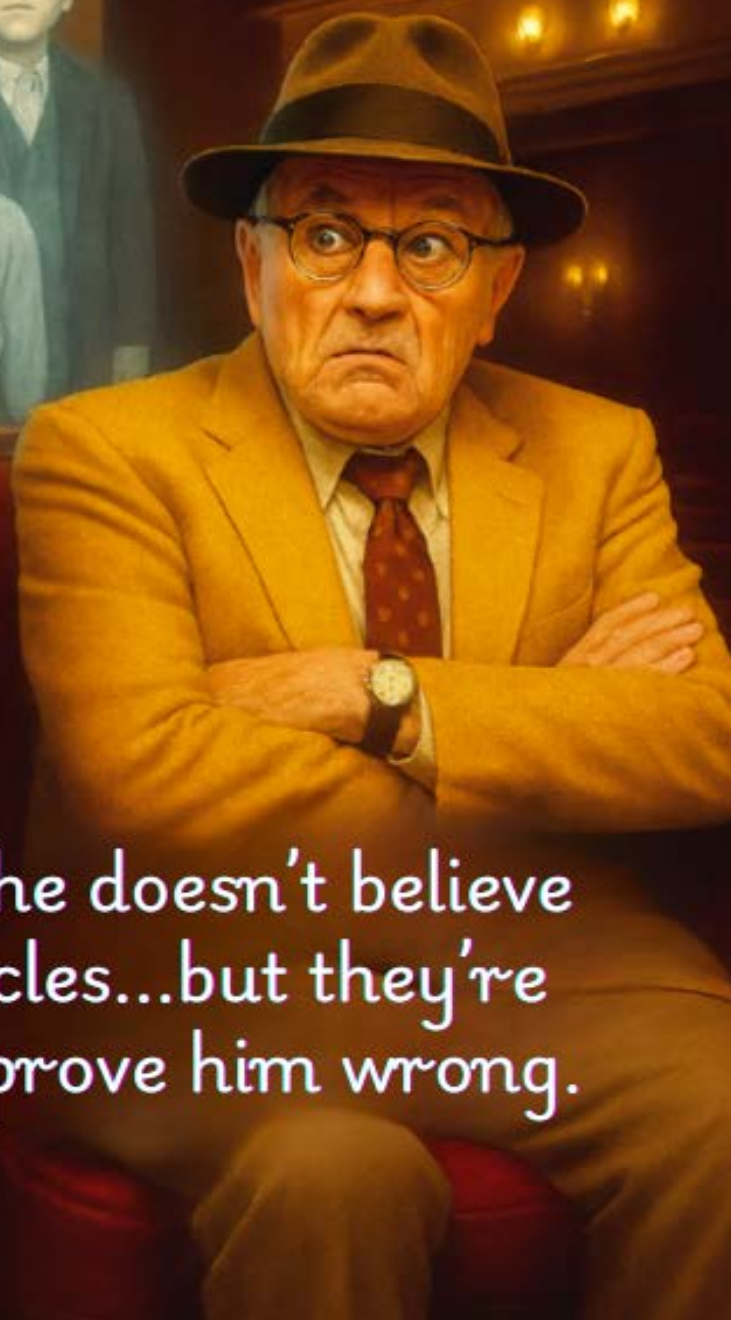


# A Matter of Faith

by Barbara Oleynick



He said he doesn't believe  
in miracles...but they're  
about to prove him wrong.

## DEDICATION

The remedy for peace was given to three children in 1917. Ten-year-old Lucia dos Santos, her younger cousins Francisco Marto, who was nine and his little sister Jacinta who was only seven years old. If these three children bravely faced death rather than betray the Beautiful Lady from Heaven, can't we be that brave?

The children of the world deserve to live in a world of love, of kindness and peace. This book is dedicated to them.

The book is dedicated to the Fatima Seers and the peace makers of this world.

**A Matter of Faith** interweaves a modern-day narrative with the original scenes and songs from *The Miracle of Fatima Musical*. Its cast album was recorded in 2002, made possible by a single anonymous donor. I had never met him, and he had never seen the show, but he was acquainted with Father John, a Franciscan Friar who invited me to speak at his youth group.

