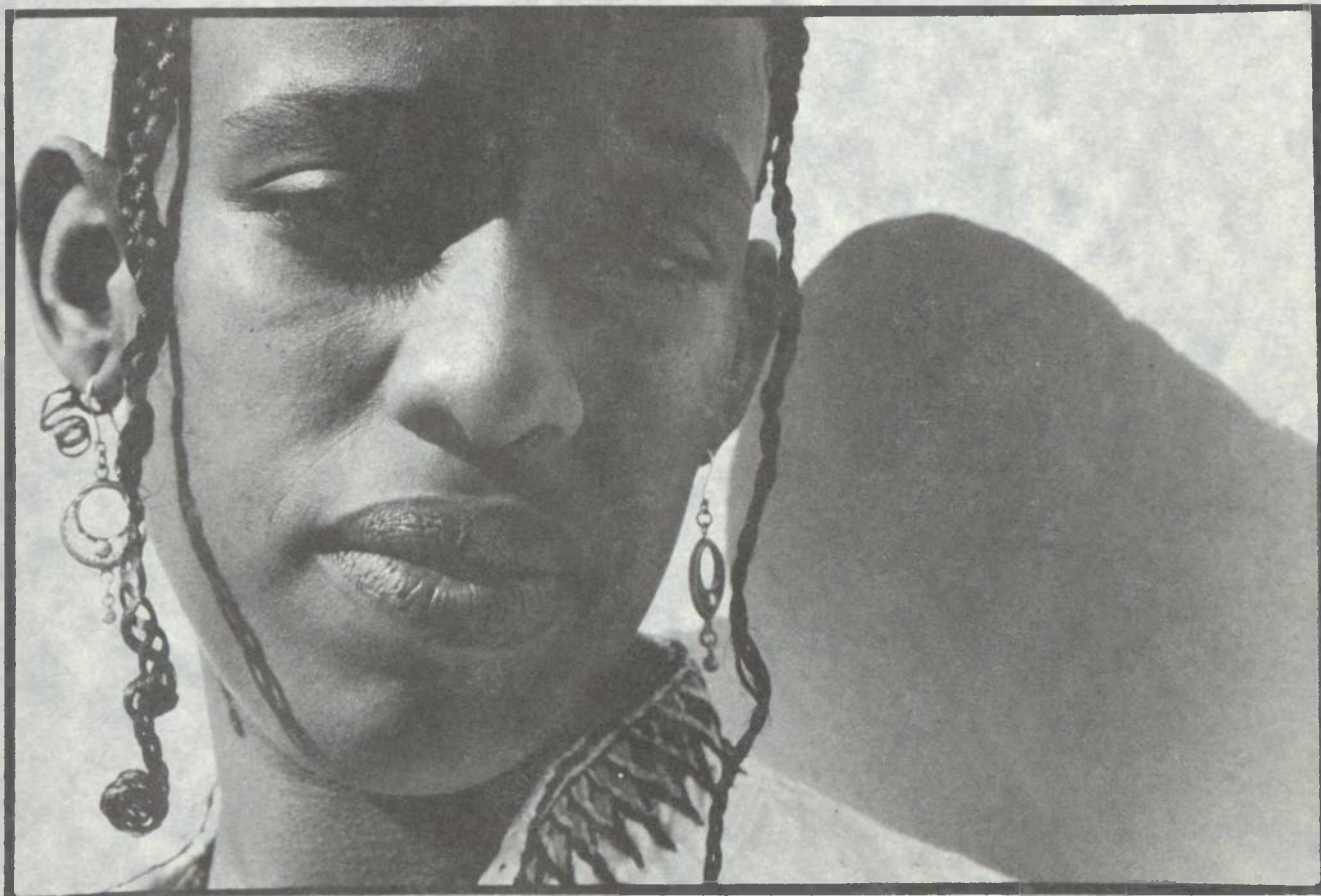


FOCUS



1997

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**Spelman
College's
Literary
Magazine**

1997

Dedication

Focus 1997
is dedicated to
Pearl Cleage,

an ever-present
inspiration
in Spelman's classrooms,
at our podiums,
and
on our bookshelves.

Acknowledgments

We thank

Dr. Warner and Mrs. Charnelle Holloway,
for their support
in producing this issue,

Dr. Johnnetta B. Cole

as she culminates 10 years
of
exceptional service to Spelman Women,

and

**All who submitted
their work to this publication.**

Focus 1997

2	Untitled	- Ninita Brown
3	walk home	- Salah Jason Ross Brown
4	Hope	- Charley Torrell Jones
5	Nine a.m.	- Anjineeki S. Miles
6	america	- Salah Jason Ross Brown
8	Blind Praise	-Kendra Abdulwali
9	Oh Moses Said	-Kendra Abdulwali
10	Black Jack	-Nakia Brown-Threadgill
11	Almost Extinct	-C.P.
12	Beyond	-Justice

