

A Father's Love

When I was a little girl
I adored my father.
I brought him
hollyhock dolls
and the very prettiest shells.

When my nipples
were like buds on a lilac tree,
he became different.
Nothing I did
pleased him.
If I excelled at school,
I was being extreme.
If I didn't,
I was dreaming too much
about impractical things—
like poetry.

One afternoon
alone in the house
I locked the doors
and went up to my room
to sleep
He came home
and could not get in.
He knocked
but I did not hear him.
Finally, he broke a basement window.

He raged upstairs,
barged into my room,
dragged me out of bed.
Shook me
then threw me against
the corner of the desk.
He broke more
than my shoulder.

—*Sparling Mills*