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Chapter One

Through different eyes

When I was two years old the doctor told my mother was ‘retarded’.*

As a baby, my mother noticed that I always seemed to be in a world of my own. I can even remember lying in a cot – a big basket – and seeing my mother bending over me. Surrounding my mother I saw wonderful bright, shiny beings in all the colours of the rainbow: they were much bigger than I was, but smaller than her – about the size of a three-year-old child. These beings floated in the air like feathers; and I remember reaching out to touch them, but I never succeeded. I was fascinated by these creatures with their beautiful lights. At that time I didn’t understand that I was seeing anything different to what other people saw; it was to be much later that I learned from them that they were called angels.

As the months passed, my mother noticed that I’d always be looking or staring somewhere else, no matter what she’d do to try to get my attention. In truth, I *was* somewhere else: I was away with the angels; watching what they were doing and talking and playing with them. I was enthralled.

I was a late talker, but I had been conversing with angels from very early on. Sometimes we used words as you and I understand them, but sometimes no words were needed – we would know each other’s thoughts. I believed that everyone else could see what I saw, but then the angels told me not to say anything to anyone about seeing them; and that I should keep it a secret between us. In fact, for many years

*In Ireland, many people, especially women and children, faced horrific discrimination due to ableism. Disabled people were frequently ostracised from Irish society with many being institutionalised and removed from public view. There was never any understanding as to my learning disability and I was always referred to in this derogatory way.

I listened to the angels and I didn't tell people what I saw. It is only now while writing this book, that I am telling much of what I have seen for the first time.

The doctor's comment when I was just two was to have a profound effect on my life: I realised that people can be very cruel. At the time we lived in Old Kilmainham, near to the centre of Dublin. My father rented a little bicycle repair shop there, which had a cottage attached. If you walked through the shop and around to the left, you would come to a tiny and fairly dilapidated house. It was part of a row of old cottages and shops, but most of them were empty or abandoned because they were in such bad condition. For much of the time we lived in the one little room downstairs: here we cooked, ate, talked, played and even washed in a big metal basin in front of the fire. Although the house had no bathroom, outside in the back garden, down a little path, was a shed with a loo. Upstairs there were two small bedrooms; at first I shared one of the bedrooms, and a bed, with my older sister, Emer.

It wasn't just angels I was seeing (and I saw them constantly – from the moment I woke up until I went to sleep), but also the spirits of people who had died. My brother, Christopher, had been born long before me but he had died when he was only about ten weeks old. Although I never saw him while he was alive, I could visualise him – he was dark-haired, while my sister and myself were fair – and I could also play with him in spirit.

At the time I thought there was nothing strange about this; it felt as if he was just another child, although he seemed a little brighter in appearance. One of the first things that made me realise that he was different, though, was that his age could change. Sometimes he appeared as a baby, but other times he looked about the same age as me, toddling across the floor. He wasn't there constantly, either, but seemed to come and go.

Late on one cold winter afternoon, just as it was getting dark, I was alone in the little living room of the house in Old Kilmainham. There was a fire in the open fireplace, which was the only light in the room. The firelight flickered across the floor where I was sitting playing with little wooden blocks that my father had made. Christopher came to play with me. He sat near the fire and said that it was too hot for

me where he was, but it was okay for him as he didn't feel the heat. Together we built a tower: I would put one brick down and he would put another on top of it. The tower was getting very tall and then, suddenly, our hands touched. I was amazed – he felt so different to other people I touched. When I touched him he sparked – it was as if there were little stars flying. At that moment I went into him (or perhaps he went into me); it was as if we merged and became one. In my shock I knocked over our tower of bricks!

I burst out laughing, then I touched him again. I think that was the first time I fully realised that he wasn't flesh and blood.

I never confused Christopher with an angel; the angels that I saw did sometimes have a human appearance, but when they did, most of them had wings and their feet did not touch the ground and they had a sort of bright light shining inside them. Some of the time the angels I saw would have no human aspect at all, but appeared as a sharp glowing light.

