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A Needle Through the Eye of an Apostate: Baptism

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JUNE PIERSON

A Needle Through the Eye of an Apostate: Baptism

Everyone is staring at the back of the house, standing up from the pews and looking towards the pool. It is a used saltwater fish tank, water opaque and glass smudged. All the churchgoers have on their Sunday best—darned suits with visible creases and dresses with old tags still attached. Everyone is faced towards the baptism pool, ready for its murky waters to cleanse someone's soul.

The Bishops move into the aisles, searching for someone. A vessel. A volunteer. Everyone is ready and willing to be picked like an apple from a tree. But there is one boy who is not standing. He has his eyes closed. The boy sits next to the dignified Mr. Pyle, a boisterous man who is the spirit of the church. He is not the Pastor, but he is a preacher for his family and community. The boy's eyes are closed to shut out everyone's thoughts, especially Mr. Pyle's.

Mr. Pyle shakes his son awake. For a moment the boy jolts in alarm, his eyes wide, scared and at attention. Mr. Pyle bores into his son, before pointing at the baptism pool. The boy obliges and begins walking, wanting desperately to not meet the judgemental gaze of the house. His shoes are untied. They detest the boy for this. Apples rotten before they fall.

The baptism will do him good.

The Bishops stand at the corners of the baptism pool like tall spires surrounding the tank. The boy, dressed in white now, stood pretending to sleep, standing on a stepladder near the pool. The Pastor stands and speaks, words trailing away and fizzling out like flies to a bug zapper. He closes the book and taps the boy's shoulder. The boy turns to run and is pulled under, grip of the Bishops, hot and tight. He falls and disappears in the water. The water is calm, but the boy is thrashing. They are trying to drown him. He can't get any air. He is still. Moments pass.

The Bishops' sleeves are wet.

Eventually, the Bishops pull and raise him up. For the first time in all the House's Sunday services, Mr. Pyle's son is awake. It is a miracle. Rejoice.

He stares out into the crowd, Mr. Hartfield meets his eyes.

Mr. Hartfield is ecstatic. For ten years, the boy was claimed by sloth, but no longer. The boy's eyes are full and awake. Mr. Hartfield breaks eye contact.

But it isn't Mr. Hartfield the boy is looking at. The boy sees someone separate from the crowd and separate from himself—he sees Us. We keep looking at the boy. The boy's face is locked in an expression of alarm and his eyes are wide. The overhead lights reflecting in his pupils crash into the iris like discordant cymbals. He sees the truth and through bathing with God knows who he is, who she'll be. There is no difference between his tears and holy water. He stares at us, seeing us for the first time. He is exhausted. He breaks eye contact and chooses sleep. The bishops have to catch him before he falls back into the water. Rejoice.

(This is an excerpt from a longer piece.)