

Chapter 1

Angels Unawares

Maria gave the door an extra tug. It slammed shut behind her, cutting out the swirling December snow.

“Why did you do that?” her sister Teresa chastened. “You were rude to that visitor.”

“What visitor? I didn’t see anybody.” Maria frowned.

“You must have seen him, Maria. He walked up the steps with you, holding your arm. I looked out the window and saw him, and I wondered who you were bringing home for supper.” Teresa flung open the door and took a quick look up and down the New York street. There was no one in sight. The wind blew icy snow into her face. She strained to pull the door shut again and continued to scold her sister. “That’s not like you to be so inhospitable, Maria.”

“Honestly, Teresa, I didn’t have anyone with me!”

“He had such soft brown eyes,” Teresa insisted. “Such a kind face. He looked almost like an angel.”

“An angel?” Maria gasped. Could that have been her own guardian angel guiding her across the busy street against the after-work traffic? Could he have placed an invisible arm under hers to see that she didn’t slip as she ascended those icy stone steps? Maria remembered her feeling of complete safety as she wended her way home from work, hoping that her sister would have a hot drink ready to warm her frozen limbs. New York in winter offered little warmth to a Christian-book saleslady out ringing doorbells. The granite steps at home had not seemed slippery, either, she recalled. Could one of God’s angels really have come to protect her?

It wasn’t unusual for Maria to think of angels being present and sometimes visible. Ever since her mother’s death when she was thirteen, Maria had been involved with the spirit world; only back then it had been the devil’s angels. Born and raised in Puerto Rico, for over fifteen years Maria had been a spiritualist medium. And now that she had accepted Jesus as her Saviour, why shouldn’t she take for granted that God’s angels would protect her?

In all those years as a medium Maria had never placed a curse on any of her clients. Many of her fellow mediums used their powers to help themselves or to decree evil on others, but Maria had always tried

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to help people. She called forth her spirit “guides” to heal diseases, mend broken marriages, or help guide people to so-called happiness.

“Maria’s spirits are good spirits,” her clients used to say. “They will make you happy and healthy.” Yet Maria had not been happy herself—not until she had turned her life over to Jesus Christ.

Oh, how she had fought doing that! Now, as she warmed her hands on the cup of hot cocoa that Teresa handed her, she recalled two occasions when her “good spirits” had turned on her, trying to snuff out her life. After resisting Teresa’s urgent invitations to learn about Christ and what He had done for her, Maria’s life had suddenly taken a plunge into tragedy. She and Henrique, her husband of nearly ten years, were divorced. Their daughter, Dulcita, was four years old.

Her turning in despair to her sister’s teachings and beginning to study the Bible for herself had apparently angered Maria’s spirit “guides.” Not only did they refuse to respond when she tried to help someone in trouble, they began to threaten her own life. At night, when she tried to sleep, they awakened her with accusations, and finally one dark night she realized that a presence was in her room. Hands circled her throat to choke her. By the faint light filtering through the window she saw a picture of Jesus on the wall, and she prayed desperately, “Jesus, if You are real, as my sister says, please save me! Please save me!” Immediately the strangling sensation left. Then a peace such as Maria had never known seemed to fill the room. “Thank You, Jesus,” she breathed, as she fell into a quiet sleep.

From that time on Maria dreamed only happy dreams. In one she seemed to see Jesus standing by her bed. She gazed in awe at His white-robed figure, of which she could see but the lower half. “Will you please tell me who You are?” she asked. Three times she repeated, “Are You Jesus?” Then she pleaded, “Jesus, if You are really my sister’s God—the God of the Bible—won’t You please give me a sign?” Then in her dream her eyes raised until they met His-beautiful eyes radiating love and tenderness. He slowly turned His hands and stretched them out toward her. The nail prints! She saw the nail prints in the palms of His hands! Maria gasped. That’s what she had read in Teresa’s Bible. It was really true. This was the Jesus who had died for her!

“It is Teresa’s Jesus!” she cried out, waking herself up. “The Bible is true! He’s real!” Falling to her knees beside the bed, she prayed, “Oh, dear Jesus. You saved me from those evil spirits. You died for me. I love you! I want to serve You.”

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Now, as she held the warm cup of cocoa in her hand, she spoke to Teresa across the table. "Remember, Sister, how Jesus took those bad spirits out of my life? Now I believe He has sent my special angel to guard me at my work."

"How well I remember!" Teresa answered. "Maria dear, you should not even think about those evil spirits. It was they who caused Senor Molino to put that curse on your marriage back in Puerto Rico. I should think you'd want to forget it all."

"I know, I know." Maria's voice sounded close to tears, and Teresa hastened to change the subject.

"Anyhow, I really do think you had an angel with you tonight, Maria." Teresa looked dreamy for a minute. "He wore a neat white suit, and he didn't look cold even in this snowy weather. His eyes were so beautiful-so kind."

"Then I hope that means Christ approves of my selling Christian books." Maria smiled.

"Oh, I'm sure He does," her sister agreed, as she cleared the table of their cups, wiped it clean, and began to set it for the evening meal. "The children will soon be in for supper," she reminded Maria, "and they'll be as hungry as wolves."