Christopher appeared around my mum a lot. Sometimes Mum would be sitting in the chair by the fire and would doze off and I'd see him cradled in her arms. I didn't know whether my mother was aware of Christopher's presence so I asked him, 'Will I tell Mum that you're here?'

'No, you can't tell her,' he replied. 'She won't understand. But sometimes she feels me.'

One winter morning, the angels came to my bed as the sun was coming up. I was curled up under the blankets; my sister Emer, with whom I shared the bed, was up and about and instead Christopher was curled up beside me. He tickled me and said 'Look, look, Lorna – over at the window.'

As I have said, angels can appear in different forms and sizes; this morning they looked like snowflakes! The glass in the window seemed to become a vapour, and as each snowflake hit the window it was transformed into an angel about the size of a baby. The angels were then carried on a beam of sunlight through the window and each one seemed to be covered in white and shiny snowflakes. As the angels touched me the snowflakes fell from them onto me: they tickled as they landed and, surprisingly, they felt warm, not cold.

'Wouldn't it be wonderful?' Christopher said, 'if everybody knew

that they could fill their pockets with angels; that they could fit thousands of angels into one pocket, just like with snowflakes, and be able to carry them around with them and never be alone.'

I turned and asked, 'What if they melted in their pockets?'

Christopher giggled and said, 'No! Angels never melt!'

I rather sadly replied, 'Christopher, I wish that you could fit in my mum's pocket like a snowflake, and be there for her all the time.'

He turned and looked at me, as we were cuddled up in bed, and said, 'You know I'm there already.'

When I was an adult my mother told me she had had a baby son called Christopher who had been born a year before me but had only lived for ten weeks. I just smiled in response. I remember asking her where Christopher was buried and she told me that it was in an unmarked grave (as was the custom in those days) in a baby's graveyard in Dublin.

It's sad that there is no grave with his name on that I can go and visit, but he's not forgotten. Sometimes even now, all these years later, I feel Christopher's hand in my pocket pretending to make snowflakes, reminding me I am never alone.

I learned more about Christopher and my mother one day when I was about four or five years old. I was sitting at the table swinging my legs and eating breakfast when I caught a glimpse of Christopher, looking as if he were about twelve years old, running across the room to the shop door just as my mother walked in with some toast. She had a big smile on her face as she said, 'Lorna, there is a surprise for you in the back workroom under Da's workbench!'

I jumped up from the table, all excited, and followed Christopher. He went straight through the shop and into the dark workshop; I had to stop at the door because it was so dark in there that I couldn't see anything and I needed my eyes to adjust to the darkness first. However, Christopher was just like a light, a soft shimmering glow that lit up a path for me through the cluttered workshop. He called out, 'The cat has had kittens!' And there, thanks to Christopher's light, I could see four tiny little kittens – three were jet black, and one was black and white. They were so beautiful, so soft and glossy. The mother cat, Blackie, got out of the box, stretched herself then jumped out of the little window into the garden. I ran after her and called to Christopher to come too, but he would not come into the garden.

I walked back in and asked Christopher, ‘Why wouldn’t you come outside?’

He took my hand, as if to comfort me – I loved the touch of his hand – and our hands merged again. It felt magical: it made me feel safe and happy.

‘Lorna, when babies die their spirits stay with their mothers for as long as they are needed, so I stay here with Mum. If I went outside, it would be like breaking those memories – and that I won’t do!’

I knew what he meant. My mother had poured so much love into him: all the memories she had of being pregnant and carrying him inside her, the birth, the joy and the happiness she had felt holding him in her arms and bringing him home – when even then she had a feeling that something was wrong, despite what the doctors told her. Mum had a precious few weeks at home with Christopher before he died, and Christopher told me of all the love that she had poured on him which he now poured on her.

So my spirit brother would remain in the house, never going out, until the day came when we had to leave that little shop in Old Kilmainham for good. At that time it seemed that my mum was ready to let my little brother go and felt strong enough to move on.

