

ANIMUS

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The only time I really wanted
to hit my mother was when she said to me
You're just acting this way to spite us
and we were on a therapist's couch – burgundy, a color
we both hated. I felt my right hand's fingers bow
to palm in a violent prayer
as she stared into me, blank.

I want to hit her but am afraid
I won't stop, or won't be able to stop,
or worse, am afraid
I won't want to. There is a blur
of imagining: one-two, right hook
to the jaw. None of it is happening.

My father is looking at the floor
and I am seething through his silence but working
to show the therapist that I'm the rational one,
maintaining eye contact through my mother's
You never really had a teenage rebellion, that's what this is
and my own tired rebuttals.

The conference was my idea and it was not a good one
and the therapist finally says *your daughter is trying*
to rebuild her relationship with you, says
talk about anything else,
says ride bikes, talk about the chickens

and I think maybe she's right, through the car ride to their house
when my mother says *it's embarrassing*
and my father says nothing

and I think maybe there's something to rebuild
even when my father gives a speech on the moral perversions
of homosexuality and my mother says he is inspired
by the Holy Spirit. I think maybe

there is something left when I tell them both

*I respect what you've said
but I disagree with you and the Church,*

but my mother turns sharply to me

with a lit stare and says *Oh you think this is a disagreement*
says *We are in a battle for your soul*
and that's when I know it's lost.