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Before the Finale

Before 1964 was over, Garabandal entered into a phase of reactivation: something that now, from a perspective of the passing years, could be described in the jargon of sports as the *final stretch* or the *last lap*.

On December 8th, feastday of the Immaculate Conception and thus Conchita's nameday, the girl received the singular favor of another visit with the Mother of Heaven. A month later, on January 12th, 1965, she spoke about it briefly to Father Laffineur:

«On the day of the Immaculate Conception, the Virgin congratulated me on my feastday; and she told me that I would see the Angel St. Michael on the coming June 18th.»

A few days later, on January 24th, she wrote again to this priest (whom she familiarly called *Grandfather*):

«I do not remember whether I mentioned in my last letter that on June 18th I was going to see the Angel St. Michael. The Virgin told me this during a locution on my feastday, the feast of the Immaculate Conception.»

And so, with the announcement of the return of St. Michael, the year 1965 began. This had great portent, since the great Archangel was not for minor matters; and his visit, announced so far in advance, certainly could not be of the routine type. He, who had come four years previously to start everything in motion, could well return now to bring it to a close.

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The importance of the coming year was marked out right from its first day.

It was the holiday evening of January 1st, and daylight was fading. Two shepherd children from the village, Joaquina (12 years of age) and Urbano (9 years), were tending their herd of sheep, which they were leading over the little flat area by the Pines.

On coming to the Pines, the children stood staring open-mouthed, discovering Conchita solitary and enraptured beneath a pine tree. How many times had a similar scene been seen there and in the village!

They observed her as closely as the wandering of their sheep permitted. The visionary, with her gaze

fixed upwards, appeared to be in mysterious conversation, since she was speaking and listening.⁽¹⁾

Only later, piece by piece, was learned some segments of the many things that occurred during that exceptional trance.

Conchita wrote Father Laffineur in her letter of January 12th:

«On January 1st I saw the Virgin at the Pines.»

She said nothing about the vision. However, in another letter of February 2nd, while answering the priest's questions, she explained more:

«The Virgin seems to be the same age as the first time I saw her. (July 2nd, 1961) The same as in these past years: about 18 years old.

She wears a white robe and a sky blue mantle.

A prodigious light, which doesn't hurt the eyes, radiates from her and surrounds her completely.

Apart from the ecstasy that I am going to have on June 18th, I don't know whether the apparitions will begin again, either for me or for the four of us.

The Virgin will give a new message, since she said: *Hardly any attention was given to the other.* (That of October 18th, 1961) The Virgin is going to give, therefore, a final message.»

What Conchita says here to the promoter of the cause of Garabandal in France and other countries

1. I finally saw a confirmation of this in a letter from Maxima to the Pifarré family, dated March 8th:

«I think I have already written you about this; namely that on December 8, the feastday of the Immaculate Conception, Conchita had a locution. And she said that the Virgin told her that on June 18th she would have an apparition with the Angel. She doesn't know what he will say or whether she will be alone or with all the other girls. Also on January 1st Conchita had an apparition with the Virgin at the Pines, and it lasted a long time. (She often goes to pray at the Pines.) Two shepherd children, a boy and a girl, found her there in ecstasy. They were the ones who later talked about it; if they had not, perhaps she wouldn't have mentioned it. She came to my house when the ecstasy was over, and she looked quite excited, although very happy . . .

I don't write as much as before, since now there is nothing special to write about.»

is no small matter. But there was still more to say. And finally she did say it; or rather said some of it! But months later.



Fr. Laffineur and visionary

The occasion was Fr. Laffineur's stay in Gara-bandal to watch the predicted visit of the Angel in June of that year. On the day after the apparition, June 19th, this priest was in Conchita's house, speaking of course of what had happened. And at one time, she said to him:

«After so long a time, the Virgin has spoken to me about so many things! But she hasn't told me to talk or keep quiet about many of them. Because of this, many times I don't know what to do, being afraid of making a mistake . . .

I'm going to give in writing the Warning that I received during the apparition of January 1st, when I was alone at the Pines.»

A Warning for the Whole World

What Conchita wrote was this:

«The Warning, that the Virgin is going to send us, will be like a punishment: to bring the good closer to God, and to warn the others either to convert, or receive what they deserve.

I'm not going to reveal what the Warning consists of. The Virgin didn't say that I should tell it. And concerning this, there is nothing more to be said.

God wishes that, due to the Warning, we would amend our lives and commit fewer sins against Him!»

Fr. Laffineur, having read these words, asked Conchita if the Warning would cause people to die. She then added this remark:

«Dying will not be caused by the Warning itself, but by the effect that we will have on seeing and feeling it.»

If the information written by Conchita to Fr. Laffineur was brief and delayed, it was not the same with what she sent to her aunt and godmother, Maximina González. She spoke to her aunt when she was still under the effect of what she had just learned at the Pines on January 1st:

