

# THE STORY OF MARY ANNE

When Mary Anne woke and found herself in the hospital room. Fr. Martin was sitting by the bed. He looked at her but said nothing.

He didn't have to tell her. She knew. She was going to die soon. At the age of thirty-five. The wife of a husband she loved. The mother of four small children.

She looked around the room. "Peter has gone home to the children", said Fr. Martin.

She lay quiet for a long time, then:

"I see they have left my handbag, Father. There is a small blue diary in the bottom of it. Before you go I would like you to read it, and then keep it, please."

Presently she slept.

The priest found the book, opened it at the beginning and began to read.

"This story begins on the day I spoke to Father Martin about Mary being the Mediatrix of All Grace . . . ."

MARY Anne liked new things; this was one reason, even if a minor one, why she enjoyed her visit to the church after school. The sun usually shone through the stained glass panels on the west side then, and made coloured patterns all over the sanctuary. Sometimes she stayed quite a while, and if she were distracted from talking with Our Lord she would find herself weaving dreams to fit the patterns. The church had been not quite completed when she arrived in the parish a year before, and she liked to think that there was a bond between them. She had loved the new church at once, especially the stained-glass window of Our Lady which took up most of the back wall, and looked so lovely from the street when the lights were on inside at night. The altar was a simple table of marble, and just right as a place of sacrifice. The walls were made up almost completely of unbroken oblongs of stained glass, each with its own inspiration. The moods of the church changed with the variations of weather and light from out-side.

This afternoon her visit was rather short. She hoped that she would be able to see Father Martin. After studying his habits for some time now—this appeared necessary, as priests seem very hard to find just when you need them—she knew that on a fine day like this he would probably be saying his Office at this time, in the semi-enclosed courtyard on the western side, between the church and the presbytery.

Father Martin was a dear, really. He had done Mission work for some years with the Order which was responsible for the parish church, and had returned here after an accident of some kind and a serious illness. She was very curious about the accident, but had never enquired because it had left him with a pronounced limp, and she thought that he might be embarrassed about it. In any case, he usually said his Office limping up and down the yard. He wasn't the most popular priest in the parish because he didn't take much part in the more vigorous activities of the young people, but Mary Anne had often seen him finish his prayers in front of Our Lady's altar, and any friend of Mary's was a friend of hers, so on occasions she had followed him out of the church to ask about some of the problems that confront adolescents. He was very kind under a rather gruff exterior, quick to the point, and his sympathy with human nature enabled him to understand the undercurrents of thought and emotion which were not very easy to put into words.

Mary Anne paused a moment in front of Our Lady's statue, said a quick "Let Him be there, Mary," and slipped out the side door into the courtyard. There he was, going along his usual track, and moving quite fast considering the extent of his disability. This was not altogether a good sign. Father Martin usually moved faster than usual when he had something on his mind, or when his leg ached, which she knew it did periodically.

She took up her usual position at the far end of his beat and waited for him to notice. He gave her a quick glance over his book as he turned at the end and continued his walking. This was his usual practice. He had once said something about finishing a psalm before he could stop, and the length of time this took varied considerably. Today it was a sudden halt at the end of the next round.

"Well ?"

"I was wondering if you had a few minutes, please, Father."

Father Martin learnt from experience, too, and he knew that this meant a discussion. He didn't have the time really. There was a lecture to be given tonight to some gathering or other on the peculiarities of native languages in the

islands where he had worked as a missionary. He was a scholar in various fields, and was called on sometimes to lecture to different groups on the more unusual aspects of a number of subjects. He was not yet thoroughly familiar with to-night's lecture, and had hoped to spend most of the next two hours revising his notes. On the other hand, Mary Anne was one of his favourites; in fact, she was his idea of what a Catholic young miss should be—intelligent, virtuous in a pleasant way, mischievous, modern, with an already deep and still growing love of Christ and a particular devotion to Our Lady.

Now Father Martin surveyed her. His keen eye took in the signs of a day at school. The hat was sagging around the brim, shoes dusty, hair unruly, mischief mostly evaporated for the time being. He studied the keen grey eyes, and saw that she was very much in earnest. It was characteristic of him that he decided without hesitation that even a little help in the formation of Mary Anne's ideals would mean more in the long run than technicalities discussed with scholars. So he closed his book and looked around.

Mary Anne knew that this was a good sign. Whenever Father Martin was going to give his full attention to anything he sat down on the nearest object. Now he turned abruptly and made his way to the fountain in the centre of the courtyard, where he sat down on one of the low pillars situated at intervals in the wall around the base.

