

Poems used in the song cycle *No Ordinary Woman!* (1997)

Poetry by Lucille Clifton from the collection Good Woman  
Music by Gwyneth Walker

Bones, Be Good!

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.

Turning

turning into my own  
turning on in  
to my own self  
at last  
turning out of the  
white cage, turning out of the  
lady cage  
turning at last  
on a stem like a black fruit  
in my own season  
at last

### Homage to My Hips

these hips are big hips  
they need space to  
move around in.  
they don't fit into little  
petty places. These hips  
are free hips.  
they don't like to be held back.  
these hips have never been enslaved,  
they go where they want to go  
they do what they want to do.  
these hips are mighty hips.  
these hips are magic hips.  
i have known them to  
to put a spell on a man and  
spin him like a top!

### Homage to My Hair

when I feel her jump up and dance  
i hear the music! my God  
i'm talking about my nappy hair!  
she is a challenge to your hand  
black man,  
she is as tasty on your tongue as good greens  
black man,  
she can touch your mind  
with her electric fingers and  
the grayer she do get, good God,  
the blacker she do be!

## The Thirty-Eighth Year

the thirty eighth year  
of my life,  
plain as bread  
round as a cake  
an ordinary woman.

an ordinary woman.

i had expected to be  
smaller than this,  
more beautiful,  
wiser in afrikan ways,  
more confident,  
i had expected  
more than this.

i will be forty soon.  
my mother once was forty.

my mother died at forty four,  
a woman of sad countenance  
leaving behind a girl  
awkward as a stork.  
my mother was thick,  
her hair was a jungle and  
she was very wise  
and beautiful  
and sad.

i have dreamed dreams  
for you mama  
more than once.  
i have wrapped me in your skin  
and made you live again

more than once.  
i have taken the bones you hardened  
and built daughters  
and they blossom and promise fruit  
like afrikan trees.  
i am a woman now.  
an ordinary woman.

in the thirty eighth  
year of my life,  
surrounded by life,  
a perfect picture of  
blackness blessed,  
i had not expected this  
loneliness.

if it is western,  
if it is the final  
europe in my mind,  
if in the middle of my life  
i am turning the final turn  
into the shining dark  
let me come to it whole  
and holy  
not afraid  
not lonely  
out of mother's life  
into my own.  
into my own.

i had expected more than this.  
i had not expected to be  
an ordinary woman.