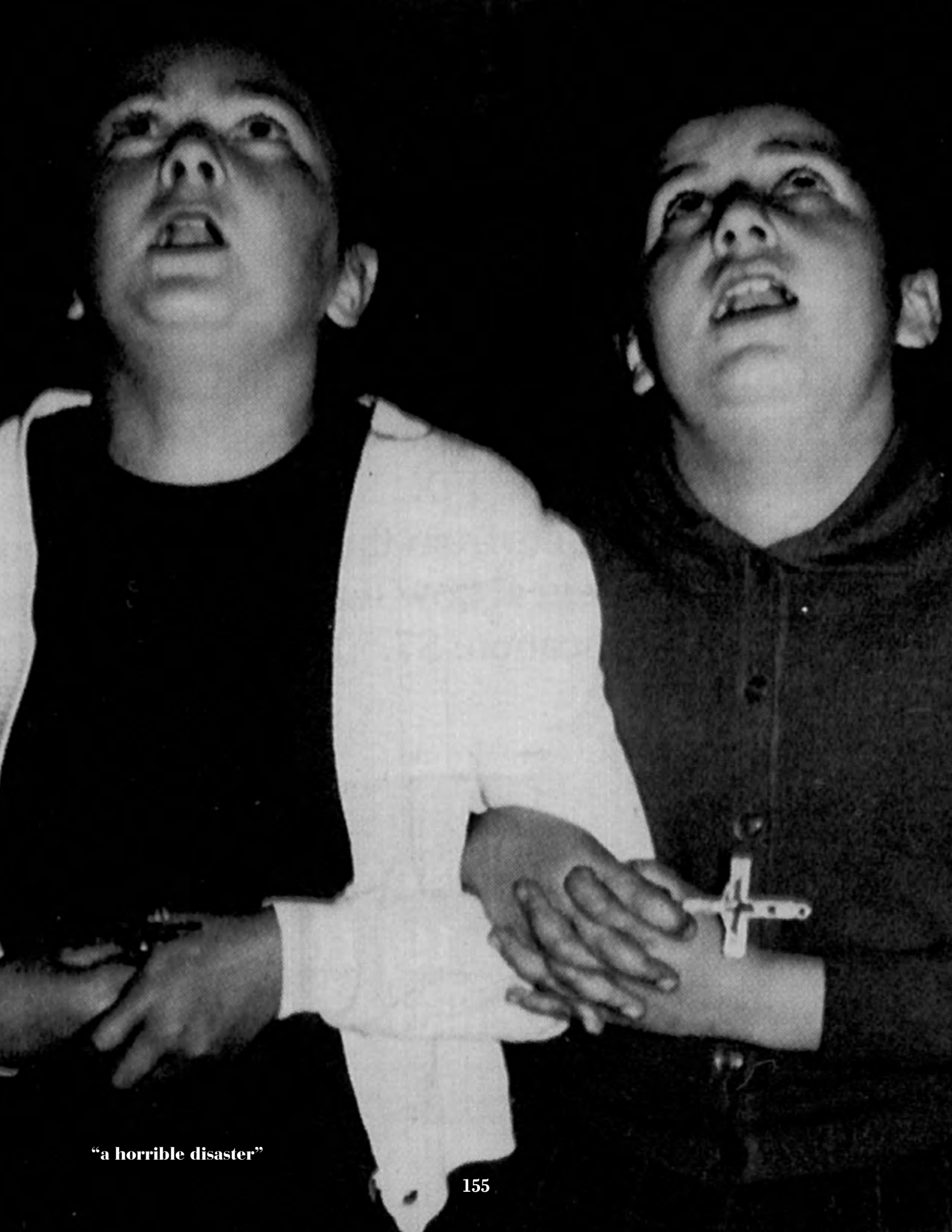
«Before the Miracle, there will be a Warning, so that the world can amend its ways.»



Maximina and visionary

Hearing this, Maximina wanted to know more. The niece explained the warning to her the best she could. From those explanations, the aunt remembered the following, which she wrote down:

«She told me we were going to suffer a horrible disaster some day, in all parts of the world.



“a horrible disaster”

None of us will escape this: the good, so that they may draw nearer to God; the evil, so that they may amend their lives.

She didn't tell me what it was; but that she was expecting it any day. It would come before the Miracle.

She said that it was preferable to die rather than suffer for just five minutes what was going to come.⁽²⁾ She said that it is horrible, that it is a thing clearly from heaven. People in every part of the world will suffer from it.

I said to her: *Why don't you publish it, so that the world may know what is going to happen to it?* And she told me that she was tired of giving warnings and the world was not paying any attention.

She said that the Virgin told her that the world certainly believes that there is a heaven and a hell, but that it can be seen that we think little about it. The Virgin also told her that when we suffer this punishment, all of which we have caused ourselves with our sins, that we should not feel the sufferings and pain for ourselves, but rather that we should suffer everything for her Son, since He is very offended by what we do.

I asked her how long this catastrophe would

2. According to later statements given by Jacinta, and published in July-Sept, 1977 issue of the magazine *Needles*, now titled *Garabandal*:

«The Warning is something that is first seen in the air everywhere in the world and immediately is transmitted into the interior of our souls. It will last for a very little time, but it will seem a very long time because of its effect within us. It will be for the good of our souls — in order to see in ourselves our conscience . . . the good and the bad that we have done . . .»

It will come upon us like a fire from heaven, which we will feel profoundly in our interior. By its light each one will see the state of his soul with complete clearness; he will experience what it is to lose God; he will feel the purifying action of the cleansing flame. Briefly, it will feel like having the Particular Judgment in one's very soul while still alive.

The *purification* of the Warning will be necessary to make us ready to face the Miracle. Otherwise we might not be able to sustain the superhuman and marvelous experience of the Miracle. Perhaps he had not previously undergone the Warning, the early death of Fr. Luis Andreu came about, after he saw on that summer night in 1961 what even the visionaries had not yet seen.

last, and she said that she didn't know; but that we could suffer it both in the night and in the day. I said to her, *Will we die?* And she told me, *I think if that happens, it would be from fright.*

—And if we were in the church praying?

—*I think too that the church would be the best place to pass it, there next to the Blessed Sacrament, so that He could support us, give us strength, and aid us to suffer it better.*

—Since you've told me this, I've done nothing but look at the sky, to see if I can see anything.