When I see an angel I want to stop and stare; I feel like I am in the presence of a tremendous power. When I was younger, the angels generally adopted a human form – to make it easier for me to accept them – but now that’s no longer necessary. The angels I see don’t always have wings but when they do I am sometimes amazed by their form; sometimes they are like flames of fire, and yet they have shape and solidity. Some of the angels’ wings have feathers; one angel I saw had wings that were so slender, tall and pointed that I found it hard to believe that they were wings. I wanted to ask the angel to open them up.

When angels have a human appearance – with or without wings – their eyes are one of their most fascinating features. Angel eyes are not like human eyes; they are so alive, so full of life and light and love. It’s as if they contain the essence of life itself – their radiance fills you completely.

I have never seen an angel’s feet actually touch the ground; when I see one walking towards me, I see what looks like a cushion of

energy between the ground and their feet. Sometimes it looks like a thin thread, but other times this cushion grows between the earth and the angel, and even sinks into the earth itself.

Ever since I was very young there was one particular angel who used to appear to me often. The first time I saw him he was in the corner of the bedroom and he just said 'Lorna'. In some ways he looked like other angels, but there was something different about him, too, he shone more strongly than the others and he had a commanding presence, a powerful force of male strength. From that first time I saw him I always felt he was ready to protect me, like a shield, and from then on he kept appearing and gradually I befriended him. He told me his name was Michael.

School was difficult for me; most of the teachers treated me as if I were slow. My First Holy Communion was at school when I was six, and it was horrible. It should have been a very special day – as it is for most Irish children. When we were preparing for First Holy Communion in the classroom the teachers would ask the children questions, checking that they had learned their catechism, but they wouldn't bother with me; they'd say, 'There is no point asking you!' And when all the other children had to stand in line and say something about the Communion, I would stand in line, too, but then I'd be dragged out and told to go and sit down. As a young child, this really hurt. So while I sat down at the back of the class or on one of the benches in the corner I'd ask my angels, 'Don't they know that I know my catechism, too? They aren't even giving me a chance.'

Then, in church on my First Communion Day, as I finally made my way up to the altar, I was grabbed by the arm and pulled out of the queue again because the teacher decided that the better girls should go ahead of me.

There were some kind people, though; when I was about four, I remember there was a nun called (I think) Mother Moderini. She had been told that I was 'slow' and 'retarded', but I felt she knew better. When I was in her class she would come down and ask me little questions to which I always knew the answer, so then she'd smile and rub my head.

But despite these occasional acts of kindness from a few people, I grew up an outsider. People could see that I was different and they just

couldn't understand it. That aspect of my life has been very, very hard – and it still is today. People say I'm too trusting, too truthful for this world, but I cannot be any other way! The strange thing is, that to be truthful in every way – in how you think and in how you speak – and to be truthful to those around you is hard and it does tend to isolate you.

The way people think about or look at me does affect me greatly even now. Even though they may not know me, or know what I do, they know that on some level I am different. If I go out with friends and meet someone new, who knows nothing about me, they will often report back to my friends that there is something unusual about me, something that they can't quite put their finger on. This can be difficult to live with.

However, my life at school was made much more bearable by one particular angel, called Hosus. One morning I was running to school, trying to keep up with the older girl who was with me, when suddenly I saw a beautiful angel hiding behind a lamp-post. He made a face at me, and from that day on Hosus used to appear most mornings on my way to school. I still see him regularly today.

Hosus looked – and looks – like an old-fashioned school teacher. He wears a swirling robe which is blue most of the time (but can change colour), and a funny-shaped hat and he carries a scroll in his hand. His eyes are radiant and sparkle like stars and he looks like a young professor: a man full of energy and with great authority and wisdom. Hosus always looks the same, unlike some of the other angels who surround me. Michael, for example, adopts a human appearance most of the time – something I asked him to do, because I find it easier – but he changes his appearance frequently, depending on where we are or the message he has to give me.

To me, Hosus represents knowledge: he looks very serious, and he can be, but he is also wonderful at cheering me up when I feel a little down. It was Hosus who would comfort me and tell me to ignore the other children when I felt ridiculed at school, or when I saw adults talking in a huddle and then turning and looking at me. Hosus would say to me, 'They know nothing.'

