

Woman of Light

for Lucille Clifton

Lucille, whose name means light
and whose dark eyes are light as well,
Lucille, I am the woman in the second row,

white, with skinny hips and a colorless blouse,
loving the turquoise you shimmer—the bright,
the long and the curve of it,

your words in my hands, your voice in my ears;

Tell me again, Lucille, about the poems
you lost and the babies you saved.

Tell me you couldn't replace
the children, tell me you could
replace the poems; please, tell me that lie
again because I, too, have poems and children

and some days they play side by side,
tossing sound back and forth;

some days they fight to the death.

You say your children won, but we both know
that lost poems are poems lost forever;
like lightning, words won't strike the same place
again.

Tell me that truth, strong woman of light;
please, tell me that hard truth.