“to see if we amend”

—*I too, and when I go to bed, I look and have great fear. Though on the contrary, I have a desire for it to come, to see if we amend our lives, since we don't understand the offenses that we make against the Lord.*

—Well then, when we see that it is coming to us, we can all go to the church.

—*I myself would consider doing that! But perhaps it will come upon us in the darkness and we won't be able . . .*

How horrible it will be! If I could tell it as Conchita told it to me . . . She said that if she didn't already know what the Chastisement was, she would say that the Warning was worse than the Chastisement.»⁽³⁾

From this testimony, written and signed by Maximina, it appears adequately clear that the *Warning* that was revealed to Conchita on January 1st, 1965 will have the following characteristics:

- It will cause terribly afflictive and striking suffering.
- It will have a universal scope; that is, it will reach everyone, in all parts of the world.
- It will be seen that it is *a thing from God*, something that man himself could not perform, leaving him to implore the mercy of God.
- It will come with a purpose of salvation: in order that the good may draw nearer to God, and the bad take their amendment of life seriously.
- It will certainly come, and before the Miracle; but no one knows the day or the hour.
- Its time, probably, will be a time of mysterious darkness.
- At that time, there will be no other refuge or relief except prayer.

Conchita's important communication appears not to have been disseminated for a long time, since in the letters and information that I have seen from the first months of 1965, no reference was made to the Warning, which should have occupied everyone's attention.⁽⁴⁾

What did capture the people's attention was the

3. It is no wonder that Conchita, having learned this and coming down from the Pines on New Year's eve, appeared at her aunt Maximina's house, according to the latter's testimony as **«very excited but also very happy»**.

4. Maximina, who was always so prompt to report everything that was happening to her friends the Pifarré family in Barcelona, did not bother to say anything about the Warning until many months later (in a letter on September 9th), and then only because the Pifarrés had asked her about it:

«Concerning what you asked me about the Warning, I believe in it, that it is true; at least I have heard something about it from Conchita . . .»

announcement of the Angel's upcoming visit on June 18th. Many of those who believed in Garabandal began then to make plans and even to reserve rooms. On that same day of January 1st, Maximina wrote to María Herrero de Gallardo:

«I am very, very sorry to have to tell you that the two rooms at my disposition have been promised already to Dr. Ortiz and Fr. Luis Retenaga. I have inquired at the other houses and they told me that, since it is such a long time away, that they couldn't promise a room. The village is going in a bad way. (She is referring to selfishness and interest in monetary gain associated with the coming of the visitors.) Perhaps not as many people will come as they expect. But I think it is most likely that you won't be able to walk through the streets because of the people who will come, since the people want to see apparitions again.»

From these lines, we can imagine what the climate was at the beginning of 1965 in the village that had been so favored during the previous years.

Obviously in such an atmosphere the news and the expectation of the Warning would not easily penetrate. However Conchita continued to think about it, and during the year spoke about it to others, repeating basically what we have learned from Maximina, but adding other details that will be seen in time.

Waiting for the Day

News of Garabandal being the site of amazing phenomena was spreading throughout the world, and new visitors were coming ceaselessly to the secluded little town.

Everyone wanted to know what had happened first hand, through the visionaries themselves. The girls could not always acquiesce to the people's wishes; either because the flood of inquisitive people was at times overwhelming, or because the girls had duties which they could not neglect, or because their parents placed obstacles in the way of the persons who came.

But usually the visionaries tried to please everyone. Obviously they could not put down what they

knew in writing for all. However there was an exception in the case of William A. Nolan, an American from Illinois.

This man made his appearance at Garabandal in March, 1965, and wanted to learn from Conchita everything that had happened. He was not able to converse with her in words, since neither did he know Spanish, nor she, English. At the time the young girl agreed to write to him, something that was hard for her. In order that it would not serve as a precedent, she put as a postscript:

«I'm doing this for this man, as we don't understand each other, and he wants to be informed. I'm doing this for him, but I can't do it for everyone. And he, with an interpreter . . .»

The manuscript was three pages long, and Conchita said nothing new; but it is of interest as a resumé and confirmation of the principal facts. She began:

«On an evening in June of 1961, at San Sebastián de Garabandal, the Archangel St. Michael appeared to four girls, of whom I am one . . . The first time that we saw him, he didn't say anything — until the 1st of July. Before the 1st of July, he carried an inscription underneath his feet, and we didn't understand well what it said . . .»

She continued, a few lines down:

«The Virgin came on July 2nd and she appeared very beautiful to us, with the Child Jesus in her arms and two angels dressed alike, one on each side.

The first thing that she said to us was, *Do you know the meaning of the inscription that the Angel carries?*

And we said no.

It is a message that you have to tell the world on October 18th of this year, 1961.

It is the following . . .

Besides the message, the Virgin told us many more things; she also told us that there would be many contradictions among us . . .

She continued appearing to us like this until 1963, and she told us many very beautiful things, which it would require many days to write all down.

In the past two years we haven't had apparitions;



“a great miracle for the whole world”

but the Most Holy Virgin has spoken to us interiorly, without words, and we understand her very well. These are called *locutions*. I like very much to see the Virgin; but I like even more for her to speak to me interiorly, because she seems to be inside me.

The Virgin has also predicted through my intercession (*through me*), a great miracle for the whole world; it is more important than any other, as the world needs now. For the world now there is the message — for the people to fulfill it, and make others fulfill it . . .»

After the usual descriptions of the Virgin, the Child and the Angel, she added in ending:

«The last time that I saw the Virgin was at the Pines on January 1st. And I will see the Angel on the coming June 18th.»