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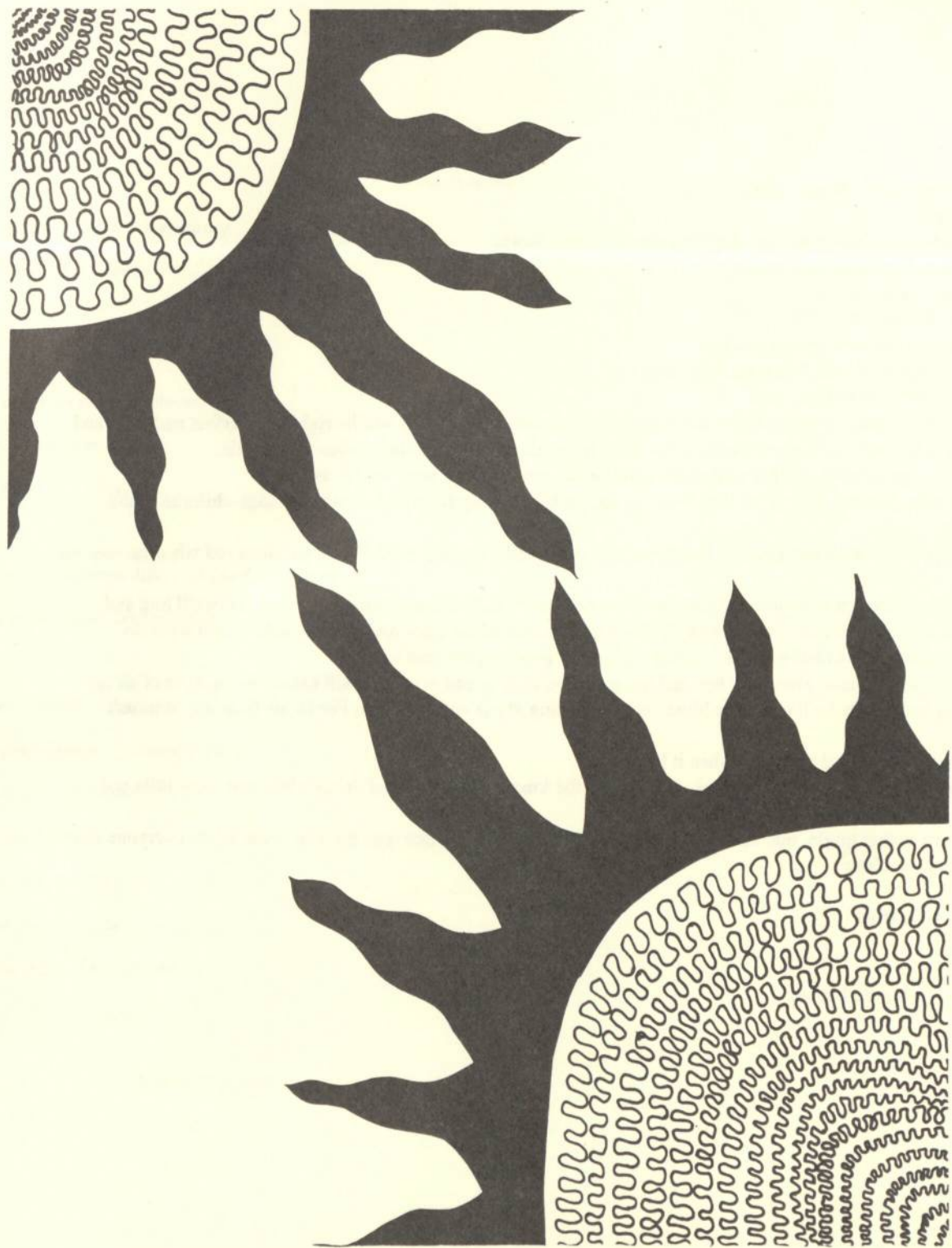
16	Untitled	-Carrie L. Ellis
17	She touched my hand	-C.P.
18	Abuelita	-Leconte Dill
19	Waiting	-Kendra Abdulwali
22	I see it my own way	-7B.I. SOL
24	paradox	-darlene anita scott
25	Cataclysm	-Michelle McCullers
32	full of shit	-darlene anita scott
33	Written over a drink of Cappuccino....	-Ayana M. Davis
34	Poor House Keeping	-7B.I. SOL
36	Mirror on the Wall	-Ninita Brown
39	journal entries from a year in afrika	-Salah Jason Ross Brown
40	amen	-darlene anita scott

ARTWORK

Cover Art - Umi A. Vaughan Page 1 - Teri Freeman Page 7 - Kahrin Bennett

Page 15 - Megan Cross Page 21 - Trevor Lighty Page 31 - Trevor Lightly

Back Cover - Nia Tuckson



I believe in love at first sight
 I believe in love
 in knowing someone so well that your world is their world,
 that your breath is their breath
 in everything you do.
 I hope I'll find it
 I believe in dreams and hopes and
 and Loneliness will bring strength that
 that Truth will free the soul
 That I'll find the person right for me in a place I'll never expect and it will be right and perfect and right and
 I'll be ready and we'll grow together like the tree my daddy told me about when I was little,
 hugging each other in the sky, making little trees in the grass below us
 He'll smile too much, sing off key, dance in the park and jump rope with beautiful Black children in the
 ghetto
 He'll speak Spanish and flirt and laugh outloud and smell like soap and his ears will turn red when he sees me