Mary Anne perched on a similar one a few feet away. "Father," she asked, "what is a mediatrix?"

"A 'mediatrix' is a female mediator. A mediator is a person who stands in the middle and unites individuals or groups of people who are opposed."

"What do we mean when we say that Our Lady is the Mediatrix of all Graces?"

"Do you need this information in any particular connection?"

"Yes, Father, we are to do a paper for religious instruction class on Our Lady, choosing any aspect we like. I want to write on that subject."

"How old are you?"

This was another peculiarity of Father Martin's; when the discussion did not seem to be achieving its purpose he would suddenly change the trend of the conversation altogether, and take a line of approach which he thought would clarify the matter more in the long run.

"Fifteen, Father."

"Well, in that case it was something over fifteen years ago that God decided to make yet another human being. He looked out over the vast sea of possible people whom He could make. There were brilliant men who would know Him well and love Him with all their strength; there were beautiful women who would rise to the heights of culture and virtue and be a credit to the human race; there were possible saints and scholars, scientists, statesmen, philosophers, kings and queens. All of these looked up to God from their nothingness and their souls longed for creation.

"While God considered all of these the Mother of God came to His side and spoke to Him: 'Make this one' (pointing to the soul of a little girl). 'Give her the blessing of creation. Bring her into this world sound in body, without any defects of limb or sight or hearing or speech. Give her a robust constitution so that she will always be healthy. Give her a generous measure of intelligence, a pleasant temperament, a sparkling personality, so that she will be able to glorify You by using all these gifts well.

"Bring her into a good Catholic home, with parents to love her and bring her up in security and with affection.

Look after her in her birth so that she will not die, but live to receive the sacrament of Baptism and so share in the life of God by grace.

"As a special privilege, which will one day be a help to her in the salvation of her soul, let her be called by my name.'

"All these things did happen just because the Mother of God went to her Son and asked that it be so.

"So fifteen years ago there was born into this world a baby girl. She was called Mary Anne. She grew up in a pious home, with good parents to care for her. And the Mother of God cared for her, too. Many blessings came into her life because Mary obtained them for her. In all the illnesses that attack small children, and sometimes prove fatal, she was preserved from any serious consequences: On many occasions she was close to danger and escaped unscathed or did not even know about it. She was loved and cared for; was taught her prayers very early in life.

"When the time came for her to go to school she was confided to the care of Sisters who taught her the beginnings

of the love of God and His Mother. Eventually she was prepared for her Confession and First Holy Communion. She confessed her sins and received her God at the altar rails. Her success in studies was more than reasonable.

“All these things, too, were gifts and graces from God, which were given because Mary went to Him and asked for them on behalf of this favoured child.

“There are other graces also which have come to this soul in the course of the years. Some of them I know about; many of them you know about; most of them are known only to God and His Mother who bestowed them.”

Father Martin paused in his story. Mary Anne was unusually silent. Did Father know just how accurate he was? Did he realize that it was precisely because she had become aware of a long chain of graces in her life obtained through the intercession of Mary that she was enquiring about her powers of intercession? She remembered how very sophisticated she had become about twelve months ago, for example. There had been a very smart set of girls at the school she was attending, and it had seemed important at the time to be in with them. This had led to a series of escapades which were doubtful, to say the least. The net had drawn tighter each week, until she realized that she must get out of the whole business.

She went to Mary and prayed desperately: “Please help me, Mary, I can’t go to my parents; they would be so disappointed in me. Unless I can break away from these companions now I fear that I will commit serious sin, and I don’t want to do that. Help me to love your Jesus and do something for me.”

She knew that it certainly was far from coincidence that her father was transferred only a week later. During the last year she had become more and more aware of how much she owed to Mary, as she fondly came to call Our Lady. Now she heard Father Martin put into words what she was coming to know by experience—that all her favours came through Mary. Her mind flashed back over the years, and she saw the Mother of God bending over her all the time, going to her Son day after day and asking for graces for the thoughtless child who bore her own name.

It would be as well to get the whole matter straightened out once and for all. So she brought her attention back to Father Martin and asked: “And please, Father, just exactly how many of the graces we receive does Mary get for us?”

“I think St. Bernard expressed it very well a long time ago. Incidentally, Pope Pius XII agrees with me because he quoted the words in one of his Encyclicals a few years ago. Using the words of this saint who wrote so well about Our Lady on so many occasions, he said: ‘It is the will of God that we should have nothing which has not passed through the hands of Mary!’”\*

“And that means utterly everything?”