This document was dated March 22nd, 1965.

Three days later, Loli took an interest in the same man, writing this letter:

«For my good believer in Christ, William A. Nolan,

I thank you very much for your trip to Spain, and for your visit to this village, lost in the mountains, where Our Most Holy Mother has shown herself one more time to demonstrate the love that she feels toward the whole world. As a mother she pardons us everything, if we ask her with faith. Show this letter in your town.

I also tell you this, that in order to avoid the Chastisement, we have to make many sacrifices and penances, to pray the family rosary every day; this is what Our Most Holy Mother requests of us. Also, that we should love one another, as Our Lord loves us. We have to love; the whites must love the blacks; and the blacks, the whites, since we are all brothers . . .»



“We have to make many sacrifices and penances.”

Not a bad letter! Brief and simple, but with material for extended meditation.

These two writings carry a breath of the Divine that acted in Garabandal; but there is also much of the human acting there, even the too human . . .

We know from Plácido Ruiloba, that toward May 11th of that year 1965, uncharitable comments and rumors concerning the bishop were being noised throughout Santander:⁽⁵⁾ that he was being obliged by his superiors to resign . . . that he was thinking of going to North America . . . that at the time it was said that Pajares and Tobalina⁽⁶⁾ were waiting to be rid of him, in order to finish once and for all with the bothersome matter of Garabandal . . .

The atmosphere that had descended on the mountain village was lamentable; it was described by the French witnesses in *L'Etoile dans la Montagne*:

«Dissensions, arguments, criticism, distrust, indiscretions, and insults concerning the Celestial Visitor . . . The more or less disguised waiting for the famous rendezvous . . . *It will be seen what will happen — since for the past two years nothing has been seen.*»

During these days of confusion, especially on May 16th, it began to be known that Conchita had held an important secret since January 1st. Thus it appears, at least in the notes of Dr. Ortiz:

«Plácido went up to Garabandal, and Maximina relayed the conversation that she had with Conchita in which she had been told that a sign (*the Warning*) would come before the miracle.»

The news or announcement, if it was divulged to the village (concerning which I have no information), certainly made no impression. Most everyone's attitude remained the same: doubting, dubious. They shrugged their shoulders: *We will see*

5. Eugenio Beitia Aldazábal had come to Santander as the bishop of the diocese in 1962; because of his age, education and deportment, a fruitful episcopate was expected. Unexpectedly in 1962 he presented his resignation, which the Holy See accepted. He state of health was given as the official reason for the resignation.

Bishop Beitia retired to Bilbao, his native land, and there continued working, especially in collaboration with the press.

6. For many years Fr. Francisco Pajares and Fr. Agustín Tobalina governed the diocese of Santander: the first from his position as a chancery secretary, and the second as vicar general.



Ceferino, the father of Loli

what will happen, if anything is going to happen.

Conchita, on the other hand, showed herself more certain than ever. On May 23rd, the Sunday before the Ascension, Mr. Ruiloba once again was walking through Garabandal. He met Fr. Valentín, who was very worried about some plans attributed to Pajares and Tobalina, and from the priest he learned that Conchita was continuing to repeat that the Angel would definitely return on the date announced: June 18th.

—*But are you really sure?*—that pastor had said to her— *That it is not a lie or something that you imagined?*

—Do you think that the Virgin would lie?

—*No. Of course not.*

—Well, the Virgin told it to me.

Mr. Ruiloba was constantly wavering between belief and disbelief. Every street, almost every corner of the village, had to bring back memories to

him of *things* experienced very personally;⁽⁷⁾ nevertheless, the man could not overcome his vacillation. And on the night of May 25th, Tuesday, being with Ceferino in the latter's house, he began again to bring out the *negative things* that he thought he had seen in the apparitions and in the girls. Ceferino, who in this matter was never far behind, broadly seconded him. And the two were talking in such a way that there came a time when Julia⁽⁸⁾ could not endure it anymore and interrupted the conversation to remind them of some things of a very different character, which neither of the two could deny. Her husband had no other solution than to assent, and even on his own part added some marvelous *signs* that he himself had received; but as if he were ashamed of them, he made Plácido swear never to tell them to anyone.

As with so many others in the village, it seemed

7. This same Plácido mentioned one day to Doctor Ortiz that at the beginning of the apparitions, after an ecstasy, one of the girls spoke of the state of his conscience as though she were reading it. And his wife, Lucita, added that from that time on her husband had changed very much.

8. Ceferino's wife and Loli's mother.

that Ceferino took a strange pleasure in destroying hopes. On June 6th, Pentecost Sunday, when again Ruiloba and his wife came to his house, Ceferino received them with these words, *My friend Plácido, everything is finished. This is nothing but a farce . . . And what Conchita is going around predicting . . . pure lies. I have already pointed it out, as I have always done. I went once again to talk about it to the bishop . . . If the people come here on June 18th, let them. I am going to play billiards.*

His daughter Loli, who was present there, joined in the conversation, with words and attitudes that were almost as ridiculous as those of her father.⁽⁹⁾

And up in those remote mountains, that is the way things were going during those last weeks before the great date.

Conchita had remained alone as the center of everything. And as a result, she was the occasion and the cause of the jealousies that surfaced in some, of the distrust that tormented others, and of the expectation of many others.

And Conchita, on June 13th—the Sunday before the date so awaited and feared—caught cold . . . Right at the wrong time. She awoke on June 14th with a bad case of flu that elevated her temperature to 39 degrees. For three days she was confined to

9. Ceferino's doubts, or his changing from belief to disbelief in what had happened, remained to the end. But finally in his last days he seemed to receive a clear light, which must have comforted him in passing away.

