

rio." Tell me what you saw the reporter says. "I was hiding in the river for a long time" (Claribel Alegria, end of poem, *La mujer del Rio Sumpul*).

As time went on the writing possibilities multiplied. "You are not victims," I told them. "You are power, you survived." Narrate your survival. In a language, I didn't speak the women filled the pages. They overcrowded the ward: to tell, to testify, to be recorded. Then, they asked for pictures. Forty in each ward three in each picture. Also a testimony. To receive back, to prevent falsification, to continue the fight.

At the borderlands  
you are the battled round  
where enemies are kin to each  
other  
you are at home, a stranger  
the border disputes have been  
settled  
the volley of shots have shattered  
the  
truce  
you are wounded, lost in action  
dead, fighting back  
Gloria Anjaldua  
*Borderlands*

As I was leaving, Hava, dressmaker in her early 30s, Samela's mother, beautiful woman, with strong hands and fearless sight, brought me a polaroid photograph: her sister and she with their children in a highway, travelling. Before the war. With pride and all the dignity of joy she kept only this "artifact" from her private geography. The other she said, the real, away from the camp. Her hospitality however re-enacted her topos as she overturned a bucket a table between us. I drank her coffee and was defeated. Even though I hadn't realized I was fighting. At the borderlands.

"You are a battleground... you are at home, a stranger."

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## PATIENCE WHEATLEY

### Our Mother Playing the Piano

Smell of citronella on the sheets. Screech owls calling in the woods behind the house. A full moon whitening the walls of our bedroom.

The piano's rippling notes are like a cool stream, then like a river pouring out the open windows into the garden where American Pillar roses sway on trellises.

Red-tufted caterpillars have made chrysalises on the flat single roses. All afternoon we've pulled their papery coverings open to release crumpled moths with black red-spotted wings.

Christine stands by my bed: "Let's go closer."

We huddle at the top of the stairs. I imagine our mother at the piano in a blue-mist dress, her beaky nose lifted, her foot in a cuban-heeled sandal, deliberately pressing the pedal as her hands leap over the keys like waves. Up down. Up down.

She's making mistakes. Her hands crash anywhere. Discord, then silence. She's put her head down on the keys. Our father has just shouted, "Why must you be so dramatic?"

The music starts again, changes. I have to go down to her. Our father hears a noise and finds me outside the open sitting room door. He carries me back upstairs. Christine lies there in bed as if she'd never left. "It's just the music," our father says, "She gets too dramatic!" He goes downstairs. We hear his stern voice scolding our mother.

That wasn't what we meant to happen at all.

Outside, the flutter of moths' new wings.

*(from the long poem The Astrologer's Daughter).*

*Patience Wheatley's poetry has been published previously in cws/ cf, and other sections from The Astrologer's Daughter appeared in the Space 1 issue of Descant. She has also had two poetry collections published by Goose Lane Editions: A Hinge of Spring and Good-bye to the Sugar Refinery.*