Interestingly, Father John had once been a venture capitalist who tried to woo an investor by flying him to Medjugorje in his private Learjet. Three years later, that venture capitalist gave up all his worldly goods, donned the brown robes, and devoted himself to serving God.

After I spoke and sang for the youth group, Father John borrowed my cell phone and disappeared for a few minutes. When he returned, he handed me the phone, saying, "This man wants to help." I spoke with this stranger for less than five minutes and arranged to meet the following week. When he asked about my next step, I mentioned my plan to record the cast album with a budget of \$60,000—funds I didn't have. He simply took my banking details.

On the morning recording began, he wired the entire amount- no contracts, no formal acknowledgments - just faith.

## Endorsements of The Miracle of Fatima musical

*"Truly the manner in which to evangelize the message of Fatima in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century...perhaps the most significant thing to happen regarding Fatima since the event itself."* - Monsignor P. Luciano Gomes Paulo Guerra, Rector of the Basilica of Fatima, April 2004 (now deceased)

*"The Miracle of Fatima, the musical" by Barbara Oleynick is a masterpiece, inspired by The Good Lord to serve the cause of Our Lady of Fatima, to call humanity to a new life of peace, perfect love and happiness. It is a work of art, a perfect instrument for the New Evangelization, a beautiful experience that will move hearts to come closer to God and be filled with joy and grace, the fruits of the Fatima Message."* Prof. Américo Pablo López-Ortiz International President of the World Apostolate of Fatima (Retired after 42 yr.) An International public association of the faithful of pontifical right



Sister Maria Lucia

### The Prologue

*"I have a story I want to share with you. I come from the small village of Fatima, Portugal. It was so named for a Muslim princess, who like many other Muslim girls was named at birth "Fatima," in honor of the daughter of Mohammed. Upon the death of his beloved daughter, Mohammed, the founder of Islam, proclaimed: "She has the highest place in heaven only after Mary, the Virgin" and it is so written in the sacred Koran. Over seven hundred years later, in 1911 the Separation Law forbidding public prayer was enacted in our country. By 1917 many devout families and friends suffered dearly as loved ones who broke this law were punished. I was but a child of ten, my cousin Francisco was nine and his little sister Jacinta only seven. World War I raged around us, but this, this is not where my story begins, for something happened to me and to my cousins the year before in 1916. It began with an Angel who visited us on three occasions to prepare our hearts for what was about to happen. There was to be miracle in my village of Fatima, a miracle I want to share with you."*

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## **A MATTER OF FAITH**

### **PROLOGUE**

On March 22, 2024, inside the Miracle Theater, tension filled the air. It was the final casting session for a new musical called *The Miracle of Fatima*, in which three children would play the lead roles. The potential actors - fifteen children in total - stood in three neat lines on the stage: one group of older girls (ages nine to thirteen), a row of boys (ages nine to twelve), and a line of younger girls (ages seven to ten).

Joshua, the stage manager, stepped forward. "Okay, here we go," he announced, clipboard in hand. "And we know this is the hardest part, but please - no screaming, no hitting and parents, please stay back." He glanced offstage, clearly directing his last remark at some adults who were just out of sight.

Then he cleared his throat and read from his clipboard. "For the role of Lucia dos Santos, will Megan Garcia and Lilly Santos please step forward? The rest in that line, thank you very much."

Two girls, Megan and Lilly, stepped forward and grabbed each other's hands, grinning from ear to ear. The other hopefuls trudged off, some of them visibly crushed. One girl threw herself to the floor, wailing, "No... It's mine! The part is mine!" A stagehand had to guide her away, while a few others whimpered quietly as they left.

Joshua pressed on. "Next, for the role of Francisco Marto, will Johnny Reyes and Matthew Costuna come downstage, please? Thank you very much to everyone else." No sooner had Joshua spoken than the mother of a boy who wasn't chosen rushed onstage, dragging her son by the arm. She shouted to the casting team, "He can dance! Watch... go on, son, dance for them!" Desperate, she tried to flap her boy's arms around in some semblance of a routine, but the mortified child went stiff in embarrassment. Joshua hastily motioned for his assistants to usher them offstage.

