How She Spelled It

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spill (v) 3. (with reference to the contents of something) empty out or be emptied out onto a surface.

"Passengers' baggage had **spilled out** of the hold."

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it actually lifts her out of the bed. breathing or something like it. water in her veins. salt. spirit. rush. she has no one to describe it to. she would say wave crash but she has not seen the ocean. would say lightning. would say wait and come back, i'll show you. the next day she draws it in flour on the floor, the stars she has seen with her body, the stars she holds, they are children. and the shapes she makes are the shapes of her hands in every direction. she doesn't have the word *fractal*, she is inside a kaleidoscope where color merges to nothing she has ever seen. flour on her dirt floor on her brown skin. the only thing bright enough to make it real.[1]

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because she was a cave. papyrus. she was inventing a language. herself. she was lighting up the darkness. her skin. however dull, the person who holds the tool can say *i am not an animal*. can she? can say there is control. there is reason in what she feels. cannot. say that and be heard. she is not. an animal. so she brights it in the darkness. her skin. so she spells it in the tomb. her covered arms. her battered womb. she makes a place to right her walls again. she tilts and wields it expertly. her pain. the spell she scratches in her skin. her name.[2]

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i am wrong. she told herself. *born wrong. or more like retrieved. walk wrong, talk wrong, even now.* she grieved. *and who in the hell set things up like this?* then she wrote it in the salt spilled on the table. *wrong.* she wrote it in the flour on the floor. *wrong.* she wrote it in chicken blood on the stump. and in grease on the counter. and she circle dialed it rotary home to her mother. and she postcard wrote it across to her sister. and she wrote it on her own wrists with toothpaste that night and smeared it over her teeth. and she bit herself wondering about sinews, worrying about the palimpsest of veins. but in the end she was too vain because when she spelled *wrong* in the steam in the mirror it was not her name.[3]

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she put the words in his breakfast. wiped the spoon with the ink, stirred it deep into black tea. the words were blue and she pressed them into the china saucer underneath his teacup the delicate bowl before she put the oatmeal in. the words were sins that she allowed herself in the morning. imagining they would realign his brain rewrite his thoughts unstain her life. the words were hearses. not curses. just designed to carry him away. she named him what he was. so gentle he would swallow it and not choke. her wrought written loops of language printed careful on the whiteness sweet as poison. before the sugar and the milk. she loved the soft blue ocean of wishing he would die. burying it in the heavy oats. she imagined the blue of her own bruises spreading daily on his insides until his muscles could not take it and his bones grew weak and bent. she wrote vitamin hate in his breakfast. receipt for how her life was spent.[4]

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she just took a corner of one piece of paper and scribbled in blue ink and loops what she meant. and then she folded it up and ate it. and then the next day she did it again. and after eight months she danced and looked you in the eye. and told you with her deep blue tongue that fiber could do wonders. and something was coming. she could say it with her gut and release it rather joyfully. and what do you know. we are all full of it now.[5]

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first she would have to clear the table. put away the brightly colored miscellany on the central surface of her lying life. first she would have to admit the table was there before she was. first she would have to sit at the table and watch relationships fall apart and the table stay together. first she would have to trust that a table can be strong enough for a question. she would have to sit there wondering how a table got to be stronger than her. she would have to move the kitchen table to her office and meditate on that. how much love does wood absorb. she would have to ask the oldest tree she knows. *how do you turn paper into food?*[6]

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she tied paper to her wrists with rubber bands, kissed ink and sat down. pulled elastic over her ankles for what it meant. eyelash staples broke and rusted daily off her face. collated and cross. she referenced her elliptical contents monthly and wondered, bent at the edge of her bed, how her thin-paged life, her black-type days amounted to only this.[7]

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she had thought to hold the question whole, with hairpins and her hands, until you got here. thought she could stay it with staples and standing still. surely housework could wait. surely heaven and handbasket would grant her a few moments to hold it together. after all her waiting, surely this. but surely is nothing and it fractured slowly, the question, in her patient mended heart until her bone remembered who to punish, broke away from her stoic knowing and began to stab small ventricles of trust. you didn't come home. and this was not eden. she smashed your chest of drawers to smithereens.[8]

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she sands them out. the grooves they used to walk in. the steps they once stepped into. the time they wasted here. she sawdust saves them. the crooked mornings the creaking nightwalks. the pacing evenings. she smooths them out. redeeming something returning woodsign asking for heart pine to hear her out. she won't remember the routine wreckage she used to walk through barefoot here. she sands it out.[9]

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a framed family picture is a phantom. it is a fountain of glass to cut her now. all this time believing that glass is water gets caught in her throat like the sanded-down future of what it is possible to say. she is so smooth now. disabused of how what is was supposed to look like. now that the pane is a million drops. now that she has dropped the frame of what she thought she was making onto the floor where bare feet sacrifice and smile.[10]

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so she stood steeple-straight in the shards still in proud shock of her quick work. the living room now rainbowed glass collected on the floor, the mosaic of how mad she had been. she almost laughed out loud but she was too breathless at this room, more broken than she. no picture frame could contain her now. she was prism reborn. she was sharp refracted everything.[11]

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not everybody knows my name, but everyone knows what I taste like. salt after malt liquor. vault where the soul is kept. everyone knows my sweat under their tongue when they try to say free market. wet wild wick when they try to spark it on the fourth of july again. mildew of what I do for you. everyone knows the bloom of the brackish floor of the living room America. i taste like hysteria sedated with a case of blues. i taste metallic like tap shoes Morse coding no. i taste like dirty city snow that can't stay white. i taste like your morning breath after waking up all night afraid your stuff is gone. i taste like sparrow song and hunger, taste like blackened coal mined lungs. i taste like military blunders limping up and down the street. i taste like used rag fermentation that gets used again another week. can i speak?[12]

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