And I'll melt when I see him. Words won't be necessary and eyes will mirror the soul and we'll hug and
 kiss in front of Dr. Cole's house and I'll sleep in his arms 'til my neck and legs fall asleep and we'll do
 meaningful work together and my name will sound good hyphenated with his.
 And Ill put his picture over my bed and mine will be over is and everyone will know and in front of all my
 friends and family he'll make me blush by just smiling at me and I'll laugh, For Reals from my stomach

I believe in love and I'll know when it happens
 I believe in love, the kind everyone sings about, the kind that you giggled about when you were little and
 K I S S I N G-ing under the tree
 I believe in that tingle, that forever tingle in your lips that everywhere you go, you smile when everyone else
 has forgotten how

I believe in it all

-Ninita Brown

walk home

his hand fit with a gentle familiarity

as if he'd been there before

known me before

and

remembered the secrets of the soft places

where dreams ripen

in the clench of sweaty fists.

his calloused fingertips didn't cut like i'd expected

and my manhood wasn't shattered when he let go.

when we released each other,

as, our destination had been reached

and he entered his house

to greet his wife

I couldn't help but wonder

if he took the time to hold her hand

and knew the secret of the places

where her dreams reside?

-Salah Jason Ross Brown

Hope

An empty room, an empty house
Enter through the vacant eyes
Reflecting silent echoes of
Untold lullabies and times of
Bittersweet plans for the future.
Outside the devil is beating his wife
And through the windowpane
Crystalline tears float up to
Heaven's door, asking for
Entrance with a wind-soft knock.
Drifting to form a rainbow,
Not refused, the salt water imbued
With the sun's warmth speeds to earth like
Drops of molten gold.

-Charley Torrell Jones

Nine a.m.

creating mindless art, chaotic strokes of ink
fighting to maintain attention
digging through all parts of the brain wanting some
deviation
distraction
depth
to this lecture
reiteration of what was read before the hour or maybe
not
but what is learned? what is gained?

babbling through , but boredom brings sleepy eyes
selective inattention
denied
not listening to keep from hearing
unrelated things
heads tilting, eyes rolling, pencils dancing upon the lined floor
creating the thoughts that want to get out
using this time as that outlet
but should I be able to?

-Engineeki S. Miles

america

maiden spirit of twofold bitterness
healing awaits you
loosen your fears.
nobody to hurt you here
love abounds
come cry now
in these arms.

her agenda?
reconciliation--
failed, but at least she tried.
and at most,
well,
stumbled awfully
into deeper lies and further denial.
but please remember, oh, how her spirit's been broken
and
place blame at the door, for, like you, she dreams,

of being whole,
of being kind,
and of one day being one with the universe which bore her.

-Salah Jason Ross Brown



Blind Praise

Praises are sung
to frail goddesses
bleached of wrath
devoid of sexuality
ignored are the queens
sturdy lovers
effortless dreamers
rulers of themselves
and all they see.

-Kendra Abdulwali

Oh Moses Said

Let my people go
free us from our sheltered shackles and our mirthless minds
with the crowbar of truth pry open our foolish eyes
Let My People Go
open the doors to the projects the ghettos the slums U expect us to call
home
crack the walls of our educated mis-education Let the truth and the books be
one

Let My People Go
but Ahhhhhh...
Why am I speaking to you?

U gazed upon us for 400 Years
created millions of broken homes, lakes of bloody tears
your hard white mask smiles and bobs but your heart is like the bones of
my ancestors
hidden, bare and hard
My people...Let Yourselves Go
batter at the cocoon of desperation and cynical 'White' lies
rip the bandage of white wool from your poor suffering eyes
climb to the tops of your houses scream cry moan as you break free
LET ME FREE...

-Kendra Abdulwali

Black Jack

Got me a friend, John Johnson.

I call him Jack.

Ole Jack try to fight
for everything that's Black.

Black magic, Black balling,
Black tie affairs.

At 14, Jack started dying black
over his gray hairs.

He only drink colas...

No ginger ale or Sprite.

But Jack take 7-Up

home to his white wife.

-Nakia Brown-Threadgill

Almost Extinct

anything to the good
 of a lighter shade of brown,
 a medium done
 piece of wheat toast,
 one cent colored beauty...
 to that of a
 California reared olive,
 polished onyx,
 a sundried raisin,
 an ethiopian shepherd's beard:
 I marvel in the preciousness of you.
 and
 if crowned in strands of
 brush thick brush
 entrapping to the fingertips,
 malleable with patience,
 baby tight coils relapsed, zig-zaggy
 designed coops creating new styles...