He died on June 4th, 1974 at 56 years of age, about to complete the 13th year from the beginning of those phenomena in which he has been so closely entwined. Two days before his death on June 2nd, a group of pilgrims came to Garabandal with an image of the Virgin of Fatima. They were singing the *Salve* and other songs in the plaza, and Julia opened the doors and windows of the house so the prayers and songs could come in better to the room of her dying husband, at times almost unconscious; then she leaned against the window weeping and praying . . .

When the songs ended, she asked one of the youths from the group to give her a flower from those decorating the image. She went to place the flower on the crucifix that hung over the head of the dying man. Ceferino then came out of his lethargy and began to look from side to side as if he were searching for something, while he said, *The sign! The sign!* Julia brought the crucifix with the flower. He took both with great devotion and remained with the flower in his hand, full of peace and joy, as if the flower had been for him the *proof* that finally was given to him on this matter that had worried him so profoundly . . . Julia, for whom the early death of her husband was a hard blow, now believes in the apparitions more than ever.

bed with chills and fever.

June 17th, Thursday, was the great feast of Corpus Christi, and Garabandal, like so many other ancient towns in Spain, put its best piety and enthusiasm into celebrating the feast.⁽¹⁰⁾ But Conchita could not follow the celebration more than from afar, from her bed of sickness. As the procession passed around her house, she could hear clearly the songs of the crowd accompanying Our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament, *Most High Lord . . . Let us sing to the greatest of all loves . . . God is here, let us adore Him . . . Heaven and earth, bless the Lord . . .*

In the street next to the house, her mother Aniceta had constructed a small arch of triumph made from branches adorned with flowers; she had also draped a banner on it with the colors of the national flag and an inscription that read, *Long Live Christ the King!* What more could the simple woman do? It was a deeply felt homage that she offered to Our Lord in her own name and that of her children, especially for the daughter who could only accompany the procession in spirit.

The sudden illness of Conchita was the object of the most varied comments. *A good way of preparing an "out" if on Friday nothing happens!* said some. *The things of God in this world never come without some tribulation,* said others. Those who still hoped could do no more than ask with a greater or lesser degree of concern, *Will she be on her feet for the call of the Angel?*

The situation did not look good, since, although the illness had improved much during the day of Corpus Christi, the doctor had prescribed that she remain in bed, or at least not leave the house, for the next six days.

The Gathering Crowd

Throughout June 17th, pilgrims were arriving.

10. They thoroughly swept, cleaned and decorated the streets for the procession of the Blessed Sacrament that would be carried through them. The people of the village assisted en masse at this procession, the most solemn of the year; those who were not able to participate in it knelt at their doors, windows and balconies for the passage of the Lord.



Pilgrims waiting for the apparition

The same was happening during Friday the 18th, well into the evening. Persons from foreign countries were numerous. The *L'Etoile dans la Montagne* mentions: «200 Frenchmen, 10 Americans, 6 Englishmen, 4 Italians, and an occasional representative of the other countries of Europe and America.»

There must have been many priests, but there were only a dozen visible in cassocks.

Vehicles with the most varied license plates inundated the village and its surroundings. Attention was especially drawn, and not only because of their size, to the vehicles of the technical crews for Spanish NO-DO,⁽¹¹⁾ and *Televisión Italiana*. In the latter

11. NO-DO (Noticiero-Documental) was the governmental agency of news pictures. Its importance has diminished with the development of television. The presence of NO-DO at Garabandal was due to the activities of a young woman from Segovia, Paloma Fernández-Pacheco de Larrauri. This woman, who already knew the village well, was there again for June 18th with her sister Fuencisia.

group, the famous actor Carlo Campanini was particularly active.

What was the attitude of the crowd? Fr. Laffineur tells us in *L'Etoile dans la Montagne* as a witness of the scene:

«In general, it was exemplary. Pious, modest, penitent. Almost all those who composed it had received Communion at one of the three Masses⁽¹²⁾ during the morning . . .

Occasionally there could be found a face that was there only to spy on the events and

12. Aniano Fontaneda from Aguilar de Campoo wrote on June 26th to Fr. Ramón:

«I was at Garabandal on the 17th and 18th and I saw your friends and a great number of acquaintances. You missed a great day since everything turned out magnificently. Although Fr. Valentín told me that there would be no Masses in the village unless the priests came with written permission to celebrate Mass, we actually had several Masses, with more than 1,500 Communions. I can say no more than that the Hosts were exhausted on two occasions.»

activities, to gather information to utilize in favor of a cause that he represented or served . . . the emissaries from the Commission of Santander, obviously; members of some foreign agencies also, and even someone representing the ridiculous ex-priest Collin.»⁽¹³⁾

How did the crowd pass the interminable hours of waiting? Certainly with less difficulties and hardships than the congregation that waited on October 18th, 1961. This time there was not such a great gathering and the weather was much better. But opportunities were not lacking to exercise patience, and practice penance. Mr. Poch Soler, the reporter sent by the Barcelonian weekly, *Por que?*, wrote an interesting article:⁽¹⁴⁾

«From Cossío we made the trip on foot, 7 kilometers, always heading upwards, arriving at Garabandal after 2 in the morning of June 18th. Unplanned and spectacular! The monumental task of sheltering hundreds of pilgrims in a small town of no more than 40 houses had already ceased when we arrived. The people were sleeping in the doorways, in the stables, on the porches, in the kitchens, in the middle of the streets . . . In our nocturnal walk through the uneven and rocky streets, we had to step with the greatest attention, avoiding the many people who were sleeping, stretched out on the ground, under the feeble illumination of a dozen light bulbs scattered throughout the village.

