

16. Kidnapped – August 1917

Two days after being interrogated by the Administrator of Ourem, Lucia prepared to go to the Cova for the Lady's promised appearance on August 13. Imagine her surprise when she went to call on Francisco and Jacinta, and found the Administrator at the Marto house...

Ti Marto spoke for everyone when he told Arturo Santos: "I did not expect to see you here, sir."

The Tinsmith smiled. "I thought that, after all, I would like to go to the miracle today. I thought that we would all go together in my carriage. We will see, and then believe, like St. Thomas."

"He was a great actor, that man," Ti Marto said later. The children said it wasn't necessary for them to ride in Arturo's carriage, but the Tinsmith persisted, adding another wrinkle: he wanted to see Father Ferreira on the way to the Cova. "So what could we do?" asked Ti Marto rhetorically. "We went along – myself, the children, and Lucia's father." The children rode in the Tinsmith's carriage, Ti Marto and Antonio followed them to St. Anthony's parish.

Once there, the Tinsmith insisted that Father Ferreira interrogate Lucia again. Today Father Ferreira was harsher with Lucia. "Those who go about spreading such lies as you are doing will be judged and will go to Hell if they are not true," he said. "More and more people are being deceived by you."

Lucia replied, "If people who lie go to Hell then I shall not go to Hell, because I am not lying, and I saw only what I say and what the Lady told me. And the people go there because they want to; we do not tell them to go."

The Tinsmith cut the interview short: "These are supernatural things. Let us go."¹ He took Lucia out and smoothly loaded her and Jacinta and Francisco in his carriage and trotted off – to the Cova, it seemed, until the carriage

reached the main road. Then the Tinsmith whipped his horse and the carriage disappeared in a cloud of dust, headed for Ourem. The children had been kidnapped.

The Tinsmith's plan was twofold. First, he figured that removing the children from the Cova da Iria would at least disrupt the gathering, and at best, nothing supernatural would happen and the large crowd gathered for the apparition would conclude it was all a fake. Second, he intended to personally terrorize the children into confessing the Secret. Perhaps Arturo Santos had some genuine interest in the supernatural, but it is more likely that he figured the Secret would be something he could exploit to discredit the growing Fatima phenomenon.

Back at the Cova, Maria Carreira describes what happened.

"The crowd this day was even greater than it had been in July. Oh, there were many, many more. Some came on foot and hung their bundles on the trees. Some came on horses. Some on mules. There were bicycles too, and everything else, and on the road there was a great noise of traffic.

"All around the tree, the people were praying and singing hymns, but when the children did not appear, they began to get impatient. Then someone came from Fatima and told us they had been kidnapped by the Mayor. Everyone began talking at once; there was great anger, and I don't know what would have happened if we hadn't heard the clap of thunder.

"The thunder was a shock to the people. Some of them began to shout that we would be killed. We all began to spread out, away from the tree, but, of course, no one was hurt in any way.

"Just after the clap of thunder came a flash of lightning, and then we began to see a little cloud, very delicate, very white, which stopped for a few moments over the tree, and then rose in the air until it disappeared. As we looked around, we began to notice some strange things we had observed before and would see again in the months to follow. Our faces were reflecting all the colors of the rainbow — pink and red and blue and I don't know what. The trees suddenly seemed to be made not of leaves, but of flowers. The ground reflected these many colors, and so did the clothes we wore.

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The lanterns that someone had fixed to the arch above us looked as though they had turned to gold. Certainly Our Lady had come, I knew, even though the children were not there.

"Then when all these signs had disappeared, the people started for Fatima. They were shouting out against the Mayor and against Father Ferreira, too. They were against anyone connected with the imprisonment of the children."²

The crowds of singing, praying pilgrims became an angry mob. Father Ferreira rightly feared for his life,³ and he may have owed it to Ti Marto, who confronted the crowd: "Boys, take it easy. Don't hurt anyone. Whoever deserves punishment will receive it. All this is by the power of the One above." The words of the father of two of the kidnapped children carried weight.

