

learning gang handshakes

after Lucille Clifton

my 1 hand holding tight

to the neighborhood, stubborn
& still. this hand has never been
crooked, never cradled the love
or hate side of a pistol, never punched
with no regret. my hand is small,
hairless as a newborn. my wrist, thin as a promise
breaking. this is shaking up in the park.
the big boys have deemed me not soft
today. they see the way
i ball, a blur & menace. wild
as a punch landed in the wrong stomach
or a bullet through the big
picture window, lodged into a living
room wall. i dive into concrete
for the loose ball, stroke heavy at arms, swim
in a pool of blood that we still won't call
a personal foul. have you played a pickup game
running red from 3 distinct places on your person? if not
then don't throw up any sign of the South Side.
when the big boys taught me how to hug with palms
i learned the secret. shaking up looks like violence
& love. & it is. the fingers at the end
freeze in a pose like sutra, bent, only an inch away
from breaking. both partners in the dance of hands know
they could crush the knuckle of the other.
they know *all is 1*, they whisper
this fusion in mean mug
my other hand; come celebrate.