

THE SILENT SYMPHONY

Chapter 10: The Accident

The summer of 2005 had been the best of Mateo's young life. His performances for CF Barceloneta had been nothing short of spectacular, with the eight-year-old establishing himself as the most promising player in the Barcelona youth leagues.

Scouts from several professional clubs had begun attending his matches, and there was growing talk that he might be ready for the next level of competition.

But football, like life, has a way of humbling even the most gifted individuals when they least expect it.

The accident happened on a Tuesday afternoon during what should have been a routine training session.

CF Barceloneta was preparing for their most important match of the season, a cup final against FC Barcelona's youth team that would determine the regional champions.

The opportunity to play against La Masia's prospects had generated enormous excitement throughout the club, and Mateo had been training with an intensity that bordered on obsession.

"Easy, pequeño," Señor Vásquez had warned him earlier that week. "Save some energy for the match."

But Mateo couldn't help himself. The prospect of testing his skills against Barcelona's youth academy was too exciting to approach with anything less than total commitment.

Every training session became an opportunity to refine his technique, to push his abilities to new limits, to prepare for what he saw as the most important ninety minutes of his young career.

The session had been progressing normally when disaster struck.

The team was practicing crossing and finishing, with Mateo playing his usual role as the creative midfielder who would provide the final pass or shot.

He had already scored twice from similar situations, his finishing as clinical as ever, when Pau delivered a cross that was slightly overhit.

The ball was heading toward the goal line, seemingly destined to go out of play, but Mateo saw an opportunity that others missed.

If he could reach it before it crossed the line, he could cut it back for Sergi, who was making a late run into the penalty area. It would be a difficult piece of skill, requiring perfect timing and exceptional ball control, but Mateo had never shied away from challenges.

He sprinted toward the goal line with the kind of desperate speed that only comes when everything is on the line.

His eyes were fixed on the ball, calculating the precise moment when he would need to slide to keep it in play. The mathematics of the situation played out in his mind with the clarity that had become his trademark: angle of approach, speed of the ball, timing of the slide. This chapter is updated by n0velfire.net

What he didn't see was the goalpost.

The collision was sickening in its violence.

Mateo's head struck the metal post with a sound that echoed across the training ground like a gunshot. His small body crumpled to the ground immediately, the ball rolling harmlessly over the goal line as his teammates and coaches rushed toward him in panic.

"¡Mateo! ¡Mateo!" Señor Vásquez shouted, dropping to his knees beside the motionless boy.

There was blood.

Too much blood. It pooled beneath Mateo's head, staining the grass a dark crimson that made several of the younger players turn away in horror. His eyes were closed, his breathing shallow and irregular, his face pale as marble.

"Call an ambulance!" Miguel Santos screamed, his voice cracking with emotion. "Now!"

The next few hours passed in a blur of sirens, hospital corridors, and worried faces.

Don Carlos arrived at the Hospital Clínic within minutes of receiving the call, his usual calm demeanor shattered by the sight of Mateo lying unconscious in the emergency room.

Sister María Elena followed shortly after, her hands clasped in prayer as doctors worked frantically to assess the extent of the damage.

"He has a severe concussion," Dr. Ramírez explained to the assembled group of worried adults. "There's some swelling in the brain, and we're monitoring him closely for any signs of increased pressure. The next twenty-four hours will be critical."

"Will he be okay?" Don Carlos asked, his voice barely above a whisper.

"It's too early to say," the doctor replied honestly. "Head injuries in children can be unpredictable. We're doing everything we can."

The vigil began immediately.

Don Carlos and Sister María Elena took turns sitting beside Mateo's bed, watching for any sign of consciousness, any indication that the boy who had brought so much joy to their lives would return to them.

The other children from Casa de los Niños were brought to visit in small groups, their young faces etched with worry and confusion.

Mateo remained unconscious for three days.

When he finally opened his eyes on Friday morning, the relief in the room was palpable. Don Carlos was holding his hand, and Sister María Elena was reading quietly from a book of prayers.

The first thing Mateo saw was their faces, creased with worry but brightening immediately as they realized he was awake.

"Pequeño," Don Carlos whispered, tears streaming down his cheeks. "Thank God you're back with us."

Mateo tried to speak, but no words came. He opened his mouth, moved his lips, but only silence emerged.

Panic flickered in his eyes as he tried again, his throat working desperately to produce sound that simply wouldn't come.

"It's okay," Sister María Elena said quickly, recognizing his distress. "Don't try to talk right now. You've been hurt, and you need time to heal."

But Mateo knew immediately that something was wrong.

The silence wasn't temporary; it was complete and absolute. The voice that had expressed his dreams, his thoughts, his love for the beautiful game; it was gone.

Dr. Ramírez arrived within minutes of being notified that Mateo was conscious. His examination was thorough but gentle, testing reflexes, coordination, and cognitive function. When he finally addressed the elephant in the room, his voice was carefully neutral.

"Mateo, I need you to try to say your name for me," he requested.

Mateo's lips moved, his throat strained, but no sound emerged. The effort was visible and heartbreaking, his frustration mounting with each failed attempt.

"The inability to speak is not uncommon after this type of head injury," Dr. Ramírez explained to Don Carlos and Sister María Elena. "It could be physical damage to the speech centers of the brain, or it could be psychological trauma. Sometimes the mind protects itself by shutting down certain functions."

"Will it come back?" Don Carlos asked.

"It's possible," the doctor said carefully. "But I want to be honest with you – there are no guarantees. We'll need to run more tests, consult with specialists, and see how he responds to treatment over the coming weeks."