

English Creative Vignette - Eloise Harper

Do pigeons go to heaven?

The aisle seats are cold and clean, my hands are wedged beneath my thighs, separating the wood
from the cotton of my suit pants.

I've been nudged many times now, once for yawning, twice for posture, and at least three for
staring more at the half-naked statues than the priest.

I'll be 13 soon,
13 in August.

The enveloping summer air is warm,
I am cold.

An icy draft wafts through the air, stealing and dragging any degree of warmth that dare to enter
the doors, up beyond the ribbed vaults of the ceiling,
stuck until forced to swim, and sinking with the desire to breathe.

I use my fourth stare to study the tall looming crucifix, metal and flesh carved from maple and
mahogany, the sick woody richness still aromatic from decades of display, 8 rows down the aisle.

I inspect every inch of the hanging body.

Bony knees joined at the caps,
fingers, arms, and ribs, separated.

I scan over my own knees, bony and lanky; joined at the caps too.

Scanning the carved long hair thick and coarse,

I tug at the one out-of-place strand protruding from my own slicked mess.

I continue to scan the sculpture vertically, following flesh along the horizontal cross section, eyes
locked on the last few inches of wooden skin.

I fold my hands in my lap, thumbs smoothing the un-touched skin of my palms in reassuring
strokes, not convinced by the perfect calluses that remain.

My palms throb at the sight of lifeless dangling fingertips, blood pulsing into my moving thumbs
that send shivers over my already cold body.

But I can't seem to shake these sinful thoughts.

A warm spring day, his short hair, stretched fields,

We ran for the ball but ended in rolling hysterics,

Neither one of us got up

And neither one of us wanted to.

Each reminiscent spark was interrupted by the present sight of carved metal and flesh,

The reminder of a sacrifice,

Of salvation.

I snap my eyes away from the sight, hands meeting my jaw, as I continue to smooth and massage
skin, masking the rhythm of my heart's quickening pace, and my now audible shortening of breath.

Expecting to feel sproutings of stubble where there had been on the hanging body, my fingers tingle
at the now unfamiliar familiar sensation of a soft 12 year old's skin,

and I am reminded once again that my skin is not, too, carved from wood.

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I refold the linen collar wrapped around my neck, fixated on the new creases of my freshly ironed
button-up.

Guilt and embarrassment blossom in my gut.

I now notice the small cereal stain on my besom pocket,

My far from crisp-white socks,
and the skipped button three holes from the top of my folded collar.

I want to leave,
Scream
Sob
Curl-up.

But Most of all, as I glance to my right, and I am met with the oblivious focus of a mother occupied
by unbreakable faith, I want to want to whisper;

I'm so sorry.

But it's so quiet, and even my thoughts are too loud for the silence.

The sun beams pouring from the stained glass filling the narrow wall openings, flicker and bend.
I follow the path of light to the exterior window sill positioned high up the wall where a pigeon is
perched.

I watch as she twitches her long neck,
grooms her feathers,

and drinks the little water left of the early morning spring rain that fills the sill's nooks.

As passing breezes fill her feathers and her eyes begin to shut, the pigeon in all her sweet innocent
glory drifts to sleep.

There, she may dream, she may not.

But when she wakes up, she will feel hungry and she will search for something to eat, and only
then will she find somewhere else to hydrate, and finally, to rest, but not once will she enter this
church, and not once will she have to question whether if what she is eating, what she is drinking,
and where she is resting is right or wrong.

As my mother lays her hand on my childish bruised-up knee, and the eyes of a mother meet the
eyes of a son, I say to her;

I'm sorry that I was careless at breakfast

I'm sorry that I played in the rain in my new socks

*I'm sorry that I didn't count the buttons of my shirt before I buttoned them up
and finally,*

I am so sorry that I am the reason you will have to nudge me for a fifth time.

As I imagine my final words, I finally say aloud
'Ma... Do pigeons go to heaven?'