, Brother Matthew had hung a little wooden house with sliding glass dining-room doors. The sliding doors spilled thousands of seeds into a tray. These graceful, swooping 2-legged, winged creatures were fascinated by this dining area. In and out they flew, churning and chirping in mid air in great excitement. Yardstick had seen glimpses of this before from his perch in the cat cowl. But never had he realized the implications of sharing his own friendship with Brother Matthew.
Now that he had become too big for the cat-cowl, he could still see these silly creatures flitting in and out, just inches away from Brother Matthew's easel. Sometimes his master painted these foolish feathered flyers so perfectly that Yardstick could scarcely tell which side of the studio window contained flying birds, and which side had the painted birds!

As he watched their smooth sailing, fancy flitting loops and rolls, Yardstick felt his own little heart tighten. His big green eyes became just like Mama Magdalene’s - only a tiny splinter of black showed.

YARDSTICK WAS FRANKLY JEALOUS.

He had made a few unsuccessful leaps at this noisy, ill-mannered band of invaders one day when Brother Matthew saw him.

“Yardstick,” said the kind brother reprovingly, “these little flying creatures are my friends too. You are acting like Mama Magdalene. Shame on you. Isn’t it enough that I bring you your food each day? These little friends must eat too.”

After that Yardstick refrained from leaping at the silly creatures. He probably would never have caught one anyway. But he knew a cat that could! He thought admiringly of Mama Magdalene’s beautiful sinuous leap, of her leisurely, lazy-paced padding and pacing!

Yardstick knew what would happen if Mama Magdalene tried to catch a bird! Brother Matthew knew too. So he continued to bring trays of leftovers from the Big Brother’s kitchen so that Magdalene would never be hungry.

“Mama Magdalene could not eat all of these leftovers,” said Yardstick in a purring mood one day. “Now where on earth does the rest of all of this good stuff go?” He, himself, occasionally sampled a Polish sausage, or a chicken wing, or a few flaked fish cakes. He found them all delicious but Yardstick still enjoyed milk from the painted dish. He loved the smell of the dish even when it was empty. He loved the smell of the old art studio. Milk, paint, turpentine. Thinners, sawdust, old paint cloths. Birdfeed, Polish sausage. And MONEY. THE FOLDING KIND!

Brother Matthew was very careless about money. He charged such reasonable prices for his paintings - actually - sometimes he just gave them away. To hippies and others. He wanted each visitor to have something original of his own. Judging from the small prices, it is a wonder that Brother Matthew ever had much money at all. Ladies are great bar-
gain hunters. They knew bargains when they saw them! And the paintings were indeed great bargains, so skillfully did he apply his art. Even so - by the end of the day, Brother Matthew had a great deal of money from his paintings. FOLDING MONEY.

Since the good brother had no use for the money, he did not quite know what to do with it during the day. The Franciscan brothers operated a hospital for poor, broken-down old men, and for crippled and handicapped men of all ages. The money was put to excellent use for these patients' needs.

Yardstick saw them every day, some of them in wheelchairs, some with crutches, some in rolling beds on the sun deck. The little 3-footed cat had great compassion for them. Yardstick was grateful that he had three good feet!

But what to do about the day's money? Franciscans are NOT supposed to carry money. They use it for God's poor, but they don't make a project of collecting it. Brother Matthew very piously thought about this. . . .

How could he get the money from the studio over to the hospital infirmary without carrying it and breaking good St. Francis' own rules?

So he solved his dilemma by stuffing all of the money into the monk's cowl! In that way, Brother Matthew was not actually carrying money at all! The money was just getting a free ride in the monk's cowl, loosely slung across the good brother's shoulders.

Yardstick often rode back and forth when he was a small kitty, nestled into the cowl with crinkly green bills for comfort. There is no catnip in the world that can compare to the smell of money, thought Yardstick.
MILK AND MONEY
CHAPTER VI

And that is how Yardstick, the 3-footed cat began to love the smell of money! There was nothing greedy or avaricious about Yardstick. He just loved Brother Matthew so much that all of the delightful odors about him, and his art studio, Yardstick loved too.

Yardstick loved the smells of oils, turpentine, thinners, birdseed, Polish sausage, milk and money.

(Many people have loved milk and honey - but Yardstick preferred milk and money.)

