

ADRIANNE KALFOPOULOU

## Mother Tongue

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I always felt she would have preferred to sing her words the way she stood in choir, part of the curve of women in their choral robes who gave themselves to song. Instead she swallowed her arias, whole operas, ignored what seethed, entire sentences of crooked turns she chained to contain how she might feel letting loose a ballad or hymn instead of watching Frank Sinatra on television, keeping time to my father's banal rhymes. It was *Let's have some wine* when things were fine or *You always whine* and she, predictably, replied with her *I don't mind* and *that's fine*.

It was the pact she kept but didn't express, the way she placed plain verbs like *see* and *eat* and *sleep* faraway from the dangers of *dare* and *rage* or *age* (when she hardly breathed seeing him beat the anger out of me) that taught the importance of listening to what was not said. What I couldn't understand, like the sermons in church by the priests speaking in Latin or Greek, I came to admire for tone and somber murmurings, and the rapture of everything the words didn't capture.