“Utterly. It includes all graces without restriction, and that means anything which in any way helps us to glorify God and gain eternal life. Our Lady gets for us the first infusion of sanctifying grace; she is responsible for every actual grace. It is through her that we receive all our religious instruction. Every inspiration we have, every enlightenment, every help to overcome temptation, even the ‘accidents’ of our spiritual life, such as being prevented from going to some place where we would have sinned. All these things come to us because the Mother of God goes to Him and asks for them on our behalf. It is through Mary that the conversion of sinners comes about; she is responsible for the conversion of all those who come to the Church from heresy or unbelief. The Mass and the Sacraments have all the power of bestowing grace given them by God, but it is Mary who gets this grace for us. When we ask the saints to obtain things for us they do intercede for us, of course, but they go to God through His Mother. All the blessings they received during their lifetime were given through her and they give their favours through her now.

“This tender solicitude of our Mother in heaven extends to even the details of our life. She asks for and obtains for us the helps to salvation given by hearing a sermon, making a retreat, receiving good advice, seeing good example.

“In fact, we mean just what we say when we call Our Blessed Lady the Mediatrix of ALL graces. In particular, there is one grace which we especially depend on her to obtain for us, and that is the grace of a happy death. We can never earn that ourselves; that is why the Church tells us to ask her for that every time we say the Hail Mary ... . pray for us sinners now and in the hour of our death.”

“Does Mary think about each one of us all the time? In fact she would have to keep in mind everybody in the whole world and get favours for them all day long. Does she do that?”

\**P. Pius XII Ency. Doctor Mellifluus, 1953, A.A.S. Vol. 45, 1953, p. 382*

“Yes. Our Lady’s intercession concerns every soul that has lived or died since her Assumption into heaven. It will include all those yet to come on earth. During her life-time she joined with her Son to merit for them all; at present God makes it possible for her to know about them all and their every grace comes through her mediation. This includes all graces given to the souls in purgatory. This does not mean that all souls will be saved as a result, even though she does ask for, and actually gives to every soul enough grace for salvation. Some will put obstacles in the way of the working of this grace and as a result will not be saved.

“All the graces and helps she does give she gets by asking for them. She asks God for each one and then grants it to the soul concerned. Sometimes this will be as a result of prayer, but often it will all be done without any prayer at all, because she knows our needs and sees that we either will not know to ask or will neglect to do so. Every grace you have ever received, whether you even knew it as a grace at the time or not, was merited, asked for and given to you by the Mother of God.”

“She really is terrific, isn’t she?”

“I think she would accept that compliment.”

“It is a big job Mary has, Father. Why did God give her all that to do?”

“Because He is God and therefore powerful and generous and good. He did not have to give Our Lady any of these privileges, but He did freely choose to do it; out of His sheer generosity He decided to give her the privilege of the Immaculate Conception; of His own goodness He made her the Mother of God. He was lavish in the share He gave her with His Son in the work of redemption, and just because He loves her so much He now gives her the privilege of being the dispenser of all the graces which are ever given. He has given these privileges and He has told us that He has done so. We can only rejoice that one of our human race has been so favoured and take full advantage of it.”

By this time Father Martin was getting quite wrapped up in his subject, and was glaring at Mary Anne as if to impress these truths on her once and for all.

“Since her Assumption into heaven she supervises the distribution of every grace. Every blessing, every gift, every help on our way to God—even though not asked for or acknowledged—comes through the ever-watchful, all-solicitous intercession of Mary. EVERY ONE! REMEMBER THAT. EVERY ONE!

“Especially, Mary Anne, we must always be asking her to get for us that most important grace of a happy death. “Don’t forget these things now, will you?”

“No, Father.”

It was twenty years before Father Martin came to know just how well Mary Anne did remember.

He sat there reading the diary while she slept. From time to time he paused and remembered things from his own life which fitted in; sometimes, too, he made reflections on what was in the little blue diary. Much of what was contained was everyday information, but he began to see a theme in the whole account by linking up events and impressions which occurred here and there.

“Today I spoke to Father Martin about you, Mary. He was inclined to get a little technical, but he made me realize something of the vastness of your power and generosity. He must have thought me ungrateful because I left him in a slight daze without saying ‘thank you.’ It was like looking through a crack in the tower of a castle on a mountain. Inside the room was dark and, confined. Outside I could see a glimpse of a magnificent landscape, with mountains and valleys, heights and depths, light and shade, extending to the horizon and blending with the glorious heavens. It was like being locked in there for a long time and finding the crack for the first time. Father went to a lot of trouble to explain all about you, and it came to me suddenly, this beautiful vision of your splendour. I hugged it to my heart and went back into the church to impress it on my mind before it went away. I want to make this the theme of my life from now on—to be a daughter of Mary, to live as you would live in these modern times, to love Christ as you love Him.

