

## 7. First Humiliations (1915)

The following year, 1915, Lucia turned eight, and Maria Rosa decided it was time for her youngest daughter to begin working.

Twelve-year-old Caroline had been in charge of pasturing the family's flock of sheep and goats on their various properties in the Serra. Maria Rosa wanted Caroline to make money by staying at home to sew and weave. Lucia was to take her place.

This was an unpopular decision with everyone except Lucia. Antonio and Lucia's sisters thought she was too young to work, but Maria Rosa's mind was made up. Equally disappointed were Lucia's cousins Francisco and Jacinta Marto who, being seven and five, were too young to accompany their friend to the pastures.

"News that I was beginning my life as a shepherdess spread rapidly among the other shepherds," Lucia wrote. "Almost all of them came and offered to be my companions. I said 'Yes' to everybody, and arranged with each one to meet on the slopes of the Serra. Next day, the Serra was a solid mass of sheep with their shepherds, as though a cloud had descended upon it."<sup>1</sup>

Lucia continued to be the leader of her band of companions. Hers was a leadership so natural and agreeable no one contested it. One of her companions, Teresa Matias, later recalled: "Lucia was very amusing. She had a way of getting the best out of us so that we liked to be with her. She was also very intelligent, and could sing and dance and taught us to do the same. We always obeyed her. We spent hours and hours dancing and singing, and sometimes forgot to eat."<sup>2</sup>

Lucia's memories of the multitude of sheep and companions are less happy. "I felt ill at ease in the midst of such a hubbub. I therefore chose three companions from among the shepherds, and without saying a word to anyone,

## Apostle of Mary's Immaculate Heart

we arranged to pasture our sheep on the opposite slopes.”<sup>3</sup>

The three companions were Teresa Matias, Teresa's sister Maria Rosa, and Maria Justino. On the second day of Lucia's shepherding career, she and her three friends steered their flocks towards a rugged hill known as *O Cabeco* (The Head). At the top of the Cabeco was an ancient windmill, a partial cave, and many boulders to play and sit on. There was also a clear view of the countryside for miles.

After eating lunch Lucia and her friends began praying the Rosary. No sooner had they started when they saw, in the valley below them, a white figure poised above the trees. “It looked like a statue made of snow, rendered almost transparent by the rays of the sun,” according to Lucia.<sup>4</sup>

Her companions asked Lucia what it was. She said she didn't know. They continued praying, their eyes on the figure below, which disappeared when they finished praying. Lucia determined to say nothing about it, but her companions quickly spread the word when they returned home. Soon all of Aljustrel knew — including Maria Rosa.

“Look here!” she said to Lucia. “They say you've seen I don't know what up there. What was it you saw?”

“I don't know,” answered Lucia. “It looked like a person wrapped up in a sheet. You couldn't make out any eyes, or hands, on it.”

“Childish nonsense,” Maria Rosa snapped. End of discussion, until the next time Lucia and her companions took their sheep to the Cabeco. Again they saw the figure, exactly as it had appeared to them before. When this happened a third time, Maria Rosa again confronted Lucia.

“Now, let us see! What is it that you girls say you saw over there?”

“I don't know, Mother. I don't know what it is!”

Neighbors began making fun of Lucia and her companions. So did family members. “My sisters, recalling that for some time after my First Communion I had been quite abstracted, used to ask me rather scornfully: ‘Do you see someone wrapped in a sheet?’

“I felt these contemptuous words and gestures very keenly,” Lucia remembered, “as up to now I had been used to nothing but caresses. But this was nothing, really. You see, I

## *Sister Lucia*

did not know what the good Lord had in store for me in the future.”<sup>5</sup>

### **Notes**

1. Second Memoir, p. 59.
2. De Marchi, op. cit., p. 36.
3. Second Memoir, pp. 59-60.
4. Ibid., p. 60.
5. Second Memoir, p. 61.