One of the two bars or taverns in Garabandal remained open all night, although its small capacity could barely shelter 12 or 15 people. There we settled ourselves down to write. To our one side two English people were sleeping peacefully, slumped over the table on their elbows. On the ground, two French priests were praying the rosary in a hushed voice. Others were drinking beer and later went outside to walk in the streets beneath the clear moon illuminating that night in Garabandal.»

13. We have already spoken about him during his visit to Garabandal on August 22nd, 1963.

14. This article was not published in the weekly paper until April, 1966. Its introduction went like this:

«In writing about this, we have tried at all times to avoid the frivolousness and journalistic lightness that at times we are accustomed to use for other subjects of the street. We have limited ourselves to reporting the facts as we have seen them, transcribing everything that we have heard and all this with the greatest objectivity possible.»

The French correspondent from *Le Monde et La Vie* agreed with this, and said further that well into the night, in scattered sectors of the village, there rose up prayers and devout hymns in Spanish, Latin, and French . . .

As day dawned, the influx of people increased, creating a boisterous commotion in the streets. The French reporter describes it:

«The morning passed rather well. Everyone was using the time the best that he could. They were praying, singing, taking photographs, speaking with the villagers, asking a multitude of questions about the girls and their ecstasies.»



“They were praying.”

Conchita's house naturally was the principal magnet of attraction. Only she was going to be the protagonist of what everyone was awaiting. Only she could name the time and the place. The youthful 16 year old girl was slow in appearing to the crowd because her mother rightly did not let her get up until well into the morning. The reporters were the ones most importune in their desire to see her. Poch Soler wrote in his article:

«Conchita inspired all the press reporters with profound respect. My colleagues from Paris, Portugal, Madrid, the crew from NO-DO were waiting impatiently, but without irritation, for the time when they would be able to speak to her.

You have to have a little patience, her mother told us. Understand that the girl is tired. Yesterday she was sick with a 40 degree temperature. She wants to talk with everyone,



“She let herself be devoured by the crowd.”

embrace everyone. I am the one who doesn't want her to go outside on the street.»

Finally the door opened inch by inch, and in the doorway stood the young girl, pale, heavily bundled up, but with her best smile for everyone. For hours . . .

« . . . she let herself be devoured by the crowd. She smiled, she wrote cards, she allowed herself to be photographed, she responded to the questions thrown at her, she promised to pray for the most diverse intentions, she tried to console the most afflicted, she embraced the children.» (*L'Etoile dans la Montagne*)

Mr. Poch Soler continued:

«At 2 o'clock in the afternoon of June 18th, we managed to speak with Conchita. I confess that this was the most moving moment of my career as a journalist. Never has a person filled me with such respect and confidence at the same time . . .

The interview took place in the kitchen of her home. Present were her mother and her two

brothers, two strong men of the north who protected the place. She held out her hand and apologized for making me wait to get the interview.

—Are you happy? I asked.

—*Very happy, Señor. I feel a great joy.*

—Why?

—*Because today I will see the Angel and that is marvelous.*

—Have you noticed the number of people who have come to Garabandal?

—*I haven't stopped thinking of them!*

—And how do you feel about this enormous crowd?

—*My joy is difficult to put into words . . . How happy Our Lady will be!*

.

—Are you sure you will see the Angel today?



“a marvelous light”

“a message”

—*Very sure.*

—At what time?

—*I cannot say, since I don't know. I don't know the hour, but I have a feeling that it will be rather late.*

.

—What do you feel when the Virgin appears to you?

—*A strong constriction that comes up from my chest to my throat . . . And then there is a marvelous light.*

—What do you think the Angel will say?

—*I surely don't know. Possibly there will be a message. But I don't know; we will see.*

When I went out on the street, the people closed in around me. Everyone wanted to know what Conchita had told me. French, Americans, Portuguese, they all begged me to please give them an answer. It was hard to convince

them that it had been a normal interview, that the visionary hadn't told me anything about the time or the place of the ecstasy.

After 3 o'clock in the afternoon, the concentration of pilgrims around Conchita's house was imposing . . . The troops of the Civil Guard of the 242nd Command were in charge of maintaining order, although it wasn't ever necessary for them to intervene with force.

The French groups and the people from the other nations gave a lesson in faith, devotion, and seriousness, that we would have appreciated in our own Spanish people.¹⁵ At all times the initiative for prayers and petitions arose from them . . .

The climate at times was almost hysterical. Some physically covered Conchita with medals,

15. *L'Etoile dans la Montagne* states:

«Toward nightfall gangs of Spanish boys and girls appeared whose flippancy showed that the devil wanted to be present at the spectacle too.»

scapulars and holy cards, hoping that she would touch them and kiss them. Others made their way toward her to ask for her autograph, to take her photograph. A woman raised a paralytic son in her arms, imploring Conchita to kiss him.»

Among the priests who had come to Garabandal, certainly the one who aroused the most interest was Father Pel . . . «the famous stigmatic, called *the French Padre Pio*,⁽¹⁶⁾ known through all of France for his sanctity and miraculous gifts. Even though 87 years of age, he was circulating around and talking with great agility.»

But the one who showed himself the most active, and who seemed to have the best welcome in Conchita's house, was the Spanish Fr. Luis Luna, who had come from Saragossa. He was privileged to be near the visionary for many hours that day.