“I think it might help if I write down something about it regularly, so I have begun this diary. I must write out that paper for Sister soon, before I forget all that Father told me. Also, there are quite a few graces I want you to get for me, and I will give you a list of all those, too.

“I never did get that paper written, even though I wrote out what I could remember of Father’s words. When I came to set it out I just couldn’t manage. The subject was so vast. It was like trying to see all around yourself at once. When I looked at one part I couldn’t see the rest, so I wrote about something else.

“It is very simple really; you were associated with Christ when He merited all graces and He distributes them all, every one—Father was very emphatic about that, wasn’t he? —through you. It’s so easy to understand but so hard to put down in such a way that it all unfolds point by point. Perhaps Father Martin could do it; I rather think he could.

“He is a dear, isn’t he, Mary? And I just know he loves you so. Bless him, won’t you? While I write this I remember that what he said about other things is true of himself. Just knowing him and talking to him sometimes is a grace because it helps me love God and you, and so is something you get for me. Thank you for letting me know him.

“You know about the exams next week, of course. You have been very good to me about exams in the past so, please help me this time.

“I never did write out that list of intentions I had for you. It’s people mostly. There’s one I’ve told you about often, and that’s my father. He isn’t a Catholic, and that does make things hard for my mother. He never does anything but encourage us in our faith, but there are things he just can’t understand—like going to midnight Mass—and so my mother must get very lonely sometimes. I heard a priest say not long ago that the faith is often given to non-Catholics who have lived a good life according to their beliefs. He is good, Mary; you know that, so please get the faith for him. I must say that if he is interested at all he doesn’t give much indication, but you can do it.

“Today I found this quotation taken from the Encyclical (that is spelt correctly, isn’t it?) of Pius XI on the Rosary

“We know that all things are given to us by the great and good God through the hands of His Mother.”\*

“The Church certainly believes in your power, Mary. P.S.: Please let Father Martin’s leg not ache too much, and thanks about those exams. That’s one more favour you have got for me.

“About my young brother, Mary. I just don’t know what special grace to ask you to get for him. He’s eighteen and left college last year. Seems very unsettled. He came home a long time after us last night and didn’t say where he’d been. He goes to Holy Communion several times a week, though. It seems as if he is almost deliberately being wild sometimes. I wonder if he is fighting a vocation. If I do something special for him will you get for him the grace he needs, whatever it is, please? Suppose I get up and go to Mass and Holy Communion every Saturday just for him? I do like that sleep-in on Saturday morning, but you have been good to me and you are the Mediatrix of ALL graces and I do love the big loaf.

“Mother of God, what can I say? Last night I committed mortal sin—for the first time as far as I know—and I almost did a dreadful thing this morning and received Holy Communion in that state.

“It’s not as if I didn’t know either; I’ve been told by those who love me.

“It seemed marvellous at first when Des began to take me out. He is handsome and has the latest sports car and plenty of money. He took me to all the places I’ve always wanted to go.

“But I should have known when I wasn’t able to talk to you about it. My mother wasn’t very pleased either.

“Father Martin was quite blunt. When I took the Children of Mary notices down one Saturday he was in the courtyard. I stopped to say hello, but he paused in his Office just long enough to say, ‘Girls of eighteen are too young to go steady—especially with non-Catholics.’ Then he stalked off.

“My big brother John doesn’t often meddle in my affairs, but one night he stopped passing my room; I was doing my nails and the door was open. He leaned against one side of the opening. He is usually flippant with me, but this time he was quite serious.

“‘Look, kid,’ he said, ‘what do you want to get around with this guy for? He’s just not your kind.

“‘You have all the equipment to do a good job as a woman—looks, personality, poise. You can give a man something to live for one day. Why waste it all on the wrong guy?’

“My look of scornful ‘how would you know and why don’t you mind your own business’ didn’t seem to bother him, so I shrugged and said nothing.

“So in spite of all these graces I sinned. I made the elementary error of staying in a parked car. I’d done it before and thought I was immune. So I sinned and I’m ashamed.

“It was far from the worst a young couple can do, but there was passion and touching, and it’s not even as if I love him. I’m quite sure now, I don’t. And to think how often I’ve prayed to meet the right man eventually, and promised you I would keep my womanhood and my kisses only for the one man I married.