"And last but not least," Joshua continued, "for the role of Jacinta Marto—Maribeth Rios and Zoe Costuna, please come forward. And thank you to the



rest of you lovely young ladies.” The selected girls trotted to the front while the remaining younger ones were led away, stagehands gently guiding them.

Joshua held up his clipboard again. “Before our director makes the final casting decision, remember rehearsals start in two weeks. Mothers, check your email and the WhatsApp Announcements Group Chat. Be early, be prepared, and stay focused.” Then he waved an arm toward the seats in the darkened auditorium. “And now, our lovely Director, Aleta Gomes.”

Aleta Gomes emerged from the gloom and walked to the edge of the stage. She took a moment to look each child in the eye, then gave them a warm smile. “Congratulations to all of you for a great job,” she said. “Our three leads will be Megan Garcia as Lucia dos Santos, and brother and sister Matthew and Zoe Costuna as Francisco and Jacinta Marto.”

She explained, “The characters you’re bringing to life are three young children who experienced a series of miracles over six months in 1917, in a small region of Portugal known as Fatima. If you don’t know or believe in miracles yet, you will by the time you relive their story.” Turning back to the stage manager, she added, “Okay, pick up your libretto and rehearsal schedule from Joshua. I’ll see you soon.”

Applause broke out all around. Parents and fellow cast members surged forward, offering congratulations. High up in the shadows of the balcony, an older man sat in the first row, leaning on the railing and watching intently. In the very last row of the balcony stood three translucent ghost figures of children dressed in peasant clothes from around 1917. Two were girls, about ten and six or seven years old, and the other a boy of about nine. They looked down upon the stage, smiling from ear to ear. The youngest of the three looked up at her brother and whispered. “That’s our story!” However, the eldest ghost shifted her gaze from the stage to the man seated in the first row of the balcony causing her smile to vanish and a look of worry to appear.

## CHAPTER 1

### WE NEED A MIRACLE

A week later, up in the balcony of the Miracle Theater, Randolph Swoops, sixty-five years old with thick gray eyebrows and a matching mustache, sat in the first row of the balcony once again wearing an expensive suit and a hat. He tapped his fingers impatiently on the armrests, peering down at the stage. His forty-year-old son, Murray Swoops, leaned on the railing sat beside him, observing the growing cluster of actors milling about in the mezzanine of the theater before rehearsal.

“How many people are in this one?” Randolph grumbled, taking in the crowded stage below.

Murray did a quick mental headcount. “Not many more than usual, Dad. It’s a big, big, beautiful musical. I know you’re going to love it.”

“All I see is money going down the drain,” Randolph muttered. “Same as the millions I’ve poured into your other endeavors, the ones you assured me would be surefire hits.”

Murray dropped into a seat next to him, wringing his hands. “Dad, that’s not completely true. Some of them made a bit of money. We just...didn’t pitch them to the right market.”

Randolph snorted. “The right market. This is it, this is the last hurrah for the Miracle Theater.”

“What do you mean?”

“I mean if this so-called ‘Miracle’ musical is a flop, that’s it. The Miracle Theater dies with it.”

Unbeknownst to the two men, three childlike apparitions were watching from the shadows in the farthest row. They were the ghosts of the real Fatima children, Lucia dos Santos (ten), Francisco Marto (nine), and Jacinta Marto (seven). They whispered to one another in hushed voices.

“We can’t let him do that,” Lucia’s ghost said urgently.

Jacinta nudged Francisco. “What are you going to do?”

“Me?” he asked, startled. “What am I supposed to do?”

“You should make him change his mind,” Jacinta insisted.

“Be quiet, you two,” Lucia admonished them. “Let’s listen.”

Down below, Randolph and Murray continued their heated conversation.

