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Miracle Child

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had put Ann wholly in the hands of God and now must obediently await His judgment. A few days later when we were visiting Ann, Sister Mary Alice stopped us outside the room.

"I didn't want to say anything before," she told me, "but improvement began just after you left Sunday. Ann's breathing and fever eased. She spent a restful night. The improvement has continued since."

As I entered Ann's room, I whispered my prayer.

"Mother!" Ann's voice was so strong! When I stooped to kiss her, my eyes filled with tears. Ann's face was pale but the puffiness was gone. Her dark eyes focused on me. "Take me home," she said sternly.

"Soon, real soon," I replied, hugging her.

Every day we watched Ann grow stronger. The chicken pox vanished; the bluish veins subsided. Ann sat up. One day, I helped her out of bed and guided her a few steps across the room. Then I let go. Ann tottered a bit, then walked to a table, chattering away as of old.

A doctor who had been caring for her said: "I don't know what's going on inside, but what I see on the outside is unbelievable."

We knew that many believed Ann's recovery was really a "remission," that we had cruelly duped ourselves into believing her cured, and that we would suffer all the more when we finally lost her. But Bob and I had no doubts.

Two weeks after our novena began, Ann was discharged from the hospital.

"Thank You for Our Child"

It was a raw and rainy Sunday, so I tucked Ann warmly in our car, and we started on our pilgrimage to Emmitsburg, 50 miles away, where Mother Seton is buried. Her remains, at the time, were in a small chapel on the grounds of St. Joseph's Provincial House and College. We carried Ann across the west grounds and entered through an arched door. The tomb was covered by a slab of marble. Bob lifted Ann and stood her atop it. She was a child of Mother Seton's now, as well as ours. In the dimming light of early evening, Bob and I knelt and said a prayer which we have never ceased saying:

"Dear God, thank You for manifesting Your miraculous powers, through the intercession of Mother Seton . . . thank You for our child . . ."

Epilogue: Two years after Ann's recovery, the O'Neills were visited by a postulator general—a Vatican representative, often called the "devil's advocate"—who seeks natural explanations for alleged miracles. The official investigation continued for eight years; he studied all records, questioned participants in the case, and obtained outside medical opinion.

Dr. Sacks testified that Ann suffered from "acute lymphatic leukemia"; that no trace of it now existed; that he knew of no medical means to cure it.

Two experts in the field of haematology, Dr. William Dameshek of Tufts College and Dr. Sidney Farber of Harvard, sustained the original diagnoses of several doctors on the basis of records. In addition, bone marrow was extracted from Ann's chest and examined. It showed no signs of leukemia, and experts admitted they knew of no case like Ann's.

The medical experts agreed that neither blood transfusions nor then current drugs could do more than slow the fatal disease. Few children live more than two years with leukemia, although there is one rare medical case in which a boy lived seven and a half years but was under constant medical attention. Ann has had no leukemia treatments for 11 years.

Today Ann is a shy teen-ager who listens to Bobby Rydell records and lives with four younger sisters in a small home in Catonsville, Md. She is described as "average" in school and hopes someday to be a nurse.