

*Phebus Etienne*

## BLACK ENOUGH

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I traveled to Paris and the pork free,  
lactose intolerant sorority sister questioned  
how could I walk the decadent grounds of Versailles  
when I had not traced my Dahomey roots.

Even Dessalines danced the minuet.  
Europeans swim in my blood, surfacing in Victors  
who walked ahead of me, signifying beauty  
with *cafe-au-lait* or mulatto skin, straight noses and silken plaits.  
They left or were driven from  
milkweed forests and sugar cane acres,  
after learning the simplicity of dried cod tossed in vinegar  
and served over cornmeal at midday.  
Luxury was siesta, open air baths at dusk, lemon leaves scenting a tin basin.

Parisian men praised my pronunciation  
while their women appraised my brown shell. Some secured  
purse straps, pulled husbands closer  
as we shared bridges arcing above the Seine.

Two centuries since we raised a flag,  
rice farmers and professors sail wooden ships  
through another middle passage.

I know the taste of *Bordeaux*, *crème brulee*,  
the sweetness of standing over Napoleon's tomb.