At the beginning I didn't know this angel's name, and he didn't actually talk to me. Hosus would appear in the classroom; mimicking the teacher or another child or playing games in the classroom, or

doing something else to make me smile. Sometimes, on the way home, he would be waiting at the school gate or on the far side of the road. I remember the first time I spoke to him: I had no one to walk home with that particular day, as my sister was going dancing and had left early, so I took my time coming out of school and wandered slowly through the playground. I made my way towards the big gates at the entrance to the school in the hope that I would see Hosus and be able to talk to him, so I was thrilled to see him peeping around the pillars. He shouted to me to hurry up: 'You've got to get home before it starts to rain.'

I stopped at the gate and looked around. There was no one nearby so I asked him his name.

'Hosus,' he said. I just giggled in response. I skipped home from school and he skipped along with me and all I can remember is laughing most of the way.

Chapter Two

The gatekeepers

Da didn't make much money out of mending bikes – in fact, no one had much money to spend in that area, so they were always asking him for help and promising to pay 'next time'. My da was a good-hearted man, so we frequently went hungry. The meals we had were often bread and margarine, or bread and jam, but I never complained of pains in my tummy because I knew that Mum and Da were stressed enough. Eventually, though, I started breaking out in sores and so I was taken to the doctor. He told my parents that I was vitamin deficient and they needed to give me fresh fruit and vegetables every day. But with all the pressures on money I rarely did get fruit and vegetables, other than when our neighbour – who had a big garden – gave us some. For clothes we depended a lot on parcels coming from relatives in the United States, and whenever one arrived we thought it was marvellous. Things were tough for us, as they were for so many others.

Da's shop was a dark little place and behind it was a lean-to with a tin roof which was his workshop. It was full of benches and tools – all kinds of things – and it smelt of oil and grease. Sometimes, before Da came in to the house for his tea, he would call me into the workshop and get me to help him by holding the tin of grease he used to clean his hands. It was black and sticky and smelled horrible, but it did the job. After rubbing the grease into his hands for a few minutes he would wipe them with a dirty old cloth and rub them hard. Then he would go into the kitchen and wash them with cold water (the only way to have hot water was to boil a kettle on the fire); after all this his hands would be all clean again. I loved helping my da – even just to hold the tin for him – and sometimes

he would ask me to stay in the shop while he was having tea with Mum, in case someone came in.

At school, Hosus would sometimes sit at the teacher's desk when the teacher wasn't there. The first day I saw Hosus in the classroom my eyes nearly popped out of my head: and I asked aloud, 'What are you doing here?' The teacher heard something and turned and glared in my direction. I had to put my hand to my mouth to stop myself from laughing.

The reason I was surprised was that, while there were always guardian angels in the classroom, Hosus was different. He was not a guardian angel. The guardian angels of the children were extremely bright, extremely luminous, like bright lights. Hosus looked completely different, much more human; his robe would brush against the desk. Hosus looked different to help me differentiate between guardian angels and special angels given to be a part of my life. As a child, I had to learn how to differentiate between different types of angels.

Different types of angels have different skills. Just as I and every child had to learn to differentiate between a teacher and a doctor, I had to learn to recognise different types of angels so as I had some idea of how they could help me and others.

Frequently Hosus made me laugh and I once asked him, 'Do you think they think I am simple, or that word I've heard them use, "retarded", because they see me smiling and laughing so much and don't see what I am laughing at? What do you think they would think if they knew you were sitting there on the teacher's desk dressed like a teacher?'

Hosus laughed, 'They would run out screaming that the place was haunted.'

'Wouldn't they know that you were an angel?'

'No. They don't see us the way that you do.'

As I say, I had always thought other children could see and talk to angels as I could, and it was only then when I was about six that I started to notice that this was not always the case.

'You know, Hosus, I know some children can see angels.'

He replied, 'Yes, of course they can, but only when they are very little and then they grow up. By the time they are your age most children don't see us any more; some stop seeing us when they are as young as three years old.'