-C.P.

embodying la historia of your
 great grandbabies, the picture
 of a reality gone by,
 the evidence of another
 empire
 of which you are a branch;
 marvel in the preciousness of you.

like the earth formed
 diamonds on the back of
 your neck;
 almost extinct

Beyond

Outside of the woodframed shanty
with contoured Coke bottles and bologna wrapped in brown paper;

Past the grits and spicy, greasy links of pork
the black-eyed peas over sticky white rice
and biscuits smothered in maple syrup;

Down the road from the one room matchbox
with the cross on top promising a blessing
and sweaty armpits after
the hand clapping
foot stomping
arm waving
shouting, shouting
"Glory Hallelujah!"

Without the sizzle of oil as the heat presses the shape from tight
curls
dusty from racing down the road
wading in the murky water
and chasing butterflies through the fields;

In spite of the bills and coins
under the plank
on the porch
beside the rocking chair that only the wind entertains;

No matter the cola colored fingers that ball up
no to pound the wall that is the distance from west coast to east
but to wrap around the pen that gives voice to those "Rum Raisin
Rage" lips;

Away from the temptation of grinding in the grass
that trapped a rising sun on the horizon
and made a world forever dim;
Right around the corner from the one story schoolhouse
where Stuart Hall meets Bic meets red rejection;

And yet is not the skin pulled taut over rum thighs and squared
calves an invitation to acceptance
just past the starting blocks--
at the finish line?

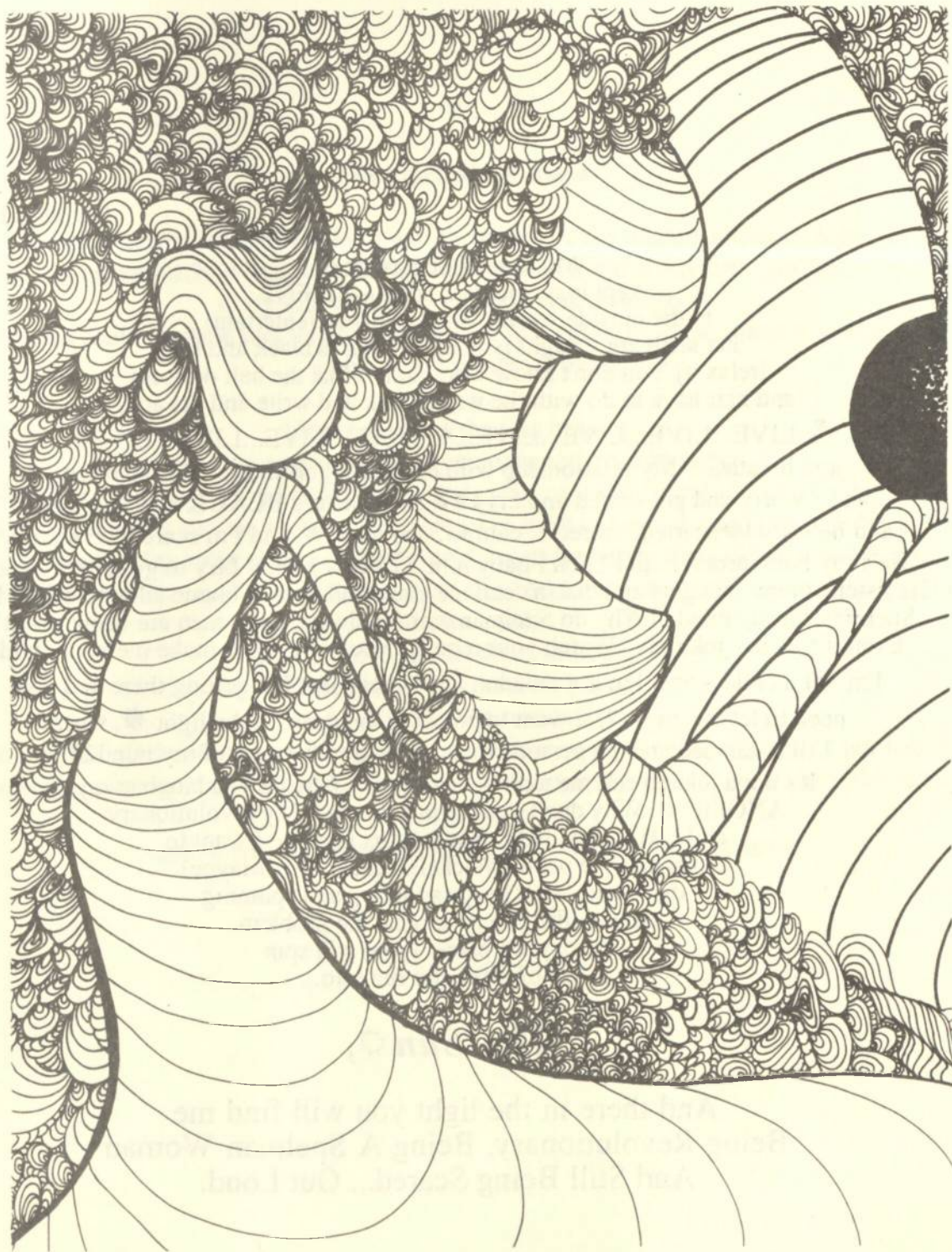
Away from this reality lurks the dream of grandeur and big words
air brushed acrylic tips
relaxed roots wrapped around
a Fashion Fair countenance
that smiles and ar-it-cu-lates;

Golden goals financed by those fast feet,
the account under the plank on the porch
beside the rocking chair;

the local bank,
the federal government,
and benefactors in need of a charity case
who deserve more than bologna in brown paper and black-eyed peas;

like they weren't good enough.