Continuing now with the article of Poch Soler:

«The evening advanced, without Conchita announcing the time of the apparition. It became darker. But how sure it is that faith moves mountains! No one gave up or abandoned his post . . .⁽¹⁷⁾ 8 o'clock came, then 9, then 10 at night . . . They were praying without ceasing; supplications and hymns in every language rose up to heaven . . .

. . . until a trembling of emotion seized everyone: At the door of the house a priest⁽¹⁸⁾ came out, and calling for silence, spoke to the crowd.

This is from Conchita: Everyone should go to the Calleja, to what is called the Cuadro, since the ecstasy will be there.»

The frenzy stirred up by these words could not

16. Referring to the Italian Capuchin Padre Pio from Pietrelcina, (*adjacent picture*) famous the world over for his extraordinary apostolate and mystical charisms. Fr. Constant Pel died on March 5th, 1966, convinced about Garabandal. (The reporter errs in calling him a stigmatic.)



17. Conchita stayed at the door of her home, giving herself to the multitude. . . «until night fell, and we didn't know if she had time to eat anything more than a crust of bread. Shivering, she went back into the house; but in order not to let anyone down, she opened her kitchen window and across the iron gate continued to give herself to the crowd.» (*L'Etoile dans la Montagne*)

18. This seems to have been Father Luna from Saragossa.

be described . . . Everyone ran crazily to see if he could get the best place for observation.

Aniano Fontaneda wrote in his letter to Father Ramón:

«Everybody wanted to be the first to get there; they almost ripped my clothes off as they shoved me on all sides. Many were knocked to the ground. I lifted up Mercedes Salisachs⁽¹⁹⁾ and other people who stumbled and fell going up the hill.»

Fr. Luna also described it:

«After having been together with Conchita for several hours—in order to benefit from her company when the expected ecstasy came—at the time of going up to the Cuadro, I found myself bowled over by the rush of the crowd, which carried me along in the turmoil and finally knocked me to the ground. With my back on the ground, the people passed on top of me as they ran upwards. While I was there, in the darkness of the night, two people assisted me, one on each side, and without the least effort on my part, in spite of the weight of my 80 kilos, I found myself on foot. Later I was able to guide myself on the left wall of the Calleja, where the stones are stacked without mortar.»

The dispersal of the crowd left Conchita's house surrounded by an unusual silence. Only three or four persons still remained there at the window of the kitchen, desiring to exchange words with the young girl inside.

—*What are we going to do now, Conchita?*

19. The illustrious writer from Barcelona.

Any sensible person will understand the frenzy with which the throng rushed to seize good positions. This is not meant to commend it; only to make the situation understood.

The reporter Poch Soler showed he sympathized with the crowd in his article:

«The spectacle was not only striking; it instilled fear . . . A woman was dragging her five year old son between her legs; the little boy was crying, but the mother could not give him any attention because she had to find a good position at all costs. A blind American got up on top of the wall, helped by his friends. A man with two bad legs asked me to give him a hand so that he would be able to climb the rocky path. The human drama that brought all these persons to the *Cuadro* overwhelmed us all. Those people had their life conditioned by suffering and their admirable resignation was the greatest miracle of that night at Garabandal.»



“A new star shot up . . .
very brilliant . . .
a golden color . . .”

—Go to the Cuadro, like the rest.

Tryst with an Angel

At the Cuadro, order had been restored in the crowd.

«Almost everyone was praying in a loud voice, in two choruses, the French and the Spanish alternating. What an extraordinary night! There was an unprecedented luminosity with innumerable stars shining as never before. Without a moon, at least for the spectators . . .⁽²⁰⁾

Suddenly everybody lifted up their heads. From the northwest, a new star shot up, brighter than the others. It traced a great circle and returned to its starting point.

Two minutes later, another star, splendid but smaller than the first, appeared straight above Conchita's house, advanced slowly in the sky and suddenly disappeared above the Pines.⁽²¹⁾

20. A correspondent from *Le Monde et la Vie* had the same observation: «From 9 o'clock in the evening a magnificent starry sky covered the heavens.»

21. Juan Alvarez Seco, the Police Chief, also gave his testimony about the two stars that were seen on that night in

Everyone was talking with the person next to him about these extraordinary phenomena, when at the foot of the road, by the light of the starry night and the flashlights, Conchita appeared, protected by a squadron of police guards.⁽²²⁾ The young girl was walking so fast that her guards were out of breath.» (*L'Etoile dans la Montagne*)⁽²³⁾

The press reporter Poch Soler saw the scene like this:

«At a quarter to midnight, Conchita, followed by some priests and seven police guards, went up to the Calleja in a completely normal state. She advanced with her gaze fixed. The flashes from the photographers began to shine on her. A police guard asked her,

—*Is it here, Conchita?*

—*No, Señor, a little higher up.*

On coming to the designated spot, the girl plummeted to her knees on the sharp stones of

Garabandal «while I was waiting for Conchita between 11:30 and 11:45 on that June 18th.»

The first star «was seen shining brightly, very brilliant and a golden color; it went from the ground upwards . . . The other, of lesser brightness, moved more horizontally.»

22. The reporter from *Le Monde et la Vie* spoke of six guards; the one from *Por Qué?* mentions seven.

23. The correspondent from *Le Monde et la Vie* also called attention to the rapid pace with which the girl was walking.



“Tears run down her cheeks.”

the road. The ecstasy had begun.

The moment is exciting. Conchita’s eyes are fixed on the sky. She laughs and pronounces some words in a very low voice . . . But immediately she completely changes her expression and tears run down her cheeks.

