







## 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.*