

THE SCAPULAR'S LESSON

By Vince Barry

WHY WE LIKE IT: *When a story the author submitted to us was snapped up by a competing lit site we asked him for another. He submitted his short story The Scapular's Lesson. We loved it, of course, but we think it works better as nonfiction, so here it is. We've published a couple works by this gifted author and even a cursory read will tell you he's a literary stylist. Delve deeper, and his manifold understanding and mastery of the language ascends to something like private language.*

The Scapular's Lesson

I never liked making novenas with my father. He used to take a drink or two before going, which made him snooze and snore as if fetching breath during the Franciscan's sermon. Nor did I like the detour on the way home to Grunnings Groc'n Groggs, under pretense of getting a brick of that tri-colored ice cream for me, whereas, in fact, it was, the chicane, for a bottle or more for himself, of "the dry flavored treat, not bitter or sweet," Rheingold by name.

I can still see him, smeared in the side mirror awkwardly trying to wrap his stash of suds in the dirty tan trench coat he never wears, but carries in the trunk for just such missions. I am at the time fingering a caramel brown piece of wool cloth about an inch square with connecting strips for wearing around the neck. It bears the pink and blue image of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Brother gave each of us one. He said that Blessed Mary told some saint or other that it had a "special power."

Intangibility, force fields, reality warping—visions of sundry superpowers dance in my head like sweet Christmas sugar plums, as I nudge the father awake with an inherited trait, a pointy elbow. Then, tramping the flock with eyes as clear as water and unbearably bright, before fixing on mine as though two burning coals, Brother, in a faint susurrantion, calls the scapular's power, "A revealed privilege!"

Embroidered on its underside: the exact nature of the privilege: "Whosoever dies wearing this scapular shall not suffer eternal fire." . . .

Thus the scapular's poor part in the gravitational pull of the lamentable past: In life there are no free lunches. Die in the shower and all bets are off. . . .

End

AUTHOR'S NOTE: *Perhaps I've seen The Treasure of the Sierra Madre too often. Or perhaps it's just the mounting years. Maybe both. Whatever, something has awakened my "inner prospector." . . . Call him—what? . . . How about Howard? Howard's pitting for gold—the gold of clarity, especially about what's fuzzy and blurred around the edges of the long-unvisited past. He's "gold panning," my wizened inner miner is, — scooping and shaking, shaking and sweeping, 'till only the heaviest stuff is left—the "gold." On this occasion he has opened a promising vein. "So what's it worth?" my greedy inner Dobbsie wants to know. "Hard to say," Howard is quick to jerk out, "could be pyrite—you know, fool's gold?" He means now that I understand why I've always favored the "combat shower."*

AUTHOR'S BIO: After retiring from a career teaching philosophy, Vincent Barry returned to his first love, fiction. His stories have appeared in numerous publications in the U.S. and abroad, including: *The Saint Ann's Review, The Bitchin' Kitsch, The Broken City, Abstract: Contemporary Expressions, Kairos, Caveat Lector, Terror House, The Fem, BlogNostics, The Writing Disorder, whimperbang,* and *The Disappointed Housewife*. Barry lives with his wife and daughter in Santa Barbara, California.