

## SORROW SONG

for the eyes of the children,  
 the last to melt,  
 the last to vaporize,  
 for the lingering  
 eyes of the children, staring,  
 the eyes of the children of  
 buchenwald,  
 of viet nam and johannesburg,  
 for the eyes of the children  
 of nagasaki,  
 for the eyes of the children  
 of middle passage,  
 for cherokee eyes, ethiopian eyes,  
 russian eyes, american eyes,  
 for all that remains of the children,  
 their eyes,  
 staring at us, amazed to see  
 the extraordinary evil in  
 ordinary men.

## THE POET

i beg my bones to be good but  
 they keep clicking music and  
 i spin in the center of myself  
 a foolish frightful woman  
 moving my skin against the wind and  
 tap dancing for my life.

## I. AT GETTYSBURG

if, as they say, this is somehow about myself,  
 this clash of kin across good farmland, then  
 why are the ghosts of the brothers and cousins  
 rising and wailing toward me in their bloody voices  
 who are you, nigger woman, who are you?

—Lucille Clifton

The poems of Lucille Clifton (1936-2010) reprise the African American experience. She also wrote wonderful poems about women, minorities, and the disadvantaged. Her poems are full of life—warm, funny, passionate, and sometimes mordant. When asked why so many of her poems were short, she said that if you were in the kitchen fixing dinner with a child hanging on each leg, your poems would be short too. She published 14 collections of poems and won the National Book Award for Poetry in 2000. “the poet,” “sorrow song,” and “i. at gettysburg” are from *The Collected Poems of Lucille Clifton*. Copyright ©1974, 1987 by Lucille Clifton. Reprinted with permission from The Permissions Company, Inc., on behalf of BOA Editions Ltd., [www.boaeditions.org](http://www.boaeditions.org).