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# I ASKED MY MOTHER WHAT WILL I BE & CORNELIA STREET

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Poems "I Asked My Mother What Will I Be" and "Cornelia Street" capture the art of summoning flight.

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## I Asked My Mother What Will I Be

### Shakeema Smalls

When we were sixteen  
we sold each other Newports rapping on  
three-way  
and instant messages  
hoping that we'd get read  
before somebody called  
the house phone.

Our boyfriends  
were dirty-necked project boys who lied  
and fucked  
and gathered us up  
by the mailboxes  
every afternoon.

Hurricanes on their backs  
all of them,  
some of them,  
handsome, public progeny smelling of  
Noxzema & Vaseline.

We were beautiful & ne'er dead but by  
grace,  
were saved by  
our babies humming sing-a-long songs  
to the end of the world.

## Cornelia Street

Shakeema Smalls

*for Keyshia, Gladys, and Shaquana*

In a box between her twin cousins and three dead aunts  
is a photo of the old co-op off Cornelia & Hausey  
where all her granddaddy's girls, fixtures of the  
building stoop, became high-hipped astronauts  
pinning their doobies and tying their shirts as they  
grabbed old phone cords out the kitchen drawer.  
Little sisters of the sidewalk, popping at each others' legs'  
between flesh and concrete, gold jewelry gathered about their  
their necks and earlobes like baptismal collars,  
their rhythmic hands sacred valances holding time  
the power in their straw legs defying physics.