So the first part of the Tinsmith's plan failed. The beautiful Lady did visit the Cova even though the children were not there, and many miraculous phenomena were observed by a large audience. Did Our Lady not know the children had been kidnapped? Of course She knew. She appeared anyway because She said She would, and because Her presence there, even unseen, would thwart the Tinsmith's plan to discredit the apparitions.

At the same time the Tinsmith's carriage arrived at his home in Ourem. Arturo Santos shut Lucia, Francisco, and Jacinta in a room in his house, telling them that they would not be able to leave until they told him the Secret. Later the Tinsmith's wife took pity on the children. She let them out of the room, allowed them to play with her children, and brought them books and toys.

The next morning found Lucia, Francisco, and Jacinta still at the Tinsmith's house. They were questioned by an elderly lady who was unable to extract the Secret from them. The next inquisitor was Arturo Santos. He offered the children money and a gold chain in exchange for the Secret. Again the children refused. Santos lost his temper and cast the children into the public jail. It was only temporary, he told them: they would only remain in jail until a cauldron of oil became hot enough to throw the children into.

Jacinta wept at the thought she would die without seeing her parents again. Lucia and Francisco didn't cry, but they

Sister Lucia

were also convinced their lives were at an end. Yet they offered their suffering to God, as the Angel and the Lady had instructed them. The prisoners felt sorry for the children and urged them to reveal the Secret. "We'd much rather die than tell the Secret," Jacinta told them.

The children touched the paternal spirit of the prisoners. They tried to cheer the children up by concertina playing and dancing, which Jacinta enjoyed until it occurred to her that the solemnity of the end of her life required a more fitting exercise. She, Lucia, and Francisco knelt and began praying the Rosary. The prisoners knelt with them, and Francisco admonished one for wearing his hat while praying.

The Rosary was interrupted by a guard, who took the children out of the cell and brought them to the Tinsmith's office. An elaborate script had been prepared concerning the boiling oil. Arturo Santos was at his dramatic best in describing their doom. The children sincerely believed they were about to be martyred, but they still refused to reveal the Secret. Jacinta was taken away.

Francisco turned to Lucia. "If they kill us, what about it? We'll be in Heaven, won't we, Lucia? Is there anything more you could want?" "No, Francisco," Lucia replied. The boy began moving his lips in prayer. "What are you saying?" the guard asked him. "An Ave Maria," Francisco answered, "so my sister will not be afraid."

The guard who had taken Jacinta came back. He ordered Francisco to tell him the Secret. Francisco refused, and was taken from the room. Lucia was alone with Arturo Santos. A guard assured the Tinsmith that the two children had been boiled alive. Santos bore down on Lucia for all he was worth, but the ten-year-old refused to tell the Secret and was led away... not to her death but to a reunion with Jacinta and Francisco, who appeared remarkably healthy considering their fate.

The Tinsmith had failed, and the next day — the Feast of the Assumption — he brought the children back to Fatima, and with the help of Ti Marto, was able to leave Fatima in one piece (for an interview with the Tinsmith, see pages 258-259 of this book).

"What I felt most deeply," said Lucia, "was my being completely abandoned by my family, and it was the same for

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my little cousins. After this journey or imprisonment, for I really don't know what to call it, I returned home...To celebrate my arrival, they sent me right away to let out the sheep and take them off to pasture..."⁴

The following Sunday, August 19, Lucia was tending her flock with Francisco and his brother John on the property of one of Lucia's uncles. Jacinta was not with them. She was receiving a treatment for the lice she had picked up in the public jail. The property, known as Valinhos, was perhaps two hundred yards from Aljustrel. Lucia recalled:

"We felt something supernatural approaching and enveloping us. Suspecting that Our Lady was about to appear to us, and feeling sorry lest Jacinta might miss seeing Her, we asked her brother to go and call her. As he was unwilling to go, I offered him two small coins, and off he ran.

