

FAYE MCCRAY

Virgin in Harlem

Their wooly black locs twirled in circles down their backs,
swinging in unison with one another to the beat of the faint steel
drums

echoing in the smoky hot Harlem streets.

Their fingers laced together, tight, and their offspring close at their
backs.

Their tiny steps just hairs from their elders,

One, two, three . . . five steps for everyone one.

Their baby locs springing like tiny coils from their fertile heads.

Uneven but still beautiful.

They were Harlem black, uptown brown.

They were created by the concrete and
twinkled like jewels in the bright city sun.

Their velvet locs were moist with coconut and
their skin was smooth like licorice candy.

Their handmade clothing draped their bodies and
floated in the breeze they created.

Carrying them like subjects at their feet.

I wanted to be with them.

Birthered from them.

Maybe just close enough to listen to them speak.

My thoughts danced to the beat of their footsteps.

Hip hop beats and Afro-Latin rhythms.

Lyrics filled with knowledge and a history untold.

I watched in moss green tights and my Our Lady Queen of
Something uniform,

releasing my mother's manicured hand

trying desperately to see myself in their light.

We were here from Queens to see ourselves.

Well, what we hoped and
who we had planned to be.
My hair was processed and short.
It smelled like it was burning.
Like SoftSheen. Like Dax.
I stunk in this light.

And I
Who I
Me
Who I pretend
Who I be
I knew
Breathing in the air they shared as they passed us by.
I was watching them be free.