“Murray,” Randolph said, “I’ve been supporting this hobby of yours for fifteen years. Enough is enough. Why keep it going?”

“Come on, Dad, they haven’t even started rehearsing yet,” Murray pleaded. “I can’t tell them all to go home.”

Randolph shook his head. “Listen to me. I’m going to sit through every rehearsal, and if I don’t like what I see or hear, I’m pulling the plug. Do you understand?”

Murray, relieved to have even that much leeway, threw his arms around his father. “I knew you’d see it my way. I love you, Pops.” He planted a smacking kiss on his father’s cheek and hurried out of the balcony. Randolph, sputtering, wiped his cheek and sank back into his seat, muttering, “Miracles...who in their right mind believes in miracles? It’s as ridiculous as believing taxes are good for you.”

From the back row, the translucent Jacinta nudged Francisco. “Is he talking about us?”

Francisco clamped a ghostly hand over her mouth. But Lucia reminded him. “They can’t hear us, silly. Let’s just listen.”

When Murray had gone, Randolph sat alone. Jacinta frowned. “He’s kind of mean, don’t you think, Lucia?”

Lucia shrugged. “Yes, almost as mean as the mayor.”

“No,” Jacinta argued, “the mayor was really mean.”

Randolph’s voice snapped them back to the moment. “Why shouldn’t I shut these doors?” he complained to himself. “Miracle of Fatima...nobody believes in miracles.”

Jacinta leaned closer, raising her voice a little. “Is he still talking about us?”

“Yes,” Lucia confirmed. “Now hush.”

Murray’s departing words echoed in Randolph’s mind. “People need a miracle, Dad.”

The children's ghosts exchanged determined looks. Lucia said, "We have to get him to believe..."

"In miracles?" Francisco asked.

Jacinta put her hands right through her brother's arm. "But we're not real," she reminded them, a note of sadness in her voice.

"That is a problem," Francisco agreed.

Lucia, thinking quickly, whisked down the aisle and moved behind Randolph. She flicked her fingers against the brim of his hat. Randolph stiffened and glanced over his shoulder but saw nothing. Jacinta and Francisco joined Lucia, all three flicking the hat brim in unison. The sudden flick made Randolph spin around. He saw only empty seats.

"What the heck?" he exclaimed, rubbing the back of his neck.

Meanwhile, down onstage, brother and sister Matthew and Zoe Costuna, cast as Francisco and Jacinta, were waiting for rehearsal. Zoe looked up at the balcony and spotted the faint outlines of the three children dressed in old-fashioned clothing. Grabbing her brother's sleeve, she discreetly pointed. Then suddenly the three translucent images vanished before their eyes. The brother and sister's eyes widened in shared disbelief.

## CHAPTER 2

### MEGAN

Later that evening, in her bedroom at home, ten-year-old Megan Garcia lay across her pink comforter. Though her bedspread and pillows were all different shades of pink, her walls were decorated with posters of activists and world-changers: Nelson Mandela, Greta Thunberg, and Mahatma Gandhi. She had on her cozy flannel PJ's while flipping through a book.

Her mother's voice rang out from downstairs: "Let me hear the First Visit scene again!"

Megan sighed. "Mom, please, I know the lines," she called back, but it did no good. She plugged in her earbuds and turned on music from her phone to drown out her mother's demands. Music filled her ears, and she started to dance around the room, lost in the rhythm.

Suddenly, the door opened, and her mother strode in. Realizing her daughter hadn't heard a word, Mrs. Garcia plucked the earbuds out. "Did you hear me?" she asked, exasperated. "Study your lines! Sing, sing, sing. They'll replace you if they don't think you're the best."

She scrolled through Megan's phone and tapped onto the show's orchestral track. The swell of music filled the room once more. "Now sing," she ordered, then left as abruptly as she'd come.

Megan rolled her eyes and flopped face-first onto the bed, exhausted by her mother's demands. A few moments later, her grandmother, Maria Garcia, a warm and graceful woman of sixty-five, peeked in and sat beside her. She turned down the music, then gently rubbed Megan's back.