The photographers and television cameramen are shooting their cameras, and their beams of light shine right into her eyes— wide open— but she doesn’t blink or make the least motion. The ecstasy is absolute.»⁽²⁴⁾

24. There is a good documentary motion picture of this complete ecstasy in the archives of NO-DO in Madrid.



“The ecstasy is absolute.”



“signs of the cross”

The witnesses of the *L'Etoile dans la Montagne* tell of it:

«The ecstasy was similar to those that we had previously observed in the village, in the seer's kitchen or her room. There were signs of the cross made with an indescribable piety and

majesty, a face resplendent with an interior light, an angelic smile and moments of solemn seriousness, whispering with lips open and the silence of a soul that listens, a tear that glistens on the temple and leaves a trail of crystal.»

On his part, the reporter of *Le Monde et la Vie* wrote:

«Conchita was there in front of my eyes, in the center of a circle of flashlights and camera lights focused on her. Her head, which I could see well during almost all the ecstasy, stayed motionless, thrown backwards in the way that so many photographs show. Her face appeared to gleam, extremely beautiful and transparent, arousing everyone's admiration.»

Fr. Luna's testimony is exceptionally valuable :

«I finally found myself on the hill, a little more than two meters from Conchita, who was already in ecstasy and whom I could see and hear perfectly. I was impressed by the more than human beauty of her face, speaking without blinking, under torrents of light projected on her from the cameramen and flashlights.



“moments of solemn seriousness”

No! . . . No! . . . Pardon, pardon!



“Priests? . . . Bishops?”



“Conchita . . . presented the crucifix to be kissed.”

I was overwhelmed on seeing her cry, as up until then, I had never seen this. From her eyes poured out tears that joined in a stream, filling the concavity of her left ear (the only one visible to me at the time), falling on the ground like water from a loose faucet . . .

I heard her speak with a voice that was gasping and breathless: *No! . . . No! . . . Still no! . . . Pardon, pardon!* Later I saw her lift herself up some 70 centimeters with her right hand raised and unsupported, to again fall to her knees on the ground with a chilling crunch.

Later she said, as if repeating it and asking a question, *Priests? . . . Bishops? . . . July 2nd?*⁽²⁵⁾

I saw her cross herself with a majestic slowness . . . And suddenly she put her two hands

25. There were only a few words that could be clearly heard from Conchita during the ecstasy; some people reported some, others reported others; but almost all agreed on these: *«Pardon! Pardon! . . . Still no, still no . . . July 2nd? . . .»*

to her face, trying to protect her eyes from the bright lights. The ecstasy was over.»

There is one missing element in Fr. Luna’s report, which the French reporters give us:

«Conchita had remained immobile some 12 or 13 minutes, in conversation with her mysterious interlocutor. Suddenly, still in ecstasy, she got to her feet, in her right hand holding up a crucifix (that she later said had been touched at the time by the Angel). She fell again on her knees and brought the crucifix to her lips with an extraordinary expression of love. It was at this moment, according to what her mother told me, that one of the police guards, with a changed expression on his face, made the sign of the cross solemnly, as if to say, *I believe*.

Then Conchita, without paying the least attention to what was happening around her, without changing in the slightest the immobility of her face or the fixedness of her glance, presented the crucifix to be kissed by three persons from France: an old priest at her side, a father of a

family who had lived in Spain for some time, and a religion teacher from Leon.⁽²⁶⁾

After making the sign of the cross with an extraordinary carefulness, she lowered her head, and smiling, without any sign of fatigue, got up.

With difficulty, the six police guards managed to protect her from the crowd . . . »
(*Le Monde et la Vie*)

The guards' task was difficult. Everyone wanted to see Conchita up close, to touch her if possible, to ask her questions . . . especially when it was heard that she had received a message.

Mr. Aniano Fontaneda, in the letter previously quoted, wrote to Fr. Ramón:

«The crucifix that she gave to kiss in the ecstasy belonged to me. I had left it when I went out of her house on the way to the Cuadro . . . On returning, she was holding up this crucifix for everyone to kiss at the door of her house. She continued until they finished kissing it, then she gave it back to me, and everyone came to ask me for it, since they wanted to kiss it. When I left Conchita's house, I passed Ceferino's tavern with the people from Cataluña, Argentina and Madrid. At every step I had to take out the crucifix, until a lady from Segovia named Fuencisla Fernández-Pacheco took charge of doing it.»

Among the few people who succeeded in getting into Conchita's house after the ecstasy, was the correspondent from *Le Monde et la Vie*. All that he could pry from the visionary about the message that she had received was the vague statement: «*It was very sorrowful.*»

But to find out its exact words, he would have to wait until the following morning.

But not everyone could wait. Such was the case with Mr. Fontaneda:

26. According to the *L'Etoile dans la Montagne*, these three fortunate men were: the previously mentioned Father Pel, Mr. Mazure and Mr. Piqué.

And the matter is doubly surprising, since no one is able to explain how they were able to get close to Conchita at the time, nor how she was able to give them the crucifix to kiss without seeing them and while holding it over the people who were next to them.



“It was very sorrowful.”

«Conchita was going to give the Angel's message on the following day—Saturday—in the morning after Communion. But I couldn't wait. We left from there at 2 in the morning, without having eaten, with only two Coca-Colas that they had given me at Ceferino's place.»

During the hours of the night, the village was almost completely tranquil and silent. The need for rest and sleep had overtaken everyone. And finally all that remained were the stars in the distant firmament above, as sentinels to continue the watch.

What mysterious designs were being planned for the world?

In those designs, what would come from that June 18th in Garabandal that was just ending?

**Would it leave its mark?
Or would it fall into oblivion?**

