

Suzanne Swanson

What Was I Thinking? All I Had to Do

How I imagined you. One like me
yet all your own. You would desire my
influence. Already mother to a son, I was
still innocent.

I had a job to do: let her
be a girl, insist
she become herself. Model
autonomy, love her
into loving. Bands
of *do-it-right* around my chest,
I toiled. Randomly, blessed
relief, the pounding
heart of joy bursting through.

What was I thinking? Beautiful
child, already herself. All I had to do
was get out of the way. [One more
dictum. This I did not
believe.]

*I know you're not going to like this:
my friends are way more important
to me than my family.* How could she
think I was surprised?

Spiritual practice: refrain
from speech. Sitting
side by side
every adolescent morning:
the hum of the engine her stone
silence our fear my intense
exhale.

Left her father. *Do not look at us
and believe this is your lot.*
Fifteen solitary years. Back
with him again. What message
now?

May a mother speak
of beauty? Girl, all skinny-
model stretch of her.
Then the curves and past
six feet—more in Docs
or heels. Taller
than her mother, taller
than women everywhere. See her
in a sari, a Guam dress, Pohnpei
skirt. Someone give her deep
purple in Nigeria, tell her to put it on.
We will be happy to look on her.

How she watches me now. That
she hates how I let things slip, seeing
that she will lose me.