"Oh, my little Mamita," Nana said. "She means well."

Megan lifted her head in resignation "I know, Nana, but she's driving me crazy. I love acting and singing...but there are more important things." At that, Maria opened her arms, and Megan slid into her embrace. "What is it you really want, my love?" her grandmother asked.

Megan whispered, "I want to do something big in the world. Something that makes it better."

### CHAPTER 3

#### MATTHEW AND ZOE

Elsewhere, in the Costuna family's modest home that evening, everyone gathered for a large meal around a long, narrow table. There were two sets of grandparents, Mr. and Mrs. Costuna, and six children in total. Pedro, the eldest son at twenty, was seated beside Alina, who was seventeen. At the far end of the table were Matthew, aged ten, and eight-year-old Zoe.

Grandfather Costuna began by offering grace, his voice was gentle and full of love. "Father, we thank You for this food and for the joy You grant us this day. May we serve You, Your Son and His Mother always, Amen."

"Amen," the family echoed. Bowls of food were passed around. No one served themselves first; they each offered the dish to the person on their left or right.

When everyone had food, Father Costuna turned to Pedro. "How are your studies?"

Pedro answered confidently, "They're going well, Father. I should be hearing about medical school soon."

Grandmother Costuna beamed. "You will make a fine doctor and heal many, I'm sure."

Not one to be outdone, Alina piped up, "I'm waiting to hear from the three universities I applied to. All of them have great pre-law programs."

Mrs. Costuna, proud and hopeful, said, "Let's hope you both get good scholarships."

Mr. Costuna nodded. "Yes, and then we can think about the rest of the kids." Everyone had a warm laugh.

Grandfather Costuna smiled at the two youngest, Matthew and Zoe. "And you two? How are things going with your 'miracle' rehearsals?"

Matthew and Zoe exchanged a look, one that said, should we mention the ghosts? Zoe's eyes went wide, and she shook her head as if to say, don't you dare. Matthew cleared his throat.

"It's going...fine," he finally managed. "Not much to share."

Sensing tension, Mrs. Costuna stood behind them, resting a hand on each of their shoulders. “The rehearsals are going beautifully, Father,” she said with exaggerated cheer. Then she leaned down between them and hissed under her breath, “Not a word about any ghosts!”

She returned to her seat and gave everyone a sunny smile. The matter was dropped, and dinner continued.

Grandfather Costuna looked at his youngest grandchildren, asking them. “Do you know the story of the children? I learned about them when I was a boy. It’s about a miracle that happened to them.”

Mrs. Costuna spoke up quickly. “Yes, Father, a miracle but we want the children to focus on performing well on stage, yes?”

Grandfather looked at her and shook his head. “Can’t they perform well and know of this miracle? Come now, where is your faith?”

His daughter-in-law’s cheeks flushed with regret. “Oh, my faith is fine Father, I just don’t want them to get sidetracked.” She looked at her two youngest and shook her head ever so slightly and widened her eyes, warning them to remain silent about what they shared about seeing visions of children in the balcony on the very first day of rehearsal. Both children nodded, understanding of their mother’s look, picked up their forks and continued eating dinner.

## CHAPTER 4

### THE FIRST MEETING

A few days later, the three newly cast children, Megan, Matthew, and Zoe, were huddled in the green room at the Miracle Theater, going over lines with the assistant stage manager. Mid-line run, the man's phone buzzed, and he glanced at a message.

"Gotta go," he said, holding up a finger. "Keep running lines. I'll be back in ten minutes."

The moment the door closed behind him, Matthew and Zoe looked around nervously. Finally, Matthew asked Megan, "Hey, uh...have you noticed anything strange in the theater lately?"

Before Megan could reply, Zoe's gaze fixed on a corner of the room, and she saw them. The same three ghostly children from 1917. Zoe clutched Megan's arm and pointed behind her. "Like...them?"

Megan spun around, her eyes going wide at the sight of the ghostly trio. "Oh my gosh. Who are you?"

Matthew ventured, "What are they?"

Lucia's ghost answered gently, "We're friendly. Don't be scared."

