

ADRIANNE KALFOPOULOU

Growing

She uses the apartment key to let herself in from the neighbors. I am unnerved, maybe from drinking. I know it will take all of my strength to get through the bath hour, reading *Babar*, the talk of hair, how and if we will braid it, tomorrow's homework review — I am really in a poem I say, cutting lines together, images, this poem I am always aiming at, pulling the sheet over the day, pulling the browned buds off the night flower (didn't give it enough water this winter — it might not bloom this spring). Brushing out my daughter's fine hair over her wide forehead, caressing it, I put another story together; she says in eight-year-old directness "You threw him out didn't you?" This is the moment I gather the lines, the poem, raw tendrils watered or not, snapped in urgency (the night flower has such a pungent smell). He wasn't with me anymore sweetie, he slept on the couch in the living room, that's not being together." She weighs this, the poem in fragments, may never get written. We are managing this — I am calm, I am on other territory, a kitchen of plenty, school problems solved, pencils sharpened, the lesson memorized. "Did I do it right?" she asks of the math review. I am calculating the lesson — motherhood, this sudden test. Unprepared, untutored I am telling her the grade isn't important, it's what you learn, what you can take with you.