

## 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.