

## Recklessness

I must have been about thirty when my father informed me of his disappointment and of my failure as a daughter. I was a reckless person, he said, the implication being that I was self-centered and did not care about the damage and concern I had caused to others, i.e. to him, my father. Reckless, reckless, he reiterated in a rage.

My transgressions were threefold, and based on events in my early twenties.

1. I had gotten sick and almost died.
2. My boyfriend had left me.
3. I had not buckled my life jacket promptly on the Colorado River.

This is that story.

I did love my father for many years, maybe quite a lot. When I was a child, he was unattainable, and I wanted him. As a teenager and adult, I both enjoyed him and could finally admit to myself how much I feared him.

The last time he hit me, I was sixteen years old. He wanted the phone, I was on it, and he hauled off and slugged me hard across the face.

This he did not remember and would have denied if confronted. Our relationship remained a touchstone of both good and bad, a riddle I could never solve, a koan I could practice but never truly understand.

When my father was dying, I made two lists—one of things I liked about him, one of things I didn't like. The lists were about the same length. A friend pointed out that that wasn't so bad, considering the men of my father's generation.

## Bad Things About My Father

violent

hit me

bully

dominated my mother thin-skinned

anxious

overly sensitive

made you suffer for crossing him cheap  
unaffectionate  
physically uptight

set in his ways bad-tempered tantrum thrower unscientific pontificator

had kooky ideas anti-spiritual

### Good Things About My Father

handsome

smart

intellectual sensitive to beauty loved arts ambitious successful

focused

good politics

a real New Yorker scrappy

can-do

loved my daughter Isabel loved both my husbands funny

appreciative

curious

generous

You see my problem.

### West of the Moon

outside

the motel window desert spring afternoon

two mourning doves nesting on the top of a parking lot lamp

I'm waiting

for it to rain

beyond the sliding screen

I'm waiting  
for my childhood to run off

on its bare  
skinny legs  
and grass-stained knees

dusk, and they've flown off, a dry wind  
in this drought

propped  
against the white pillows my memories remain.

## Fortuna

my eyes full of salt  
where is the mirror that remembers? there is no ointment  
to salve time

once you loved me I'm sure of it  
you love me still I'm sure of that also

if the stars chart a course  
or you chart a course by the stars open your hand  
no palm reader knows Braille

what I saw but didn't understand what I didn't see  
and everything hidden  
that no dove or raven found in me.