

Patient and Daughter Appear Closely Bonded

by Amanda Quaid

My toddler takes a bite of tater tot and tells me
she wants me to die.

The social worker says I should *respond* and not
react to things like that

so I ask *why* she says she wants me to die
as though it's just

a thought-provoking notion that has never
crossed my mind.

She thinks for a moment, chewing, her tiny lips
stained with blueberry juice.

"I want you to die so you can show me
how to die."

I take that phrase and tuck it in my breast—she's
given me a gift, I know

a task or blessing or could it be—would you not
call it *permission*—

"And you could come back as a peacock!" she cries
with a grin

"And so could I, and then we could be friends!"
She cackles at me and I smile

back at her and see us in the next
go-round, two peacocks

preening our plumes in the Sri Lankan sun
finally peers and bickering

over the last mangosteen
in the grove.