\**Envy. Ingravescensibus Malls, A.A.S. Vol. 29, 1937, p. 380.*

“I did wake up enough before I left him to say that I didn’t want to see him any more, and I know he’s gone for good now.

“Were the tears I wept into my pillow later on tears of sorrow for having offended God or just tears for my own shame? Even then I was thinking, ‘what will the other girls say when they find out I’ve lost him?’

“But this morning I could have died. It was only while I was dressing that I realized it was the feast of your Holy Family, and Father had asked us to go to Holy Communion in family groups. My mother had us all organized, my two brothers, myself and my two younger sisters. They all knew I’d been to Confession the day before.

“We sat together in the church and it was agony. As Holy Communion time came around I was cold all over, and still had my missal open at the Introit. Only you knew how I prayed to you then, ‘Please, Mother of God, don’t let me do it; I feel I’ll just get up and go, but don’t let me.’ When Susan pushed me and told me to go on, then I nearly failed—and the way she looked at me as she pushed past. Thank you for that grace. I do love Jesus, you know I do, and couldn’t stand to have done that. Afterwards I mumbled something about breaking my fast, and even that wasn’t very big of me. But I felt so ashamed I thought everyone would know.

“This afternoon I just couldn’t stand it any more, being in mortal sin, I mean, so I went down and saw Father Martin. I’d made an Act of Contrition, of course, with your help, and I knew that put me in the state of grace again, but I had to get back to the Sacraments. I felt I just couldn’t ask to go to Confession and go in and tell my sin, so I went to the presbytery and told Father Martin all about it first.

“He was marvellous. I think he’d just got up from an afternoon sleep. He usually has one on Sundays because he finds two early Masses something of a strain. He was still a little bleary-eyed when I arrived, but he seems to know when I need help most, and he listened as only he can. He said just enough to help me tell my woes, and he didn’t seem to mind when I cried and naturally you have eventually a complete picture of the man you want to share your life with. You know all about his character—he must be a man, real man—his temperament, even his appearance. Then one day someone comes along and fits the picture, and presto, you’re in love. From the top of your head to the soles of your feet, you’re in love.

“Well, today it happened. I just looked up and there he was. You can tell a real man right away. He just stood out from the rest. He was rather tall and not in a dither like so many of those money chasers. Someone introduced us and I just melted inside. I pride myself on my poise, but there I was like a giggling schoolgirl. I can’t remember much of what we said, but his eyes and hair are brown; there are a few little crinkles around his eyes because he smiles so nicely.

“I’m slipping, Mary; I can just feel myself going over-board about him. Please help me now. I know I must be careful. I don’t even know if he is a Catholic, but please let him be. Perhaps he didn’t even notice me really. I might never see him again. He didn’t ask to see me again. Oh, Mary, let him be all I think he is; let him be a Catholic and let him be interested in poor little me. I’m twenty-two now you know.

“O Mary, today I met him! His name is Peter. I didn’t want to go to that stuffy gathering but my boss wanted a report on the proceedings, something about modern marketing. I wasn’t really dressed for meetings either, but I was the only one who could take shorthand well enough. So I went along and there he was. I knew almost straight away. I did read somewhere once that you can fall in love at first sight—something about building up an ideal man in your heart as you grow up. You build up your ideals one by one; you know that your vocation is to be a wife and a mother.

“Peter came to the office today. His firm wanted to place an order with us. He could easily have rung, but he came himself and I think his eyes did light up when he saw me. I was dressed-up, too; you can’t run risks at a time like this. He is coming back to check the list before despatch.

“I seem to have known him all my life; we fit in just so well. Really, it’s only six weeks. I’ll never forget our first night out. He does everything so well. Is it wrong, Mary, if stars light up all around you when you are kissed by the man you love? Just normally kissed, I mean. I hope it’s not, because otherwise it’s going to be a long, dry spell. Wasn’t it lovely the way he said to my mother as we left, ‘I’ll have her home in good time; she has to be up for Children of Mary Mass, doesn’t she?’

“I couldn’t help asking him when we got out the gate just how he knew I was a Catholic and all that.

“I saw the little blue miraculous medal on your watch chain the first time I saw you. I have a sister in the Children

of Mary, and I drove her to the church tonight for Confession.’ It was his way of telling he is a Catholic, too. He is very capable, is my Peter. And thanks about the medal, Mary. Perhaps I would never have seen him again except for that. He did like me that first time I know, but he is the type who loves Christ like a man should, and I think he would fall out of love if he had to.