Still the mystery-question plagued Yardstick. WHERE DID BROTHER MATTHEW PUT ALL OF THE EXTRA LEFT OVERS? WHY DID HE BRING SO MUCH? The birds were gluttons with their dining-room with its sliding glass doors and suet and seeds. But they disappeared into the woods each evening. As their twittering ceased with their

flight Yardstick would become drowsy and always he was soon fast asleep. In the morning the mysterious left-overs were always gone.

WHERE HAD THE FOOD GONE?

Yardstick resolved to remain awake and find out.

He no longer rode in the big comfortable cat-cowl when he went to the kitchen with Brother Matthew. He walked sedately at the side of the good Christian gentleman. He tried very hard to make his walk as smooth and graceful as Mama Magdalene's. But it was simply impossible with that embarrassing nubbin instead of a good fourth foot.

He would have liked to have hitch-hiked a ride in the cowl but Brother Matthew thought this was kittenish. (Being kittenish is just like being childish, only this happens in the life of a cat). Frankly Yardstick didn't know whether he missed the ride next to Brother Matthew more - or the smell of the money!! He really did miss that delightful smell.

Though he was now a very great-sized cat, Brother Matthew always brought a jar of milk for Yardstick besides the mounds of left-overs ... for his “night time friends.” Just who were these “night friends” wondered Yardstick. He stopped purring. A big pang began to ache in his heart. They certainly did get a great deal of tender, loving care from Brother Matthew.
Frankly, Yardstick was jealous (Again!)

He resolved to stay awake this very night and find out who ate all of the left overs. Brother Matthew gave the office-brother all of the lovely, green folding money. One crisp new bill drifted down to Yardstick. What denomination of bill it was made no difference to the cat. But he recognized the picture on it.

Brother Matthew had often painted very nice pictures of this fine gentleman, Mr. Lincoln! He had painted them on old wood, with a rosy glow of firelight behind Mr. Lincoln's beautiful big nose. Brother Matthew liked the looks of Mr. Lincoln very much. He often had said so. He had also said that Mr. Lincoln would have been a very fine Franciscan had it not been for Mrs. Lincoln. Yardstick did not know why the Franciscans would not accept Mrs. Lincoln but he didn’t care.

This new crisp bill had an excellent likeness of Mr. Lincoln - almost as good a picture as his master painted!

Yardstick placed a playful paw over the bill, then picked it up with his mouth. It tasted almost as good as it smelled. But Brother Matthew saw Yardstick’s attachment to the money. He reached down and scooped up the five dollars for the desk brother.

"Don’t ever become too attached to money, Yardstick," instructed Brother Matthew. "The Bible says that money is the root of all evil." He placed all of the money from the cowl onto the desk to be placed in a SAFE place. Then he departed for the kitchen. There he picked up a trayful of left-over macaroni with cheese and pepperoni, and hurried to the studio.

Brother Matthew made a grand sight, striding along with his sandled feet, with a trayful of left over food, thought Yardstick proudly. The sun splashed great smears of red and gawdy gold paint wildly across the evening sky. (Whoever paints the sky did a great job, thought the little cat. Had this "master" taught his own master, wondered the cat?)

Brother Matthew hummed a lovely tune called "Born Free" as he walked. It was a perfect evening.
Tonight, however, was different. Brother Matthew sat on the steps with Yardstick purring and arching his back against the delightful scent of the Franciscan robe. It was spotted with oil paints in rainbow colors, with dashes of turpentine and thinners. The smell of money had evaporated but all of the other true Franciscan odors lingered.

"Go to bed, Yardstick," said the good Christian gentleman. The old bureau drawer was now empty except for Yardstick’s paint linens. Magdalene was week-ending away as usual. She was very secretive about her own night-time friends. The drawer was inviting but Yardstick snuggled up closer and pretended to sleep at Brother Matthew’s feet.

The moon rose higher and higher. A night breeze rippled the water in the lake. The left over food was scattered lightly at the foot of the steps, beside a sticky, yellow-spiked forsythia bush.

It was so quiet that Yardstick almost fell asleep.

Suddenly there was a slight scudding sound on the left side of the walk. A big, plodding Mother Opossum lumbered up to the left over food, sampled some leisurely.