Jacinta piped up, "Yes, like the beautiful lady in our story."

"Your story?" Matthew asked, baffled.

Francisco cocked his head. "Haven't you read the whole script yet?"

Zoe was still half-hiding behind Megan. "I read it with my mom, but I thought it was all make-believe."

Jacinta shook her head firmly. "Oh no. It really happened—to us." She pointed to herself, then to Zoe. "You are playing me."

Zoe squeaked, "I think...I'm going to faint." She swayed, and Francisco instinctively tried to steady her, but Matthew ended up taking her by the arms. Each time his hand passed through Francisco's transparent form; a tingle of shock zipped through him.

"This is so weird," Matthew murmured, moving his hand in and out of Francisco's middle.



Francisco giggled. “Hey, that tickles!”

Megan mustered courage. “What do you want from us?”

Lucia’s ghost answered, “We’ve heard things, something about the future of the show and this theater. But we can’t say too much.”

Jacinta, however, had no qualm sharing. “Mr. Swoops - Murray’s father, wants to close the theater. If the musical fails, he’ll send everyone home. And he doesn’t believe in miracles at all.”

Francisco turned on her with a reproachful look. “Oh, Jacinta! You did it again.”

Lucia frowned. “You never listen. Now we have a problem.”

Matthew stepped away, concerned. “Look, we can’t tell anyone about you guys. Our mom thinks we were making up stories when we mentioned ghosts.”

Zoe nodded vigorously. “She hates ghosts. She’ll freak out.” Then she took a breath and added, “But...could you help us save the theater? Make sure the musical opens?”

Jacinta nodded. “What about helping Murray’s father believe in miracles?”

All the children—living and ghostly—realized their missions were hopelessly entwined. They would have to work together.

A week later, the ghosts of Lucia, Francisco, and Jacinta sat in the last row by themselves in the balcony, watching the stage below. The next rehearsal was starting, and from the wings, cast members filed in, finding their places. Randolph Swoops took his usual spot, alone in the front row on the balcony, arms crossed his expression grim.

Maria Garcia, Megan’s grandmother, had slipped into a seat in the middle of the balcony, about ten minutes before Randolph, partly hidden in the dimness. She began to observe the rehearsal quietly.

Randolph muttered to himself, “Such nonsense. None of this will make sense to an audience.”

To his shock, a voice rose up behind him: “I don’t agree.”

He turned sharply. “Who’s there? Show yourself!”

Maria, amused, remained in the shadows. “What’s nonsensical about believing in something?” she teased.

“Come out, or I’ll call security,” Randolph growled. “This is private property!”

Maria laughed a little. “Do you really think security will see me if you can’t?”

The three ghosts looked on with great interest. Jacinta giggled. “She’s pretending to be like us!”

Lucia nodded. “She’s having a bit of fun with him.”

Randolph stood up. “I said, come out!”

Maria let the laughter fade. Then she stepped forward so he could finally see her. “I’m Maria Garcia. I’m waiting for my granddaughter, who’s in your show.”

“It’s not my show,” Randolph snapped. “I’m just the one footing the bill. Go wait somewhere else.”

Maria held up her rosary. “I’m praying,” she said calmly.

“Then pray somewhere else,” Randolph insisted. “I like it quiet up here.”

Hurt, Maria rose and left. As soon as she was gone, Randolph slumped back into his seat, drumming his fingers on the armrest again. “The nerve of that woman.”

Behind him, the three ghost-children whispered excitedly.

Lucia said, “I know how we can get him to believe.” She beamed at Francisco and Jacinta, as though hatching a plan. They looked curious and a bit wary.

That evening, in Megan’s pink-hued bedroom, Maria Garcia sat on the bed with her granddaughter. Megan was cross-legged, a biography about the real Lucia dos Santos balanced on her knees.

“Nana,” Megan said, “you told me you saw Mr. Swoops?”

Maria nodded. “I did. He was all alone up in that balcony, ready to chase off anyone who bothered him.”

Megan frowned. “He’s...really mean.”