"Meanwhile, Francisco and I saw the flash of light, which we called lightning. Jacinta arrived, and a moment later we saw Our Lady on a holm oak tree."

"What do You want of me?"

"I want you to continue going to the Cova da Iria on the 13th, and to continue praying the Rosary every day. In the last month, I will perform a miracle so that all may believe. *If you had not been taken away to the city, the miracle would have been even greater. St. Joseph will come with the Child Jesus, to give peace to the world. Our Lord will come to bless the people. Our Lady of the Rosary and Our Lady of Sorrows will also come.*"⁵

"What do You want done with the money that the people leave in the Cova da Iria?"

"Have two litters made. One is to be carried by you and Jacinta and two other girls dressed in white; the other one is to be carried by Francisco and three other boys. The money from the litters is for the *feira* of Our Lady of the Rosary, and what is left over will help towards the construction of a chapel that is to be built here."

"I would like to ask You to cure some sick persons."

Sister Lucia

“Yes, I will cure some of them during the year.”

“Then, looking very sad, Our Lady said: ‘Pray, pray very much, and make sacrifices for sinners; for many souls go to hell, because there are none to sacrifice themselves and to pray for them.’

“And She began to ascend as usual towards the east.”⁶

* * *

Afterwards Jacinta cut from the tree the branch on which the Lady’s white mantle had touched. On the way they met Maria Rosa and Maria dos Anjos, who recalled:

“Jacinta, all excited, rushed up to my mother and said, ‘Oh, Aunt, we saw Our Lady again! We saw her at Valinhos!’

“‘Ah Jacinta,’ my mother said, ‘when will these lies ever end? Do you have to be seeing Our Lady all over creation? Wherever you go?’

“‘But we saw Her,’ Jacinta insisted, then held forth the branch she was holding in her hands. ‘Look, Aunt, please — this is where Our Lady put one foot, and here is where the other foot was.’

“‘Let me see it, let me see it,’ my (Lucia’s) mother said.”

Maria Rosa examined the branch. “What smell is this?” she asked. “It is very lovely. What could it be?” She placed it on a table, “until we are able to find someone who can tell us what it is.”⁷

But the branch disappeared, never to be seen by Maria Rosa again.⁸ It was out of character for any of the three children to take a branch from a tree graced by the beautiful Lady. They often reproached people for removing leaves from the holm oak at the Cova da Iria. Was it simply childish inconsistency that led Jacinta to remove the branch from the tree at Valinhos? Or was it a heavenly impulse, the branch being a message to Maria Rosa from Our Lady? In either case, Maria Rosa’s attitude toward Lucia changed noticeably after this incident.⁹

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Notes

1. This episode and all the quotations in this chapter are from De Marchi, op. cit., pp. 90-91.
2. De Marchi, op. cit., pp. 93-94.
3. He admitted as much in a letter he sent to newspapers which was published in Lisbon and Ourem. See "Father Ferreira's Public Letter Regarding the Fatima Apparitions" on pages 253-255 of this book.
4. Second Memoir, p. 75.
5. The italicized text does not appear in Lucia's Memoirs, but it does in most other books on Fatima. The italicized text appears to have been taken from Father Ferreira's interrogation of Lucia regarding this apparition. See TWTAFA, Vol. I, op. cit., p. 235, and p. 253, fn 50.
6. Fourth Memoir, pp. 166-167.
7. De Marchi, op. cit., pp. 108-109 or in some editions, pp. 106-107.
8. It is not a great mystery. Jacinta deftly reclaimed the branch and continued home with it to show her parents.
9. Here is Maria Rosa's testimony (in the third person) on the episode during a canonical enquiry in 1923: "The mother took the branch and noticed that it smelled very nice. The smell could not be compared with any other smell. She was an unbeliever (in Fatima) but was slightly shaken and became slightly more convinced." (As quoted in Father Joseph A. Pelletier, A.A., *The Sun Danced At Fatima, A Critical Study of the Apparitions*, The Caron Press, Worcester MA, 1951, p. 156, fn 7.)