She sniffed suspiciously at the pepperoni as if complaining about the seasoning, then retreated into the shadows. A few minutes later she returned with two - three - four - how many more? little
creatures identical to herself! What disgusting gluttons these creatures were! Yardstick arched his back, his fur stood out like a rich golden muff in the moonlight.

"Quiet!" commanded Brother Matthew. "These are my night friends."

Yardstick was crushed. He strained his own big green eyes unable to believe what he was seeing! Such homely-looking friends indeed! His paw stretched out with claws flexed and retracting. He could have flattened one of the horrid rat-tailed creatures with one pounce. The mother opossum did look a bit fierce.....

The night was full of surprises. Now - darting in - and - out - in - and - out with smooth bobbing motions came two small wolf-like creatures. Yardstick had seen their pictures painted by his master too, exactly as they now looked. They had been painted on old wood, bright eyes shining from the dusk.

Each of them took one more cautious look, seized some sausage and darted into the shadows near the lake. Yardstick saw their gleaming silver bodies, darting in and out as they returned for more food. Each time they came in at a different angle, bright eyes glistening as they reappeared from the shadows. Sometimes they completely circled the old art studio. They moved in the moonlight like liquid mercury.

"A silver fox in the moonlight is a joy forever," said Brother Matthew simply.

YARDSTICK WAS SICK WITH JEALOUSY.

He had never seen anything move with such liquid loveliness in his life. The poor cat tucked his three feet under his own great golden body and glared at the new intruders in his world. He could not have purred if he had been ordered to do so.

After the thieving foxes left, new prowlers joined the feast. How could Brother Matthew like these creatures? A black-faced bandit was the last to arrive. Yardstick recognized his picture among the studio "portraits" on old wood too. Many times he had heard the ladies say the paintings were "cunning" and "lifelike". Yardstick loathed all of them.
“They’re all God’s creatures,” said Brother Matthew. “You and I are too.”

Yardstick marched stiffly inside, tail high, and jumped into the old bureau drawer. He burrowed down deep, and pretended not to hear.

As each day drifted by Yardstick saw more and more of the “night friends.” He liked them no better than on the first night. WHY did Brother Matthew need any more friends? He had artist-friends, hippy-friends, politician-friends, lady-art-patron friends, and those dizzy bird-friends. He had brother-friends, and church-friends. AND HE HAD YARDSTICK, HIS BEST FRIEND! Why bother with more?

Brother Matthew sensed his friend’s jealousy. He had promised to make a fine painting on old barn wood. It was to be very special. It was to be a crib scene of the holiest of nights - the night when Christ was born. First a few rafters were painted in, the straw, finally a softly glowing figure of a smiling, kneeling lady over a manger filled with straw. From the straw came a warm, golden glowing light which seemed to make the lovely lady’s face light up too! A gentleman beside her smiled down at the manger too. Yardstick stood up, looking upward as he leaned on Brother Matthew’s knees, trying to look into the glowing manger.

From the tip of Brother Matthew’s swiftly moving brush, suddenly a cat began to emerge! Standing up with his two good forelegs on the tip of the straw, was Yardstick’s own portrait - looking in on the face of the Infant Jesus! A warm and wonderful glow filled Yardstick’s chest. He didn’t need to rev up his purring motor - it began of its own
accord. When angels were painted in among the rafters overhead in the crib scene, Yardstick knew he was in heavenly company. Who could ask for anything more? He dozed contentedly.

When he awakened he could hardly believe what he saw. The lovely crib scene too, had been invaded! Chipmunks, foxes, and sheep had crowded in and were crouched around the stable in the straw! It was true that it was only Yardstick who had a painted position looking into the crib. But those other horrid night-time creatures certainly didn’t belong there with him and the angels!!!! Yardstick was sure that the lovely lady and the kind gentleman did not want this rowdy bunch of bandits around their little one! How could Brother Matthew have betrayed him in such a way?

Yardstick needed time to think! Now where could he go to meditate about this terrible invasion of his friendship with Brother Matthew?

Yardstick knew! Of course he did. Where did all of the brothers take their cares and worries? Straight to the chapel hopped the three-footed cat, hurrying all the way. He’d take his problem directly to the King of kings!