“I was at a retreat over the weekend. You can imagine how delighted I was when the priest spoke on you as the Mediatrix of all grace. It is something we don’t hear enough about. I had a pencil and notebook with me, so I took down the gist of the talk in shorthand:

“Mary, in her own way, merited all the grace she distributes. A man and a woman were associated in the ruin of humanity by original sin, and it is God’s design that a man and a woman be concerned together in the restoration to grace. The Man is Christ, and the Woman is Mary, His Mother. The correspondence is fairly close. It was Adam who was fundamentally responsible for the fall of man; Eve could not have done it on her own.. In the same way it is Christ who is absolutely responsible for the redemption of the race; Mary could not have done that. In fact, Christ redeemed the human race by His Passion and Death and made salvation possible. Now glorious in heaven He continues to sanctify the souls of men by interceding with God and dispensing grace through His humanity. But Our Lady was associated with Him in the whole of His life and with the great work of redemption which He did. In fact, all souls must be associated with Him if they want to be saved. We must work out our own salvation by sanctifying ourselves, using the grace He won for us. Not only that, but we are able to get grace for others, too. This does not add anything to the merit and atonement of Christ; it serves only to apply to individuals what Christ has made available for all. This association continues in heaven, where the saints take a part in the distribution of grace.

“This store of grace is like a big reservoir of water, from which pipes run out in all directions, with taps everywhere. The water has all been put in there by Christ. Mary could not have done it in any way by herself; only be associated with her Son when He did it. Now that the water is there she can turn on the taps. The other saints turn on some of them, but she turns them all. Don’t forget that Mary is a member of the human race, too, and she had to be redeemed as well as others; but because she was so closely associated with Christ she was redeemed uniquely. She was not born into the world stained with original sin in the first place, so that she was never under the domination of Satan in any way. By her free consent to be the Mother of God she entered into the great work of redemption with her Son. This participation in His work continued all through His life, through His Passion and on Mount Calvary, and in fact will continue until the end of time.

“So she is said to have redeemed the human race with Him. This does not mean that she paid the price of redemption; she could not do that. She had to have it paid for her, but she was so closely associated with Him that she is called the co-redemptrix of the human race.

“After she had helped Christ to merit all the necessary grace she helps in its distribution. First, she applied it to herself, and merited the glory she now has in heaven. Then, just as we can intercede for others and have grace applied to them so does Our Lady—we, perhaps, to some, but she to all. She has, as it were, convinced God to make grace available to everyone by her intercession and her part in the redemption. She, in other words, has won for all men every grace they ever receive. Now she disposes God to give every grace He ever does . . . .’

“Peter put the ring on my finger today in the Lady Chapel of that Church in the city where we go so often. Father Martin blessed it for us last night. He was quite pleased about the little invocation—‘Ave Maria’—to you, which I had engraved on the inside. There were a lot of people around today when Peter put it on and held my hand briefly, but there seemed to be just the two of us in the whole world.

“We’ve set the wedding date, too; six months away. We must have Nuptial Mass, of course, and it just happens that your feast of Mediatrix of All Graces falls on a Saturday next time, so it is a natural. It will be a big day for us. I can look back then and see all the graces I’ve had to prepare me for marriage, and know that they all come to me because you went to Jesus and asked for them. And I can look forward and tell you some others that I’ll need to be a good wife.

“It is just like my father to do a thing like that. Apparently, after Peter asked him if we could get married he went off over the other side of the city to a priest he’d heard of and asked if he could receive instructions in the Faith. He’d rather do it himself than ask us to take him along. Today he came in to dinner and asked if parents were allowed to

receive Holy Communion at Nuptial Mass. When I asked why he just said, ‘Well, I would like to go with your mother the morning you get married.’

“We looked at one another for a while. We thought he might consider it normal for non-Catholics to receive if they wanted to.

“‘It’s all right,’ he said, ‘I’m being received into the Church next week.’

“There was bedlam for a while then. My mother just sat there with tears in her eyes. She has suffered and prayed a long time for this. The rest of us went wild. Thank you, Mary.

“Wedding plans well in hand. My brother will be able to come home from the seminary and serve on the altar. Did I do enough Saturdays in thanksgiving for him, Mary? I did go nearly every Saturday for almost a year before he went off to become a priest in an Order particularly devoted to you. Aren’t you just too cute about the way you answer prayers? I think he must have told mother some time before we knew, and he must have got her to talk to dad about it. She must have known, because sometimes I would see her just looking at him, and once or twice I found her weeping quietly.

