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EXODUSTERS: A POEMIFICATION OF JACOB LAWRENCE'S THE MIGRATION SERIES

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Black folks are constantly instructed to "stop living in the past," when the very act of remembering (remembering our collective history that has been brutally beaten and chopped to bits then buried beneath a ground of white fear) is what enables us to fly. In the African American Southern stories about flying Africans brought to the so-called United States, remembering the ability to fly is the key to actually being able to do it. And our flight is beautiful; rhythmic, miracle, learned. This poem seeks to illustrate the sequence of flight enacted by Black folks during The Great Migration as a means of reminding Black folks alive today of the historically precedented power of the movement of our bodies and the resolute-ness of our collective "no." May the rhythm of their rebellion and the permeating sting of the whitelash be properly re-membered through this work.

Yasmine Bolden is a Pushcart Prize nominated Black American poet, part-time creative writing coach, and racial justice advocate dedicated to nurturing the voices of and creating accessibility for young BIPOC involved in the arts. She hopes to represent Black history in the tradition of Jacob Lawrence.

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the civil war ended and reconstruction rose
& then crashed like waves
& Black politician days where over
 (see wilmington, north carolina
 insurrection of eighteen-ninety-eight
 race riot, one of - number not found)
& freedom wasn't free in any way
 (you can sharecrop if you want to stay,
 & you better listen to what jim crow say)
& so a promise was made by northern ebony hands
& a government attempting to brand a plan to away
 (it trickles into the bones and makes you feel alive!
 & even if it doesn't,
 you're not living under the thumb
 of the white man, besides)

so letters & letters & letters promised & glittered & shone
& the Black people looked around at the scarred earth home
& at the bleary eyes rimmed with dust and derision
 (i will never let a monkey make another political decision)
 & at the boll weevil carving its name into southern crops
 (man or insect- who will come out on top?)
 & the strange fruit hanging on last stand's tree
 (baby, the klu klux klan might be riding for me)
& the Black exodus mirrored that of a holy book's
& the people went up and out of egypt
 (destination: promised land)
& the trains were chug chug chugging to new york & new worlds
& buildings that huddled together like lovers in a storm
 (you can't knock us over, we're not so easily stomped down you'll

need so many more floods to make us drown)

& Black people arrived in waves for days, for weeks & years to come &
became acquainted with the northern cities' hum drum *drum drum drum* &
more gray than gay

& would you please pray for chicago?
(the water tastes different here but it still burns)

& here, things were still monochrome
(monkey, monkey, go back home
i'm getting good at throwing stones
i killed a boy, his skin was brown like yours
i hit him hard, watched him drown,
he was seventeen, you don't want this war)

& the Blacks knew this place was not safe
nor was it safer nor was it safe nor was it safe

& law enforcement was inconsistent
& stockyard job mobs were reminiscent
of a southern lifestyle they had supposedly left behind

but still
they were beautiful

& blood could not stop them
& job segregation could not stop them
& they handed their children promises that
glittered and shone and delivered
(a new covenant, with the nurturing earth
less with her dirt and more with her industrial rhythm)

& they birthed singer Florence Mills
& poet Langston Hughes
& Black pride shaking her fist and jubilantly singing
about her melanin hue
& Zora courted controversy
& Cullen kissed a renaissance
& Black plays *shuffled* along on Broadway
& north was still south in a way
 but things were glowing and growing & growing
 & growing
 & growing
 (*you can't knock us over,*
 we're not so easily stomped down
 you'll need so many more floods
 to make us drown)