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In fact, all babies see angels and spirits, but at about the time a child starts to talk they begin to be told what's real and what's not real, and so if things are not solid like their toys, then they are only pretend. Young children are conditioned and lose the ability to see and experience more. Because education starts earlier nowadays, fewer people are talking to angels; and this is one of the reasons the angels gave me when they told me I had to write this book. This is something I am scared about doing because I don't want to be ridiculed, but I know I have to do it; I always do what the angels want eventually . . .

There are millions of angels out there – they are impossible to count, like snowflakes – but many are unemployed. They are doing their best to help, but they can't always get through to people. Imagine millions of unemployed angels hovering about! They have nothing to do because most people are working hard at getting through their lives and are not aware that these angels are there to help them, and that they are everywhere.

God wants us to be happy and enjoy our lives, and so he sends angels to help us. We have so much spiritual help waiting for us to grasp, and while some of us do reach for help, many of us don't. Angels walk beside us telling us they are there, but we are not listening; we don't want to listen. We believe that we can do everything ourselves. We have forgotten that we have a soul and we believe that we are simply flesh and blood. We believe that there is nothing more: no afterlife; no God; no angels. It is no wonder that we have become materialistic and self-obsessed. Human beings are much more than flesh and blood, and as you become aware of this and start to believe that you have a soul, your connection with your angel will blossom.

As you sit there reading this – whether you believe it or not – there is an angel by your side: it is your guardian angel, and it never leaves you. Each one of us has been given a gift: a shield made from the energy of light. It is a part of the guardian angel's task to put this shield around us. To God and the angels we are all equal; we all deserve to be protected, to be cared for and to be loved, regardless of what others might think of us – good or bad. When I look at someone I can physically see this shield around them; it's as if it's alive.

Your guardian angel is the gatekeeper of your body and your soul. He was assigned to you before you were ever conceived: as you grew

in your mother's womb, he was there with you at every moment, protecting you. Once you were born and as you grow up your guardian angel never leaves your side for an instant: he is with you when you sleep, when you are in the bathroom, all the time – you are never alone. Then, when you die, your guardian angel is there beside you, helping you to pass over. Your guardian angel also allows other angels into your life to help you with different things; they come and go. I call these angels teachers.

You may find all this hard to believe; if you don't believe, you should question your scepticism. If you are cynical, question your cynicism. What do you have to lose by opening up to the possibility of angels, by opening up to your spiritual self and learning about your own soul? Ask the angels to start to help you now. Angels are wonderful teachers.

As a child I had the angels with me so much of the time, teaching me and showing me things, that I was very happy to be on my own for hours on end. One of my favourite places was the cosy little bedroom that I shared with my sister Emer. The ceiling was low and sloped and the window was low down so I could kneel or crouch on my hunkers and watch all the comings and goings on the street. I would watch neighbours passing in the street below and sometimes I would see beside them what I now know was their guardian angel – it was as if there was a beautiful, bright person with them. Sometimes the guardian angel seemed to be floating, but at other times he looked as if he was walking. Sometimes he even seemed to have become a part of the person, or was behind them with his wings wrapped around them, as if in a protective embrace.

These angels also came in all kinds of sizes: sometimes they would appear as a spark which would then grow and open up to full size; sometimes they would be massive, much bigger than the person they were minding. The guardian angels were radiant and were often dressed in all gold or silver or blue, or wore a variety of colours.

At other times I would see a spirit – just as I saw my brother Christopher. One neighbour, who lived at the top of the hill, used to pass the window sometimes with her children hanging on to her – a baby and a young child in a big old pram and two older children who were hardly more than babies themselves – and I would see an old man walking alongside them. One day this neighbour was with my mum in the shop and I heard her saying that she missed her father who had died recently.

I knew then that the old man I had seen was her father and the children's grandfather. I smiled because even though she was missing her father, he was still there with her – she just couldn't see him. He loved her so much that his spirit had stayed with her to offer her help and consolation, and would be with her until she was ready to let him go.