-justice



Carrie L. Ellis

My mind/thoughts/ideas
 kept in a cold dark space-- SILENT
 to the outside world. She can dance [entertain] ,
 her teeth are straight [smile], her hair is black and long
 [relax it]. You don't know who I am--What the hell do teeth
 and hair have to do with the way I think and write and act and...

☠ LIVE...LIVE...LIVE...LIVE...✦...LIVE...LIVE...LIVE...LIVE☠
 and breath☺? My relationship with **MY** [little] brother is **MY** business,
 and I worry and get scared and cry♦♦♦ because he's **BLACK** and he's male
 and he's kind♦hearted, sweet☺, calm☺, and naive*, and I'm scared, so scared.
 He's my baby brother...but I *don't* baby him. I care☺/ I help/ I try to guide☺☺/And
 He listens to my thoughts and doesn't call me crazy and doesn't blame (Blame, **BLAME**)
 Spelman for my mind. (Why do Spelman women always think men are being sexist?)
 Even if you say jokingly "Watch your mouth," you're trying to make me your child.
 I'm not a child☺>>> I'm not an adult☺>>> **Yet**. But I'm getting there and you
 need to let me go →(?) I want to go out in the open, in the light ♦, where
 I (iiii) can become the person/woman hiding in the dark of my mind☺.
 It's not a joke to call me a revolutionary♦. Why do you laugh at my
ANGER!!!! Why don't you try to help me? (My revolutionary
 child, HA, HA, HA) And it hurts because I want to
 change (like pennies/nickels/dimes??No--Maybe)
 the world. As it keeps spinning and spinning
 around like you go around the problem.
 One day the planet [you] will spin
 out of orbit and run into...

The Sun ☼,

And there in the light you will find me
 Being Revolutionary, Being A Spelman Woman
 And Still Being Scared... Out Loud.

She touched my hand

it was so soft that the only way i knew it was there was by the tingling sensation it placed in the center of my stomach it sent me whirling into another world where pain was cushioned on every side where my emotion was understood a world that could recreate that tingling sensation in the middle of my stomach whenever i got an inkling that i wanted it there

i looked up and she was beautiful
 twistedhair softbrowncomplexion smallframe
 i didn't want to see her but i did and even her nose was exquisite i looked away before i thought too deep about she and me about us she walked in front of me and caught my eye for just a second before looking away as if to say **my world could be better than the one you live in now** i didn't want to but i saw the small brown hand that had turned my world upside down with its delicate brush
 i wanted to tell her what she'd done
 i wanted her to know her power
 i wondered if she was aware
 when i stepped back into my hetereality i was not ashamed of where i had been i felt happy to have been a passenger on the tour of someone else's virtuosity it made me smile to have been chosen by her
 so gentle was her charge i hoped i would be chosen ever again.

-C.P.

