

6 Poems by Jennifer Lagier

Recovering Catholic

I watched my mother, grandmother,
and great-grandmother
willingly crucify themselves
because they believed heaven
would reimburse them
for their day-to-day hells.
They obeyed without question,
passively turned the other cheek,
believed misogynist mumbo-jumbo,
died without having lives,
bought a crock of Vatican shit.

I'm tired of being a
good Italian Catholic,
raised on cautionary tales
of sacrificed martyrs,
denial and guilt.
I cut my teeth on torturous
stations of the cross,
spent Saturdays in catechism,
Sundays at mass.
Now I'm ready for *thou shall*,
want to break rules,
blow off responsibility,
sleep past noon,
stand naked in front
of the picture window,
shake my tits at the postman,
drink tequila shots on a Monday,
drop acid, experiment with mushrooms,
carelessly fuck a succession of strangers,
come loudly and often
without a single regret.

Shame

Your mother says
she's the only woman
in her community
with two daughters
and six sons-in-law.

You are an embarrassment
with your temporary addresses,
suspicious political inclinations,
odd dietary habits,
come and go lovers.

She's ashamed
you failed as a farmwife.
couldn't keep
a good secretarial job
for over 30 years, like her.

You are condemned to
live alone, never have children,
waste your life
surrounded by grubby artists
and slackers.

Every night she phones to criticize,
recite your offenses,
leave you with earful of admonitions,
obligations, a migraine
or worse.

Fifties Flashback

A Sears repairman removed
the pegboard back of our giant
black and white TV, fussed inside.

He's cleaning out the dead cowboys,
Daddy told my sister and me
as we watched, open-mouthed.

I imagined cold, stiff piles
of shot-down desperadoes,
swept away with gray dust.

Now my father is gone; nights bring
blurry reruns of past peach harvests,
truck rides he gave us to the cannery and back.

At the grading station, he
hitched up perpetually sagging levis,
handed me a quarter to purchase strawberry pop.

I miss our Saturdays, simple monochrome westerns,

Cisco and Pancho galloping to the rescue,
happy endings that last.

Hoot and Holler

At the Running Iron, we strut our stuff,
demonstrate cowboy culture on the skids,
clog, slide and twirl to a shit-kicker band.

It's Hoot and Holler night. Eagerly, we
encourage a barmaid with a pair of water pistols
to shoot lime juice, then tequila, into open mouths.

After more than a few, I'm star of the bar,
ready to mosey down the street to Miss Lila's,
finally get that winking mermaid tattoo.

Confirmation

Ironically, it's a nun who
orders mother to purchase
my first pair of high heels,
nylons, the superfluous bra,
rubber straight-jacket girdle.
She tells me the vulnerable priest
needs these reminders to adorn
my pudgy, twelve year old body
so he won't succumb
to overwhelming desire.

I stare at sister's drab habit,
imagine life beneath black cloth,
visualize her spartan cell,
untouched breasts, utilitarian panties.
I sit, listen in confusion,
ponder threats of hell
and her Catholic warnings.

Mother gleefully chooses
my size 15 tent dress:
two tones of heifer plaid
with immense rhinestone buttons.
I redden, sweat toward adulthood
within tight elastic.

When my turn comes to be confirmed,
I stumble forward on command

down the church aisle
dividing our class
into separate genders.
Trembling and filled
with a devout sense of faith,
I kneel before a man wearing skirts,
feel him slapping my face.

August in Escalon

Here in the land of
churches and gas stations,
we move sparingly and slow
in the simmering heat.
Peach fuzz rises with the sun.
Days, over-exposed and glittering,
melt into the same twenty four hours
of recycled white noise.
Asphalt softens like canal bank mud
around concrete malls.
Outside, roses cremate
themselves colorless;
blackbirds haven't the energy
to flap or complain.
A slow freight screams,
drags itself toward the cool Pacific,
steel and grease churning
along burning rails.
I sweat, leaning into the open vents
of a straining swamp cooler,
pregnant, nineteen and newly married,
breathless in some dark corner,
wondering how the hell
we ever made it this far.