

BARBARA ADAMS

THREE-QUARTERS PIANO

My piano went missing
in the middle of a war
moving from New York to LA
and back to New York.

One day a strange piano appeared
in our dingy NY flat,
carried up one flight of stairs
by two hairy men
my mother tipped with a ten.

I fingered the keyboard,
the chromatic scale
down on the left, up on the right—
until my hands struck wood
with a dull thud—

An octave had been amputated
on either end
like half of each arm—
but the remaining keys were intact.

I opened my battered cardboard box
to J.S. Bach,
fingering easy arpeggios
from the Prelude in C,
then tried Chopin's *Minute Waltz*,
trilling in five flats for fifteen minutes.

But Beethoven's Sonata in C minor—
the *Pathétique*—
its manic highs and dark lows
were unforgiving, wouldn't fit in.

Until the war ended,
I played scraps and bits—
Mother at the doctor's
Father with another wife
Sister on the floor, sucking her thumb—

Playing for myself
what I knew by heart.