“Anyhow, I made the five First Saturdays in thanksgiving and then added another Novena of Masses because he joined your crowd. Bless him and make him a good priest. Give him some of Father Martin’s understanding, but not so many rough edges, eh~, I didn’t tell him about anything, of course. He came into my room one night when I was in bed reading and told me about it. He let me kiss him congratulations, too, and he doesn’t often do that. He’s a man now. That’s one grace I’ve had; there have been men in my life, like dad and Peter and my darling young brother. It helps me to know what Christ was like in Nazareth.

“But about this wedding—a fine day please, Mary.

“And thank you for getting Father Martin to talk to Peter. Where do priests get their insight from? Anyhow he got hold of Peter and told him that most girls get the ‘jitters’ about this time before they get married. He said I would be moody sometimes and a bit unreasonable, because, he said, marriage is a big step in a girl’s life. He must have told him to talk to me a lot and tell me he loved me often, because since then Peter has been marvellous that way. From what Peter has said it seems that Father said a girl sets the standard early in company keeping, and if she is good enough and sets a high standard and is an inspiration to her man, then he really falls in love with her. But towards the end a girl gets very weak, and it is up to a man to take the responsibility then for the company keeping. Peter would only have to be told that once, and he is certainly doing it. I get cranky sometimes because he doesn’t stay longer, but in the morning I know he was right. Thank you for all this, Mary, because I don’t think I could have lasted otherwise.

“It takes a long time to settle down in marriage and a new home and all that, so I’m afraid I’ve been neglecting my little blue book. The wedding was simply the most; weather, people, ceremony, everything. About all the sacramental grace we received I suppose you know more than I do, Mary. I don’t expect in my lifetime another few minutes quite as lovely as when Peter and I had received Holy Communion together, and knelt there in the sanctuary alone with God. Even the priest was away for a few minutes giving Holy Communion to the others, and we seemed to be quite alone at the altar of God. It isn’t bad form to shed a tear at your wedding is it, Mary?

“According to the books I read before the wedding to get all the information I could on the vocation of marriage, the sacrament gives us God’s guarantee of a whole chain of actual graces throughout all our married life—that is besides the great increase in sanctifying grace on the occasion, of course. So I know that when I need it you will be there, Mary, giving me God’s help.

“Please look after us. We are so happy I wouldn’t want anything to go wrong. I know I’m good for Peter, too, and thank you for that. You have been so good to us up to date. The honeymoon was a dream. We say the Rosary together each night, too, begun on the first night, so it shouldn’t be hard to keep up now. It is no burden, I just love praying to you with my husband.

“We found just the right house, too. Quite by accident, of course, because that is the way you do things often. Quite a spacious stone house up on the hill overlooking the water. They were renovating it when we saw it first, and I just knew immediately it was for us, so asked Peter to tell them to be sure and finish it in blue and white. The stone-work is excellent, and now it is all modernized inside it is just perfect. There is plenty of room in the grounds—and altogether it is the ideal place for bringing up children.

“P.S.: Please do give us children, Mary, boys and girls, and help us to be good parents.

“Last week we lost our only son. He was just a month old. Please intercede for Peter, Mary. He is finding it very difficult to reconcile himself to losing our boy. We have two lovely girls already, for which we are immensely grateful, but Peter did so want a son now. He has hardly said a word in the last week, just comes home and sits around or follows me about the house saying nothing.

“I miss him, too, Mary. Now I know what you felt like when you held the body of your only Son in your arms on Calvary. He is a saint in heaven because he had the grace of Baptism—and Confirmation, too—through your generous intercession. But we do miss him, and we want another boy soon.

“It was a very difficult confinement, and I suppose that made him just a little more precious. At one time the doctor did not think he would be born alive. You know how I prayed about that, and my heart goes up to you that you went to God and got the grace of Baptism for him.

“My brother was ordained a priest on the feast of the Immaculate Conception. I must hold a world record for crying. I was so happy I cried all the way through the ordination, when he gave us his blessing, at the first Mass and the reception as well. He spoke so well, too, I was proud of him.

“There would have been so many graces in the last years to prepare him for this that you must have been at God’s elbow all the time. I never cease to wonder at the power God has given you of dispensing every grace for every person. The graces of ordination and otherwise which make up the priesthood must be one of your crowning achievements. I thank you that you have given them to my brother.

“I still feel a little sad. He doesn’t belong so much to us now. As Father Martin said when he spoke, he is a priest of all the people now, to stand between them and God. Dealing with God will be easy enough I should think, especially as he will know the secret of speaking to you first, being a priest of your own Congregation. But the eminence on which he must stand before men is very high and dangerous, and I ask you to look after him. He has to go back to the seminary for a while to complete his studies, so he should be out just in time to baptize our baby when it comes.