Abuelita

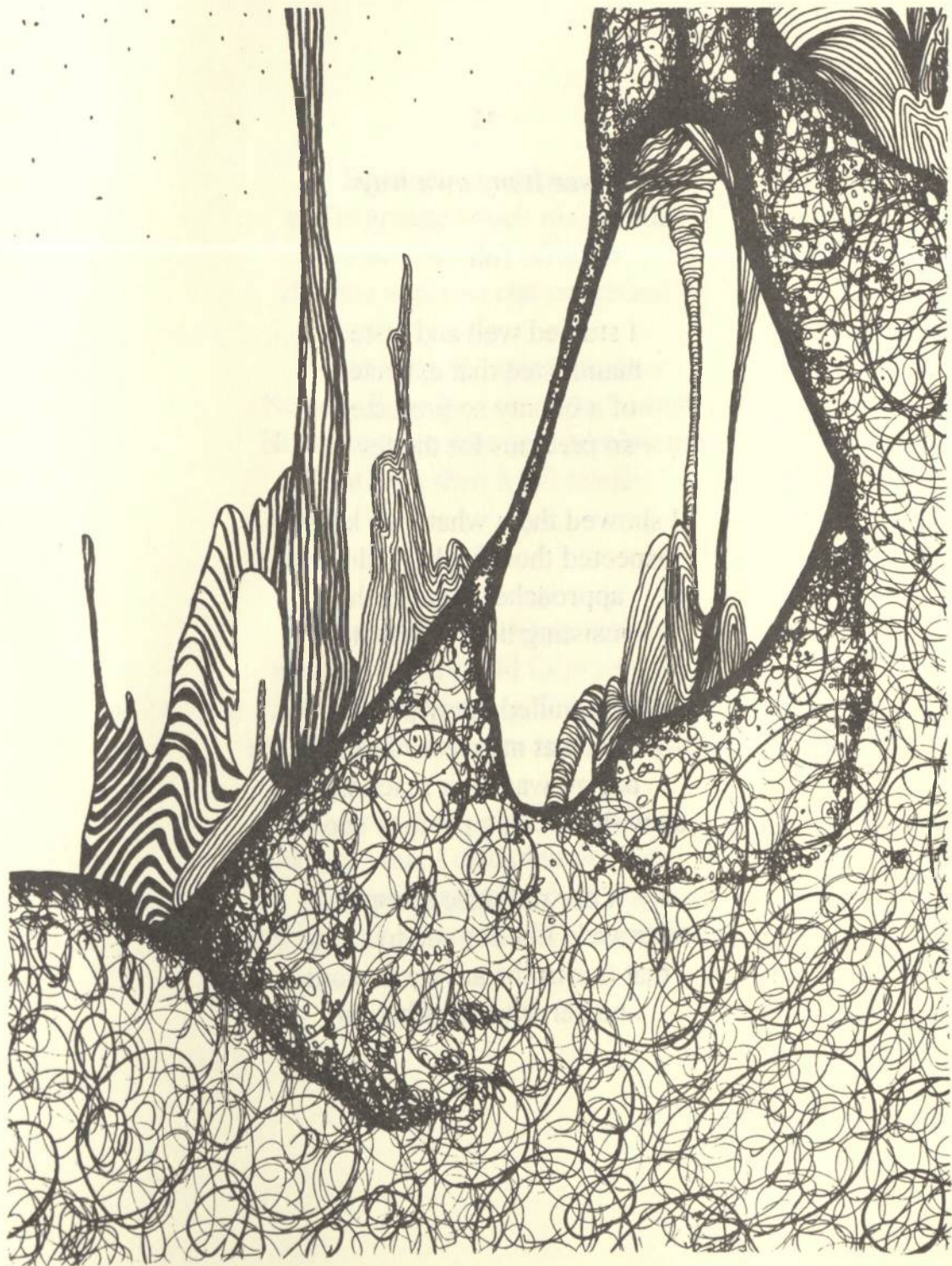
The firm hands
Dipped in chocolate
Covered with the smooth contours of wrinkles
They once bathed my newborn body
Or occasionally swatted my toddler bottom
Routinely, plaiting my thick hair
Coaxing it into long ancestral lines
These hands often served me hot cereal to erase the winter chill
Or patted my dead, encouraging my success
These hands were a lasting memory for me,
waving at me from the house, as I headed out onto my new journey
They longed for me to stay,
yet acknowledged and accepted my search for independence
I never expected these hands to lost their firmness
To yield their grasp to the impending affliction
I returned to find frail hands instead of the firm ones that I had grown up with
and that I had grown to love
Nevertheless, these hands still manage to caress my chubby cheeks
and summon a smile from my quivering lips
How I long to grip these hands forevermore
To gain strength from their years
while shielding them from harm
With feeble hands, I cautiously pick up the phone
Afraid to discover if these hands have become mere prints on my soul.

-Leconte Dill

Waiting

Waiting is hard for me
I have always waited
Waited for equality
With my bothers/sisters
Waited for respect
In my world
Waited for pride
in myself
I have always waited
quietly, thinking/knowing
That change would come
but as I waited others too
waited
soon change came
nor would she come
drifting down from
some waiting place
change had to be called
summoned, ordered
to come
So now demand
equality with all
respect from all
and pride for myself
it is hard for me to demand,
but I'm demanding because
waiting only wastes time.

-Kendra Abdulwali



I see it my own way

(oh)

I studied well and tested
manifested that expected
of a bounty so protected
so precious for the few.

I showed them what they knew
inspected thoroughly, with new
approaches upon truth
insisting they accept it.

They smiled at my passion
Fancied at my clever fashion
but nil was their reaction
as with mocking pat they spoke.

"Your rationale apropos
but we'd like for you to know
that our truths are set in stone
and serve us satisfaction.

So kindly do surrender
to the granite which may render
you a heretic, offender
if to the *way* you can not tether."

So, in spite of urging weather
No new light they chose to treasure
No new peace or promised pleasure
Truth not their legal tender.

*

I sat in chat and chosen fuddle
hoping choice could form rebuttal
as condensation, conflict puddled
my feet, their foot, my start, our way.

Upon our parting paths, dismay
Regret, that I offend their sway.
But I will see it my own way
and hope that mine is truth redoubled.

