

Hi, readers!

Welcome to *Da Vinci's Cat*, a story that began five centuries ago, when the painter Raphael crept into the Sistine Chapel to spy on Michelangelo's half-finished ceiling. I shared this bit of gossip with our tween-age kids during a 2008 trip to Rome, all of us exhausted and sweaty and waiting for lunch, and they loved it. We'd been attempting to introduce the junior Murdocks to the Eternal City via important buildings and a blur of dates, but it turns out what they really wanted was a history of bickering.

I then spent a decade trying to shape the Michelangelo-Raphael anecdote into a book, without success. Finally, I stumbled across young Federico Gonzaga, a real-life hostage of Pope Julius II. He lived in the papal palace for three years, befriending artists and attending countless banquets. What a perfect entry to the Renaissance! Thanks to a time machine, I could also provide a modern perspective via Bee, a Brooklyn girl who wants to change the world. And don't forget the cat, a monosyllabic wonder who once belonged to you know who. Suddenly the story fit together like a pair of gloves.

*Da Vinci's Cat*, like my middle-grade novel *The Book of Boy*, is fantasy grounded in fact. History, clothing, people, food—all true! You will develop a dangerous craving for candied ginger and other antique sweets. Beware.

Hope you love it,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Catherine". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long, sweeping horizontal line extending to the right from the end of the name.

Catherine Gilbert Murdock