“I’m not so sure that’s all there is to him,” Maria countered. “What do I always say?”

Megan echoed the adage: “Don’t judge a book by its cover.”

Maria inclined her head thoughtfully. “Exactly.” She gently took the book from Megan’s hands and thumbed through it. “I read about Sister Maria Lucia ages ago, the real Lucia from Fatima. It’s wonderful that you’re learning her story.”

Megan smiled. “It’s just hard to imagine all of that with a man who wants to shut down the show before we even open.”

Maria let out a slow breath. “Sometimes, when people lose faith, they shut doors on more than just theaters.”

Days passed, and once again Megan, Matthew, and Zoe found a quiet spot in the dressing room to run lines. The ghosts of Lucia, Francisco, and Jacinta appeared, drifting in like silent shadows that only the three living children could see.

Megan shook her head sadly. “My nana says not to be afraid of Mr. Swoops, but I’m still not sure.”

Jacinta wrinkled her nose. “He acts like a big shot, though.”

“And he yells,” Francisco added.

Zoe admitted, “I’m scared of him.”

“So am I,” Jacinta said.

“What about your grandmother?” Matthew asked Megan. “She seems unafraid.”

Megan shrugged. “He nearly called security on her.”

Lucia spoke with sudden resolve. “She’ll be seeing him a lot, though. That’s part of my plan.”

Megan’s eyebrows rose. “Your plan?”

Lucia nodded. “Your grandmother read our story, didn’t she? The one Sister Lucia, I mean me when I was a grownup wrote.”

“Yes,” Megan said. “She said the musical and the real story are very close.”

Francisco piped up, “We can show you what really happened if you want. We can show you everything—the first visits and all.”

Jacinta chimed in quickly. “It didn’t start there you know. It began when an angel came to visit us the year before, in 1916.

Zoe’s eyes grew round. “Wait, you actually saw an angel?”

Francisco smiled, remembering. “Yes, we did.”

“A real angel?” Zoe asked again, breathlessly.

Jacinta grinned at her. “Oh yes.”

Lucia looked at her ghostly cousins, then at the three living children. “If you want to see what we saw, hold our hands. We can take you back to 1916—to where it all began.”

Megan, Matthew, and Zoe exchanged looks of uncertainty and excitement. The faint hint of otherworldly light danced around them, an unspoken promise of what they might discover together.

And that was how the children—living and ghost—resolved to save the Miracle Theater, reveal the wonders of Fatima’s story, and try to rekindle belief in miracles in the most unlikely of hearts.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **THE ANGEL OF PEACE**

They were still in the green room of the Miracle Theater when it happened. Megan, Matthew, and Zoe, chosen to portray the three children of Fatima in the new musical, found themselves standing side by side with three ghostly figures: the real Lucia, Francisco, and Jacinta from 1917. Only moments earlier, the ghosts had hinted they could reveal the origins of their story in a way no script could. And suddenly, before the modern children had time to protest, the room seemed to melt away like mist.

#### **A Rainy Day in Fatima, 1916**

In an instant, Megan, Matthew, and Zoe were transported back a century. They reappeared beneath a light drizzle, standing at a safe distance from a small cave on a patch of family land in Fatima, Portugal. Close by, three very real children, Lucia, Francisco, and Jacinta, huddled near the mouth of the cave, unaware they were being watched. The living children gaped in astonishment, for they also saw ghostly Lucia, Francisco, and Jacinta standing with them, effectively in two places at once.

“It’s raining,” Zoe murmured, blinking at the raindrops that splattered on her shoes. She glanced at the ghostly children in confusion. “How can you all be there and here at the same time?”

Ghost-Lucia shook her head, looking mildly perplexed. “I wish I knew. But somehow, we’re reliving our own memories. This is the first time we are visiting earth...as...like this.” She lifted her translucent hand and peered through it.

Jacinta’s ghost took a curious step forward, but Lucia’s ghost pulled her back firmly. “We should just watch,” she whispered.