At first it was easy to confuse the appearance of these spirits with humans – I had done it myself with Christopher – but over time the angels taught me how to recognise the difference between a spirit and a real person. It's a little difficult to explain: a spirit looks just like one of us, but more luminous – as if they have a light inside of them. They can turn this light up and down; the higher the level of the light the more translucent and transparent they are. If the spirits have their lights turned down (which they do occasionally to make themselves less obtrusive), it's possible to mistake them for real flesh and blood. In simple terms, it's as if you say hello when you walk past a neighbour on the other side of the road, then a few minutes later it dawns on you that it was Johnny you had greeted, but that he died six months ago. It might only be then that you realise that Johnny looked brighter than normal people.

One of the other things I loved about watching from the windows was seeing the energy flowing around people. Sometimes I would see one of my friends' mothers and I would see swirling rays of light coming from her – shiny, sparkly mauve, purple, red, green or turquoise – which derived from a central point, like a whirlwind. It was an energy that was different to the woman's energy, and it always fascinated me. Sometimes, later, I would hear my mother say that this woman was going to have a baby and I would smile to myself.

In the same way, I also could see if people were ill, even if I didn't understand what I was seeing. A flowing dark shadow would move around the person's body, showing me that something was wrong with their blood. Sometimes a bone would flash and I could see that the bone was damaged or not forming properly, and I would know instinctively that something in their body was not right, even though I had no words to explain it.

One day I was sitting crouched at the window and I saw a man cycling down the road on a big black bicycle with his little daughter on

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the back carrier. The angels told me to keep watching them and not to take my eyes off them as they passed the window. I didn't ask them why; as a child I would do what the angels told me to without questioning them. I knew I was being asked to help this father and daughter, so even when they were passing my window I was praying for them. I didn't know what was going to happen, but I asked that it mightn't be too bad.

As the man and his daughter passed in front of the house everything seemed to slow down, like a film in slow motion. While they were cycling along a big double-decker bus overtook them, and the next moment, the little girl let out a scream and the man started to fall. Somehow, though, the child didn't fall off the bike. She had caught her foot in the spokes. I watched the father carefully disentangle her little foot and leg from the buckled and bent wheel with his shaking hands. He carried the crying child – she was gently sobbing rather than screaming – to the footpath just below the window where I was watching. Adults ran to help, including my mother. I dashed down the stairs and out the door to see if she was okay. As usual, no one took any notice of me. The little girl's shoe had come off and her foot was all raw and bloody; she'd taken the skin off the sole of her foot, but there was nothing broken. I asked God and the angels to help her still.

Even then, at five or six years old, I felt that I had a role to play in helping people. I believed that, because of my watching and praying as the father and daughter passed, something worse hadn't happened. Maybe she would have fallen under the bus, or fallen off and hit her head, but in the end she had only hurt her foot and, thanks be to God, she was all right. From then on there have been many occasions when I have felt I was put in a place to help; to prevent something happening or, if I couldn't stop it happening completely, to make the situation a little better. This was part of the training that my angels were giving me: I may have had problems learning in school, but I had no problems learning from the angels.

One day I was able to use this gift to help a friend's da. Josie was my best friend. She lived up the road from me and I liked her because she was different too – she had a stammer. In fact, she stammered quite badly, but when she was playing with me it practically disappeared, and then it would come back if anyone else joined us. She had long,

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straight, reddish hair and green eyes and she was taller than me and very skinny. Her da had a garage down the road – it wasn't like a petrol station, or the garages we have nowadays, it was an enormous yard full of wrecked cars and car parts. Her da was always telling us not to play there, but there was a little space to the right as you went in the gate which hadn't much in it, and eventually he said we could play in there on the condition that we never went anywhere else in the yard.

One lovely sunny day, a Sunday, we had our clean clothes on and were trying not to get them too dirty. We were playing with our dolls in this little place in the yard and we were laughing and joking. I remember feeling the angels talking to me all of the time and telling me to listen. I thought they meant that I should listen to them, but that wasn't what they meant this time. Finally, they touched me to get my attention. I remember stopping playing and listening. I thought I heard something, but I wasn't sure. When I asked Josie, she couldn't hear anything. So we went on playing and the angels again said, 'Listen!' I listened again and got a strange feeling – I can't describe it, it was as if I went into another time and space. I felt disorientated. As I listened I could hear Josie's father calling for help very faintly in the distance. Josie, however, couldn't hear anything.