-7B.I. SOL

paradox:
a case study of the Million Man March/Day of Absence

he's a paradox walking
his intelligence slips out everytime he spouts out a successful pick-up line,
for that is his ultimate appeal
and it slips out in the bhudda smoke when he's philosophizing
about a reality that's otherwise too painful to reveal
and
he's a daddy
since October 16, 1995 when he almost became one success story of a million
(barely before the million had gathered)
welcoming sabria into the world but not into his world
and
the very next day he walked away with the scent of placenta barely off his hands
and the rhetoric of affirmation and atonement barely off his lips
and
since then, he's been running
his pace quickens each time he turns around
and sees himself in that cheeky toothless smile and those big dark eyes
each time the rhetoric begins to become tangible in the formula cans and the
pampers
then he decides that
you can't touch rhetoric.

-darlene anita scott

Cataclysm**So Say the Dead**

The spider's web grabs
and tangles
as Dreds of Mumia's
scalp reach and tear
for our protest
reach and tear
ripping like thunder clouds
over the white expanse
of nations.
The meteorologists babble
as pressure drops
fault lines crack
as I stomp in rage
with my feet
yes my feet
who are angered
at these deaf children
maimed and silenced
by the incest of
sister crack and brother smack
oh how helpless we have become
with our altars of
carved and oiled deities
mudcloth /incense
and the scratched
copy of Marley serenading.

Is this what the ancestors yearn for?
where is the fire and water burning
burrowing down passages for the unseen
En el dia de los muertos
the day of the dead
We mujeres wake
and pray
and offer food like confessors behind
laced and latticed walls
of the civilized world:
Where it is not polite
to speak to ghosts
who demand to be
heard
But the cipher I meet with
to honor
grows smaller
and the death Gods
take in more
members and
serve more
than McDonalds
in the summertime
and the mango and white
candles and candied skulls,
and stone virgins and
bread and letters scribbled and screamed
beneath glasses of water
beneath beds

they falter each year to dust
 each year
 and the dead grow on,
 calling your name.

But Dear Abby advises against the talking of ghosts
 no matter that
 Great Grandmas
 pierce Cherokee yelps
 through bedroom air
 and papas lift and bless
 babies and unavenged
 spirits decorate
 walls with nail polish and pot liquor - splattered.

Nevermind that
 icicles fall in Atlanta like so many
 spikes from the avenging
 angels
 nevermind that
 little Negra Latina girl
 learned that heads and hair
 could make linoleum
 shine

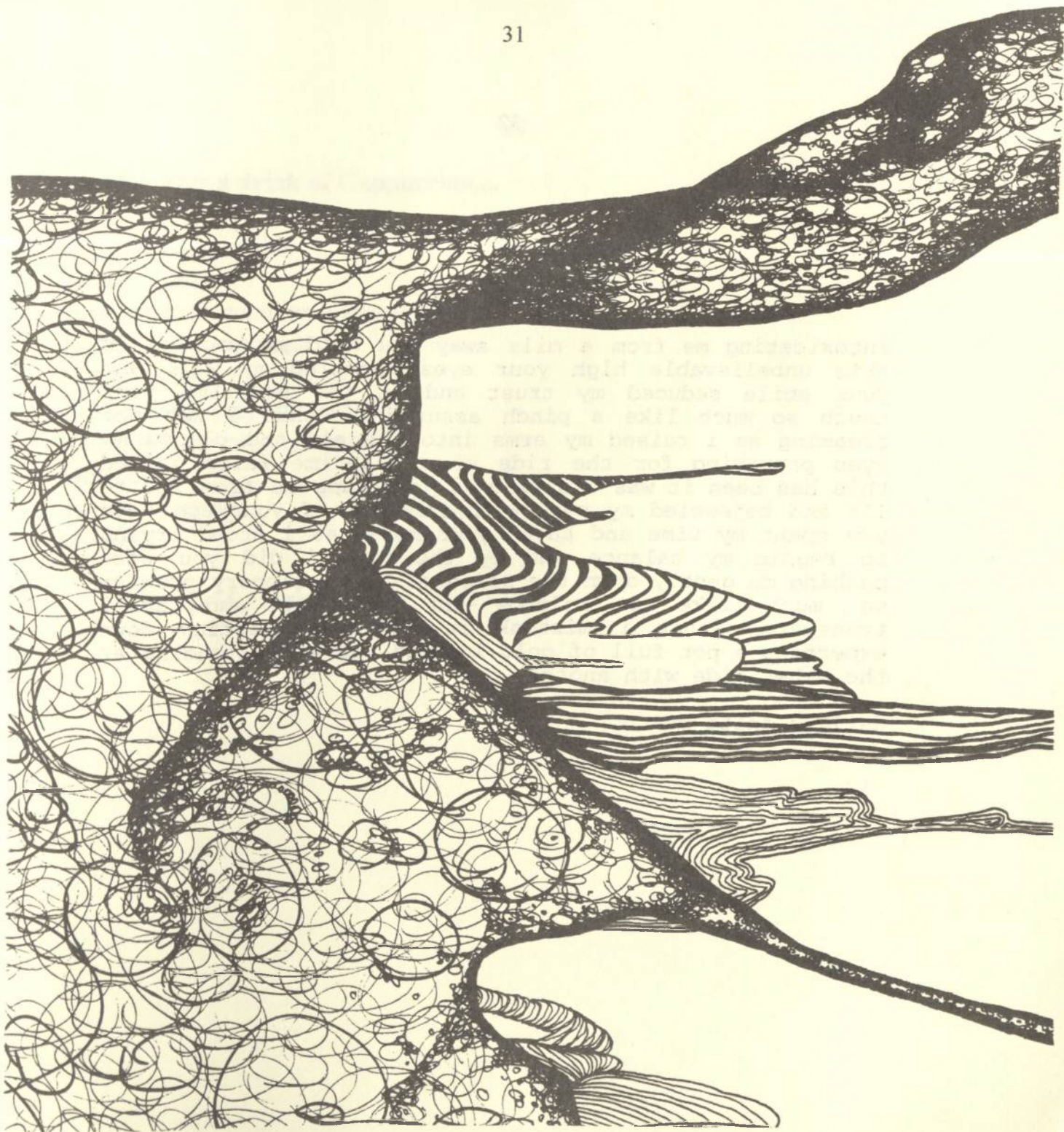
after mom freebased
and mistook her for a
mop and glo and sewer pipe.
It's no matter that
whole hillsides
melt into mud and slide
into oblivion
Don't you know that
shackled and booted feet
dance because our deaf
souls can only hear
the drum, but
there are no words
for us
for they are lost in the
filth we walk on.
We walk on the ashes
of their bones.

