

Everything I Am Not

You barged in
telling me I shouldn't be here,

*"It's not safe!
What were you thinking?
Be careful.
Be smart."*

I know I shouldn't be angry.
You are only trying to protect me
from men who will take me, hurt me, rape me.
Why is that the first thing we all think of when a girl goes off by herself?

The presence of a man should be comforting—
Defender, Protector.
Instead, it's Danger, Danger,
Abuser, Raper.

I know I shouldn't be angry
but I am.
At you:
my Defender, my Protector.
My whole life you shielded me from these realities.
I thought every man was like you.
I didn't know men could hurt me.

But right now,
you represent everything I am not.
Everything I cannot do.
Power. Privilege. Penis.
I cannot help but feel small.

You feel like one of them,
using who you are
to force your ways into who I am.

Standing there,
shouting,
all I hear is,

*"Weak.
Stupid.
It's your fault."*

I admit I'm weaker than a man.
And maybe I was stupid for coming here alone.
But don't tell me it's my fault.

It's not my fault if a man rapes me
while I'm alone in a parking lot across the street from my house shooting some hoops in broad daylight.
It's not my fault if a man rapes me
while I'm alone in a parking lot in the middle of nowhere, drunk, knocked out at 10:00 p.m.
It's not my fault if a man rapes me. Period.

I'm angry at the fact that you have no idea why I'm angry.
To you, this is no different from the time you told me
I couldn't eat any more candy or go out with my friends.
This is bigger than the fact that you're my father and I'm your daughter.
This is about who you are and who I am:
The fact that you're a man and I'm a woman.

I'm angry at the man in his car.
All you had to do was be there
for me to feel concerned
and for my dad to explode
at me, not you.

I'm sorry, too.
You may have been the kindest man in the world,
one who would stop a rape instead of committing it,
but to us, you will forever be,
the reason why I cannot play alone outside.

I'm angry at the world
for being unsafe and unfair.
Why do I cross the street if there's a man coming toward me?
Why does my pace quicken when I pass a crew of male construction workers?
Why do I have to be careful?
Why do I have to be smart?

My mom tells me, *"It's just the sinful, fallen world we live in."*
All I hear, *"In the end, it's still your fault."*

The Strength in Our Tears

Right after you left,
angry, hot tears stormed their way down my cheeks.
They fought to come out
before you left,
but I ordered them to wait,
fearful they'd be mistaken
for weakness,
for fragility.

Only now do I realize
my tears are my strength.

When men are angry,
they shout, hit, throw
and make themselves bigger,
so we will feel smaller.

When women are angry,
we hold back.
Not punches.
Tears.
Tears that hit nothing but the ground
and hurt no one but ourselves.

So don't you dare call us weak when we cry.
Think about everything else we could do
but choose not to.

Our restraint is our strength.