We were afraid to go down among the wrecked cars, which were stacked high, because we knew that we were strictly forbidden from going there, but I decided to go anyway, and Josie followed me. As I followed an angel down through the wrecked cars, I remember repeatedly saying, 'Please God, please angels, please let her da be all right!'

We found Josie's father; a car had fallen on him and there was blood everywhere, but he was alive. I remember running off to get help and I think Josie stayed there. I'm not sure where I ran to: their house or my own. Everyone came running. They sent us away because we weren't allowed to be there when they were lifting the car off him, but I remember the ambulance coming. The hospital, St James's, was only up the road. Afterwards he was all right, he got better.

I thanked God and the angels that he was all right. Again, my angels had helped me to help someone.

As I have said before, your angels are there to help you, and as you start to acknowledge that they may exist, you will start to feel their touch

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in your life. Angels have, in fact, been touching you all along; willing you to realise that they are there. They want you to know that there is much more to life than there might seem. We do not live our lives on our own: we may be in a human body, but each of us has a soul that is connected to God. Angels are connected to God too; as soon as we call God's name we empower the angels.

In other words, we empower them to empower us. God has given us free will and the angels will not overstep that. If we tell them to go away, if we say we don't want help, then God and his angels will step to one side. But they will not go away completely: they will wait somewhere nearby.

Have you ever had an experience when you are heading off somewhere and you go right instead of left? Deep inside you knew that you should have gone left, and later you kick yourself for it. That would have been your angel whispering in your ear, telling you that you should go left. Angels are all around us, unseen and waiting to help. However, angels need to be asked for help. By asking we allow them to help us thus making the connection stronger between a person and their angel.

I realise now, after all these years, that I am an interpreter between angels and man, and as such I am frequently called in to intercede. While I have a particular role, all of us have the power to ask the angels to help at any time.

I have often asked the angels for help for my family. Things weren't easy when I was growing up; by the time I was six, Mum had three more babies – two girls, Helen and Aoife, and a boy, Barry – so there were five children. On top of this, Mum was often unwell and was frequently in hospital. When she went into hospital, the family was divided up and sent away to her relatives.

I was four when Emer and I first went to stay with my Aunty Mary. She lived with her husband and three children not too far away from where we lived, but although it may not have been many miles away, to me it was a world apart. When I first saw their house I thought it was a palace: it seemed enormous compared to our home. Everything in it was so luxurious and beautiful and it was warm, whereas our house felt damp and cold much of the time; here I could run around in my bare feet on the soft carpets. Meal times were incredible – loads

of food served on a beautiful table laid with matching cups and plates that seemed to be so delicate I was afraid I would break them. Every meal was like a feast – there was so much food to choose from. One day I was asked if I would like a fry up for breakfast, and I couldn't believe what I was given: sausages, fried egg, rashers, black pudding, tomatoes and toast – all for me! Nothing was halved or shared like at home. The best thing of all was the bathroom. I had a bath filled with hot water right up to the top of the bathtub – I felt like a princess.

This trip was the first time that I realised quite how poor we were.

While we were staying at Aunt Mary's, Mum's parents came to visit and I was made to put on my good dress – a grey-blue one with smocking across the front. I always loved wearing dresses and this was one of my favourites, so I was happy to put it on. I had only met my grandparents on a few previous occasions and I was very shy of them. They were both tall and looked like giants to me. Although they were both big, Granny was fat too, and she walked with a walking stick because she had had a stroke some years before.

