

the break

is the place in the funk record
everybody goes crazy. if the dj is smart
the break is built longer. the break is hip-hop.

Grandmaster Flash took the break,
stretched the break. pulled it apart
like silly putty, plastered the party in it.

the break is where the drums take center
stage. the break is the center. the break
is the party. the break is built
from thrown-out equipment,
unused grooves. the break is struggle.

the break is the place
your sister doesn't have.
the break is the eviction.
the break is moving
back in with Moms.

the break is the break-
up. the break is garbage
bags of your sister's
belongings you find
in your room the day you
come back from summer camp.

the break is the party
you want to have
for your sister. the break
is your sister not being
only yours anymore.

your niece is the break.
the job applications
are the break. listening
to Lil' Kim & Biggie
while your sister braids
your niece's hair is the break.

the break is the job
your sister hates.

the break is the apartment hunt.
the arguments between Moms
& your sister. the break,
the apartment coming through.
the break, garbage bags
absent from your room.

Harold's Chicken Shack #35

fried gizzards w/ fries

your dad orders it for you
& you are too young
to know what you'll have
to swallow &
too old to refuse food.

good sauce is equality
for all fowl. you know
this crunch & thickness
around your tongue.

what changes is texture.
gizzard is stubborn,
muscular. you grind your
teeth like nervous sleep
to eat. you push all the hard
down your throat, away
from your taste buds.

gizzard is a bird's first
stomach to help
the avian break down
what it consumes.

you too swallow difficult shit
like gizzards & if
you're lucky sauce
might help. & if you're not
praise anyway. gravel
is necessary food.

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.