“That will be four children in the house, Mary, and we would like another boy, a companion for our one and only Joseph (who has six teeth now).

“. . . not feeling very well lately. I get so tired so easily. Try to have a rest when I can so as to be bright when Peter comes in . . . .

“. . . perhaps I should tell Peter about it. Have not been well for months now. But there is no apparent reason, and it would seem pointless. Also have a persistent feeling that your Son is going to ask me to suffer a little. We have always been blessed so much that I suppose we must expect some suffering sometime. Even that is a grace, isn’t it, Mary? I mean to have a cross and use your help to carry it well . . . .

“Today I saw the doctor again, Mary. It is just as I thought it might be. I am seriously ill. The doctor was not going to tell me everything, but I insisted. Apparently it is leukemia of some kind—cancer of the blood—and there is no doubt about it as a result of the tests they took at the clinic last week. He says there is no real hope of recovery, but he couldn’t say how long it might be.

“It is a shock, of course, to know that very soon I will be gone from the world, from the people and places I hold most dear. You will have to help me now, Mary. Death is taking solid shape before my eyes, and I can feel the stirrings of a great fear deep in my heart. You have always been my advocate with Jesus, and Father Martin told me long ago that your help is necessary in a particular way for a happy death.

“I have prayed to you for that for many years, and now when I need you most you will not turn away from me I am sure.

“I can go to the hospital for rest and treatment, which might prolong my life just a little or I can carry on my normal life as long as I am able. I don’t think there is much choice really. I will stay at home as long as I can and do my best to prepare them for when I am gone.

“It doesn’t seem necessary to worry Peter about the finality of it. He knows already that I am very ill, and it will be time enough when it arrives.

“I am fairly sure that this is the last time I will write in this little blue book, which I like to think of as yours, Mary. I am not sure what to do with it then. I would like to give it to Father Martin. It would tell him better than I could in

words just how much he has helped me.

“There are many trivialities in it, as well as a record of some of the marvellous things you have done for me. Father Martin is older now, and I think his own face is turned towards you in heaven, too. He would no longer be amazed at the vanity and weakness of his Mary Anne, and he could sort it all out very quickly. Also he would know what to do with it—I don’t think I could bring myself to burn it, but if a priest does so, well then there would be something respectful about it all.

“Because this is probably the last time I will speak to you here, I must tell what is in my heart.

“I am afraid. Not necessarily excitably afraid—in fact, a real calm has come over me recently—but deep down afraid. Afraid to go from my house on the hill and step through the door of eternity and stand before the bar of strict justice, where my whole life will be laid bare, my motives scrutinized.

“The little things, the simple joys of life have become very dear to me now. I love the way Peter’s eyes light up when they meet mine across the crowded room, the few minutes of calm in the world when the sun has just set, the tint of a rose petal, the innocence in the eyes of children, even the smell of cut grass and the sound of feet crunching on the gravel driveway. I listen now to every word the priest says in his Sunday morning sermon, and I regret the times I did not listen so well.

“The doctor says that when the time comes I will probably suffer a lot and then go quite suddenly.

“I have had a good life. I have known what it is to love and be loved. I have had good parents to bring me up. I learned quite early the joy of loving God and you, Mary. I have had a happy home, security, children who are already growing up good.

“For all these things I have you to thank. I’ve always tried to realize that everything is through your intercession, but now I know it. It is one lesson I have learned well. I thank you for the Masses and Holy Communions, the Sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation and Matrimony, my Catholic schooling, the clouds in the sky.

“And now I am going to die. Everything that ever happened to me was a preparation for this. For this I was born, for this I fell in love and married, had my children, looked out the window of my stone house and down the hill across the bay.

“Peter knows now. I didn’t have to tell him. I went to bed early one night and he came in and sat on the edge of the bed and took my hand.

“‘How long is it going to be?’

“‘About six months.’

“No more. But he sat there for a long time.”

Father Martin closed the book and held it in his hand. He knew all the rest. The struggle to keep the home going to the last, the sudden collapse in the street, the last few weeks in the hospital, the Last Sacraments so well received, the prayers for the dying repeated several times when the end seemed near.

Mary Anne stirred and spoke briefly.

“I love God . . . . I love Mary . . . . I love Peter and the children . . . . Mediatrix of All Graces help me to die well“

A deep sigh. That was all.

After a few minutes Father Martin put the little blue diary in his pocket and left the room.

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