

HOME ABOUT PODCAST ESSAYS

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# “What Do We Know of Mothers?” – By Annie Marhefka



What do we know of  
motherhood when we don't  
even know how it shaped  
our own mothers,  
changed their peripheral views,  
altered their hips and dreams and  
ovarian nightmares?  
We know them only as  
our mamas, not the women  
who existed before.  
"Oh your mother, that one,"  
people might say, as if  
that other woman she used to be  
was so mysterious, so enchanting.  
I could never have met her  
or her ambition, her dreamy  
teenage eyes and her slim waistline.  
They are strangers to me in this  
life from which I was birthed from her  
suffering and shaking and  
passion.  
I see only the tired eyes,  
the wanting arms extended.  
I feel only the touch of gentle  
hands on my forehead, searching  
for fever, for permission to worry,  
for connection when we're no longer  
tethered by umbilical cord.  
Dad says she was stunning,  
hitchhiking down the street in only  
a little red bikini, all wet hair and a thumb

pointed to his pickup truck.

I can't imagine this woman I know  
as the bender of rules; she is only the maker  
of rules, of my body, of me.

In life, I did the opposite  
of what she told me to do.

It is this game we play,  
mothers and daughters:  
her offering me her wisdom,  
me trying to prove I was different,  
break down walls in my own way.

In death, I wanted nothing more  
than to be everything she wanted  
me to be, do everything she  
would have told me to do.

Can we wish to be good mothers  
both and in spite of, and because of,  
our own mothers?

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