The living children followed the ghosts’ lead and observed the scene unfold. The real Lucia rested her head against the stone wall of the cave, while Francisco played a simple tune on his wooden flute. Jacinta twirled around, dancing in the light rain. At the faint toll of church bells, they stopped to remove their rosary beads and began praying. All at once, an angelic presence materialized before them. Though no words could be heard, the children looked at this radiant figure in awe.

“He just appeared out of nowhere,” ghost-Lucia explained quietly. “He spoke about preparing our hearts for a future visit.”

Ghost-Jacinta nodded. “He came to us three times in total, and each time his presence was so...beautiful.”

Zoe gazed in wonder at the silent angel. “Were you afraid?”

“No,” ghost-Jacinta said. “He radiated peace and love.”

“So why did he visit you?” Matthew asked, braving the question.

“He said we needed our hearts prepared,” ghost-Lucia answered. “We had no idea who would be visiting us or when, but after the angel’s last visit, we all felt...different.”

The living children watched as the angel vanished, leaving the trio of 1916 children at the mouth of the cave, quietly absorbing the miracle they had just witnessed. Then, as if pulled by an unseen thread, the onlookers—Megan, Matthew, Zoe, and the three ghosts—began to fade. Their surroundings dissolved into swirling light.

### **Back in the Green Room**

When the light cleared, the six were in the theater’s green room again. Everyone stood there, blinking and regaining their bearings.

Matthew patted his arms, his face, his chest, then looked at Zoe in mock panic. “Am I all here?”

Zoe was breathless. “I’m going to faint,” she murmured, sinking to the floor and fanning herself. Ghost-Francisco approached, hovering nearby.

“Oh no, you’re not,” he said kindly. “Now you understand how we feel. I’ve been dead for over a hundred years—imagine that.”

Zoe widened her eyes. “Ugh. I know. Ahhh!” She half-laughed, half-groaned at the idea.

Ghost-Jacinta knelt beside her. “Does it help that I’m two years younger?”

Megan, sitting on a nearby couch, tried to gather her thoughts. Ghost-Lucia and Ghost-Jacinta flanked her. “So,” Megan said, “the angel appeared to you three times. Why exactly?”

Ghost Lucia shrugged gently. “You saw it. He said he was preparing our hearts. Surely, you’ve read the script. Or at least part of the real memoirs I wrote later, when I was a nun.”

Megan nodded quickly. “I did read it. But honestly, I thought the musical was just based on your story...not that it was true. My grandmother used to tell me about Fatima, though. She even went there on a pilgrimage when she was younger.”

Megan pointed at Francisco and Jacinta. “She saw where you two are buried.”

Ghost-Jacinta’s face lit with childlike curiosity. “Really? Did she visit our house? Did she see our sheep?”

Francisco groaned. “Jacinta, our sheep are long gone,” he reminded her. “Bobo died ages ago.”

Saddened, Jacinta looked as if she might cry, until Zoe tried to comfort her. Zoe’s hand passed through the ghost’s arm, but the sentiment still made Jacinta smile.

“It’s okay,” Zoe said sympathetically. “I felt the same when Matthew accidentally ran over my hamster with his bike.”

Matthew reddened, sputtering, “It was an accident, you know!”

Clearing her throat, Megan stood. Ghost-Lucia followed suit. “So how long was it before the...person...arrived? The person the angel was preparing you for?”

“Nearly a year, but I’m not sure you should call her a person.” ghost-Lucia answered. “In the show, you’ll be doing that scene soon, right?”

Megan blinked in surprise. “You’ve been watching every rehearsal?”

“We’ve got little else to do,” ghost-Jacinta piped up.

Matthew chuckled. “Okay, so you’re here, wearing clothes from 1917, which is so old-fashioned, sorry,” he added hastily when Jacinta seemed offended. “But have you figured out why you’re here in our time?”

Ghost-Francisco shrugged. “We didn’t plan it. We just...ended up in the balcony.”

Megan looked thoughtful. “Maybe it’s for an important reason. And saving the musical is only part of that.”

The six children, three living, three ghosts exchanged glances, a sense of shared purpose shimmering between them.