When the chapel door was opened the cat darted inside - and paused in the shadows. A poor, heartbroken cat needed a choice spot for meditation - the best possible place. The friendly glow of the sanctuary lamp gleamed over the warm, red velvet cushion of the bishop’s chair. Yardstick knew immediately. (He had not lived his entire cat-life in a monastery for nothing). For first-class meditation, you don’t have to be a bishop - just borrow his chair!

The cat made a fine leap to the center of the velvet cushion and settled down for truly apostolic meditation. Soon he was sound asleep.
Yardstick decided to run away. Each day he ventured farther and farther into the woods beside the great lake. He saw Brother Matthew’s night time friends wandering around in the woods during the daytime too. He ignored every one of them.

One day he saw the black-faced bandit which he had heard called “a racoon.” A sparkling stream poured noisily into the lake. The racoon was busy washing something green in the water, but he saw the big 3-footed cat approach. It darted into a crevice of overhanging stone. The stone formed a huge ledge, and under it a dark tunnel-like hall seemed to disappear into nothingness.

Yardstick followed at a leisurely pace. Inside, his quick cat eyes adjusted easily to the darkness. The black-faced bandit had disappeared into the cave, leaving a trail of moistened earth.

What on earth was on the floor?

Scattered like leaves on the cave floor were hundreds and hundreds of pictures of Mr. Lincoln! Several of them were still quite wet from the racoon’s recent washings in the lake. Beside all of this was a musty canvas bag with even more of this wonderful green stuff.

The money reminded Yardstick suddenly of his best friend - from whom he was running away.

Dear Brother Matthew, and the snug cat-cowl, where Yardstick had ridden so many times with just such crinkly bills as these! The poor cat became homesick for his friend and the wonderful smells of the studio.

Taking several of the pieces of currency in his mouth, the cat hurried through the woods to the old chapel-studio. Brother Matthew was busy talking with art patrons. Most of them were ladies whom Yardstick clearly did not like. He placed the nice smelling money among his old paint cloths in the old bureau drawer. Then he hurried back for more.

The black-faced bandit had gone. All afternoon and evening Yardstick carried back hundreds of pictures of Mr. Lincoln. Sometimes there were other strange men pictured on the bills. But his master had never painted any of them. Yardstick hoped his friend could use them anyway. He worked hard. By evening the drawer was filled to overflowing with lovely-smelling money. Wouldn't this be a fine surprise for his good friend?
he was just a little kitty. He limped painfully, hobbling with his three feet awkwardly as if he really needed a fourth foot.

“I don’t know where the money has come from, Yardstick,” said the good Christian gentleman thoughtfully. “Some of it seems very old. But the brothers have all been praying for a miracle to get a new roof for the infirmary. I guess I’ll have to tell them that Yardstick has answered their prayer.”

Yardstick looked up at the wonderful painting of the crib scene, with himself standing tall looking into the manger. It WAS a place of honor. Yardstick purred.
“I can’t carry this money,” said Brother Matthew piously. He began to stuff it all into the cat-cowl of his Franciscan robe. Yardstick began preening and grooming himself. IMAGINE! HE, YARDSTICK, A 3-FOOTED CAT, BEING AN ANSWER TO PRAYER! He purred deeper, revving up his purring motor until he sounded just like Mama Magdalene! His revved-up purring was so loud that Brother Matthew did not even hear the sound of the $ $ $ $ $ $ $ $ as he stuffed it into the cat cowl. This was just as well - since attachment to it is evil. Yardstick beamed he was so happy. He was probably the best friend a Franciscan ever had!

END.
LUCILLE SELSOR is the founder of the St. Louis Committee of The THOMAS A. DOOLEY FOUNDATION, Inc. and the DR. TOM DOOLEY STATUE COMMITTEE of St. Louis. She worked closely with Peggy Dooley, Dr. Tom’s mother, as a volunteer personal secretary, in answering letters from all over the world to Dr. Tom Dooley for approximately six years.

Mrs. Selsor authored the capsule biography Sincerely, Tom Dooley, published by TWIN CIRCLE PUBLISHING CO., 86 Riverside Dr., N.Y., 10024, N.Y. Beamed at the ’teens and pre’teens, the biography of Dr. Tom - like Brother Matthew, and “Yardstick” the Three-Footed Cat, - is written for the young, and for the young at heart.

Lucille Selsor is a teacher in the Mehlville-Oakville School District of St. Louis.