



TERESA TUMMINELLO BRADER

AGE APPROPRIATE

Her wet hair weighs heavy on my palm. I move my hand up to hold her head steady as I run a comb through the tangles. Zoe, my husband's granddaughter, wants me to use a brush, and I explain how wet hair doesn't break with a wide-toothed comb. She seems interested, and I imagine when she gets back home she'll tell her dad she needs a comb like this one.

I can discern the different shades in Zoe's hair when it's wet: honey yellow, sandy beige, pale brown. It'll dry into a tumble of dark goldenrod, looking much as her mom Karen's hair does in the childhood photos of Karen and her twin sister Tina. My stepdaughters—I seldom think of them that way, since they're only ten years younger than I—aren't identical, neither in looks nor in the way they're wired. Tina lives nearby with her husband and three children. Karen, in and out of rehab, sent Zoe away before her fifth birthday. Zoe's almost eight.

"Who are the people in these pictures?" Zoe asks. She sounds annoyed. We're sitting on the bed in the extra bedroom. Her two front teeth are coming in, and they give her upper gum a flattened look. She's gazing at a portrait of me at five years old with my younger brothers. My mom gave me the painting after her house flooded, after the levees broke, saying she could no longer risk attachment to objects.

On the adjoining wall hangs a black-and-white photograph of my dad's law school class at Tulane. Before the photo was salvaged from the family home, it hung in my dad's study since before my birth. The one woman and the one black man in the group—Dad graduated in the mid-fifties—are what the adult eye notices. I don't have space for these refugees elsewhere, and the guestroom seems a good site for memorabilia.