

Wishbone

Jane Wampler

For my own good
she cracks me
on the face,

sends me into the thick
arms of my stepfather,
the one who usually

says stop,
but today returns
me with a backhand.

I scramble beneath
the dining room table,
the one reserved for special

occasions. I study
his scuffed oxfords,
her tired feet

in frayed flats.
The three of us
hushed, panting.

If you could have seen me
you might have thought, *pathetic*,
a girl crouched

like that. But in the cauterizing
clarity of that moment
I was hardening

into something sharp,
a carving knife or
the blade in mother's blender,

primed to spin and slash.
We froze like that.
A family portrait – the one

where our faces ache
from smiling
at the perfectly browned bird,

the Cold Duck
in crystal stemware,
the green and red quivering

Jell-O mold. How to say
he threw me back.
He helped

flush me out.
He yanked an arm,
and she a leg.

They dragged me
across scratchy carpet,
my fingers

groping for a table leg,
clutching
air,

the moment –
a slow shutter snapping
like a wishbone

sucked clean and left to dry
on the sill,
before brother and I,

desperate to win
the greater part of the break,
would close our eyes

and pull.