

## A NOTE

And so I was trying to ask the question again, ask it anew, as if it had not been asked before, because the language of the historian was not telling me what I needed to know. Which is, what is it like in the interstitial spaces where you fall between everyone who has a name, a category, a sponsor, an agenda, spokespersons, people looking out for them—but you don't have anybody.

— HORTENSE SPILLERS

This writing started to spill out one day when I was listening to Hortense Spillers speak at the Feminist Theory workshop at Duke University. I had been reading and writing about Spillers for years, but something became clear that day about my relationship to her work. What kept me coming back to her essays over and over again was not only what she said (though what she says about race, gender, capitalism, and literature is enough to come back for forever); it was also *how* she said it. Again and again, there were phrases in her work that did far more than make her point. They made worlds. They invited affect. They brought to mind nameless women in unknown places who were laughing and looking sideways at each other and a world that couldn't understand them.

I started this experiment thinking that I could take specific phrases from particular essays in *Black, White, and in Color* out of context, and then I realized that I could never take them out of context. Or that context couldn't take them at all. Which is to say that when I turned these phrases, doors opened and everyone came through. All the black women writers Spillers wrote about and didn't write about. All the characters those black women writers acknowledged and ignored. All the people living novelistic lives without arcs or arks to save them. As usual, the project took over and offered scene after scene out of time and invited voices and settings that I can't claim to have invented. It is either that I was craving these scenes and these voices or they were craving me and we met up at the hot spot called *Black, White, and in Color*.

This space, which is a temporary space, which we must leave, for the sake of future travelers and our own necks, is a sacred dedicated space. Libation for the named and the nameless. This is for black women who made and broke narrative. The quiet, the quarrelling, the queer. This is where. This is what. This is how.

**spill (v)** 1. cause or allow (liquid) to flow over the edge of its container, especially unintentionally.

*“You’ll spill that coffee if you’re not careful.”*

SYNONYMS: *knock over, tip over, upset, overturn*



the ground shakes with us  
the gathering women  
grows rich grows brown grows deep  
the gathered hands women  
grown brown grown women  
the sure determined feet  
the ground grows everything we eat  
the graceful stomping women heading home  
ungrateful women populating poems  
the ground has everything it needs  
we have never been alone

the sky sings for us  
the rainmaking women the rage-taking women  
the blood  
the sky so open so nose wide open  
can't refuse the shape of our lungs  
can't bear to remain above  
the sky sees the shoulders that shrug off hate  
and celebrate and hug  
the sky slows the rhythm by falling out  
and down and done and drug  
the sky begins to know itself  
we breathe it in as love

the water waits for us  
the wide-eyed women the walking women the worst  
the water washes the war wrung women  
the wailers the whistle the first

the water waists of the undrowned women  
the hope floats women the strong  
the water knows us  
the whole-note women  
the half-step harmony song

the fire frees us  
the fast-ass women the fall-in-love women the freaks  
the fire is full of the all-out women  
the walk-out women the sweet  
the fire is finding the love-lost women  
the worth-it women the ones  
fire is blazing the brash blues women  
the black-eyed women  
the wiry women with guns  
the fire is becoming the sun  
  
our work here is not done