

My life settled into a familiar trajectory. Lucid days. Fearful nights. Like a baby who'd refused to sleep through the night, I'd been left to cry it out, and howl I did. It felt like a harsh fate, but what choice did I have? Too proud to bother my mother, I couldn't risk being dragged to a psychiatrist. Eventually, exhaustion won out, and to my delight, my fears quieted down. I began to sleep for longer stretches until one morning, my mother had to shake me awake.

I was no longer the same. I was changing. Dr. Spock agreed. After school, I pored over his chapter on puberty. I wasn't really one girl, he seemed to be saying, but a series of evolving girls that nested inside me like a collection of Russian dolls, and I could feel a new one bursting out.

When I'd first put on the scapular, I was the girl in the third-grade picture who half believed she could be transformed into a fly. Children have so little control over their lives. Perhaps my devotion to my scapular had been an attempt to gain power over the terrors of life and death. Now, I was growing into a cynical teenager who didn't believe in magic. New preoccupations absorbed me, like thinking about boys and sex and my appearance. I spent a lot of time in my room staring in the mirror, and after school, I read Dr. Spock's section on adolescence to make sure I was developing normally.

There was no definitive Sarah Bernhardt moment when I stopped wearing my scapular forever. Giving it up turned out to be surprisingly anticlimactic. Right after I started sleeping through the night, I left it for longer periods on my nightstand or on the edge of the bathtub after I washed my hair. I wasn't nervous at all. If anything, I felt relieved as if I were laying down a great burden.

My mother must have noticed what was going on, and my father had to have been overjoyed when his trips to the religious store came to an end. But neither of them ever again mentioned my necklace or taking me to a psychiatrist. Eventually, I lost track of my scapular completely.

One Saturday in high school, I was cleaning out my jewelry box when I felt something solid lodged deep in the velvet lining. What could it be, I wondered, as I worked my index finger into the frayed seam and pulled out a grimy object attached to a tarnished chain. At first, I didn't recognize the significance of the necklace spread out in my palm. When I realized it was my scapular, I felt lucky. How often does a lost object return to you?

"Hey, do you remember this?" I asked, passing the scapular to my mother after she came into my room with a pile of clean laundry.

My mother put the clothes on my bed, dangled the scapular from her thumb and forefinger, and swung the chain back and forth.

"You know you never needed this old thing," she laughed. "You come from long-lived people; you'll probably live forever."

It was my fervent hope, but I knew my mother was lying. What she was saying was one of those soothing platitudes adults offer up.

My mother continued to swing the chain back and forth like she was pretending to hypnotize me. Wasn't a fear of being hypnotized one of my obsessive terrors back in my scapular-wearing days? Maybe my scapular looked like a prize from a Cracker Jack box, but I'd once worn it next to my heart.

**Marilyn Martin's** previous work has appeared in *Third Coast*, *Gulf Coast*, *Chautauqua*, *New Madrid*, *Southern Indiana Review*, and elsewhere. One of her pieces was named a Notable Essay in *Best American Essays 2016*.

## IAN WING

*Riverbed at Nisene Marks, 2017*  
Watercolor and gouache, 4.5 x 4.5 in



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