Sometimes when Mum was well, if the weather was good, we would go off and have a picnic in the Phoenix Park – an enormous wide-open space on the outskirts of Dublin, with deer and all kinds of wonderful things. It was about two miles from home so we could walk there without too much problem. One Sunday, when I was seven, we all set off. Da pushed a bike with the picnic on the back carrier and Mum pushed my little baby brother, Barry, in the pram. Emer and I walked and my two younger sisters, Helen and Aoife, alternated between walking and sitting up on the pram.

We had a great picnic of tomato and jam sandwiches and apples from the next-door neighbour's garden and Da boiled up a billy can and made hot sweet tea for us all. After lunch I played football with my sisters and then I wandered off on my own among the big old trees. I loved playing among the trees there; the energy of certain trees – not all trees – would pull me towards them. It felt wonderful; a tingling, magic feeling which drew me towards the tree as if it were a magnet. I used to play a game with the trees, running around until the energy of a particular one grabbed me and then I would escape from it. I could play like this for hours. On this afternoon though, my sisters came

over and asked me what I was doing. I just said I was playing: I didn't bother to explain – they wouldn't have understood.

At the end of the afternoon we were exhausted from all the running about and were looking forward to getting home and having supper. However, even before we turned the corner into the Old Kilmainham road, where our house was, I knew something was wrong. Two very big angels were walking up the road towards me and I knew from the way they approached that something terrible had happened. When they reached me they each put an arm around me, and as we walked up the road they told me that the roof of our house had fallen in. I was shocked.

When we got to the house I was horrified by what I saw. I couldn't take my eyes off it: a large part of the roof had collapsed. My da tried to open the door but he couldn't get it open, and when he forced it with his shoulder a cloud of dust came out. Inside nothing was recognisable – it was just rubble. When the roof collapsed it had brought the ceilings crashing down. To my child's eyes the house was all broken. I remember thinking, where are we going to sleep now? We climbed in over the rubble, and to my little child's legs each bit of concrete or stone seemed enormous. There was dust everywhere and everything was broken into smithereens – all the furniture, all our toys, all Mum's precious things. I saw her crying as she picked up things from the ground and I stood in shock just watching Mum and Da try to salvage things. I remember Mum picking up a little dark brown milk jug with a cream stripe and saying, 'This is all that's left in one piece.'

That jug was all that was left of her wedding presents – she had so little, and now all she had was gone. I still remember seeing the tears in her eyes. It made me cry, too, in fact all of us cried, except my Da. He told us not to cry, that he would make things all right. Somehow, Mum and Da cleaned things up a little and Da propped the roof up a bit so we could sleep there that night, but it was very dangerous. I slept thinking about the fact that our house had fallen in and wondered, what will we do now, where will we go?

We were homeless, now, and Da had also lost his livelihood.

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Chapter Three

Stairway to Heaven

Thankfully, my cousin Nettie came to our rescue. She lived in a big house on her own even though she was hardly more than a child herself. A year or two earlier, at sixteen, she had inherited the house when both her parents had died. I don't know quite how it was agreed, and if we paid rent, but we went to live with her in her house in Ballymun on the north side of Dublin City – miles from Old Kilmainham.

At first I felt miserable moving – I loved Old Kilmainham – but when I got to Ballymun and saw the big garden and the big rooms I was happy. Most importantly, this house was solid and I knew it would never fall down. It had three bedrooms upstairs and, a real luxury, an indoor loo and a bath. Downstairs there was a lovely long kitchen at the back overlooking the garden, a front room and Nettie's bedroom, which had probably originally been a dining room.

The house had a magical garden; no garden since has ever seemed as big to me. We had so many adventures there. There was even a hay stack and, when there was a birthday party, sweets would be hidden in it. When he had time, Da grew vegetables – rows and rows of vegetables – everything you could think of, including peas, which we loved to pop, and he built huge strawberry beds.

At that time there were five children in the family. My brother Barry was only a baby, and between him and me there were two girls, Helen and Aoife, and then, of course, Emer, my older sister. I didn't play much with my brother and sisters; I only played with them when there was a birthday party or something like that. I suppose I had different interests to them. I saw the world with different eyes.

At first my new life was a little lonely, but I soon made new friends. I got to know the little girl, Rosaleen, who lived on the other side of