Do you think it is a mistake
that voices haunt your dreams
that torrents and
floods follow the
shoot down of
lil'boy buying now and later
at the corner store?
they are mad
fuck it
We are mad
I speak for

the dead and
they speak
in me and
in Mumia's fist
and in the
striped color of sunset
and tangling vines
and falling buildings
and the ringing shot of
pinging bullets to the
ground and they speak
in the silence of
a spider weaving
insanely.

But the silken threads
will soon break
the dust
the bone
the flesh
will rise
so say the dead
the walls of the kingdom of souls
are breaking
and spilling into
our streets
so say the dead
prepare your souls
so say the dead.

-Michelle McCullers



full of shit

intoxicating me from a mile away you held me captive in this unbelievable high your eyes shackled my will and your smile seduced my trust and in the meantime your touch so much like a pinch assured me that i was not dreaming so i raised my arms into the air and closed my eyes preparing for the ride of a lifetime which indeed this has been it was dizzying as you swung me from lie to lie and bejeweled my neck with remnants of your ego then you spent my time and saved your money as i stood trying to regain my balance and by the time i did you were pushing me gently down the slope of your slippery promise so much like a rainbow--all colorful and still transparent that i mistook it and went sliding down expecting a pot full of gold instead you were standing at the other side with another pot

darlene anita scott

Written over a drink of Cappuccino....

Small, white granules
Pieced together
In an intricate, complex compound,
Tightly and evenly cut-
A diamond among its class.
Diametrically proportioned to fit
And slowly disintegrate into
Molecules
Sweetly stinging
My tongue.

-Ayana M. Davis

Poor House Keeping

Death visits over a
tea cup of tears, while casually
pointing out the faults in my foundation,
and the beams slowly swaying above,
singing creaks as their fragmented
"Geronimo" to a fall.

On my head.

Then he brags about his palace,
the cold marble floors, the beams
that don't move, the peace and silence
of his acres. The effortlessness
of taking care of his house.

He speaks
of rest. Eternal rest.

He then crosses his legs, to the other side
and asks about the break up.

He asks about my family and graduation.
My plans for life and so casually laments
the tragedy of this world. Swaying beams
creaking, his back up singers.

He gazes in silence again at my house
ending his perusal in my eyes
and with the warmth and sincerity
of a black southern grandmother says,
"I'd love it if you come stay with me
for a bit. Leave all this behind.
Come rest with me, boy. Be free!"

I reluctantly refuse his invitation,
only able to shake my head no
to his enticing.
So he turns,
and walks out slowly and smugly,
as patient as the seas who swallow land.
And through my cracked and dirty window
I watch him walk, longing to
follow where he goes.

(waiting for my house to fall down
around my ears.)

-7B.I. SOL

Mirror on the Wall

So you finagled your way back into his heart by telling
lies
-things that were told to you

You dismissed his evidence of your known history of
skeeming-scamming-whamb-bamb-thank you-ma'aming
By stating he's just a friend

You manipulated
(I know you hate that word)
your way back into his dreams by saying
nonchalantly
each and everything he wanted to hear
in a soft whisper while he fell asleep
in your arms to the subtle beat
of your heart

You jackknifed your way back
into his everyday rituals so that he can't
piss
without you

But you mistakenly,
 inadvertently,
 oops-ed your way into
 a little lock-down, hands on the walls, can't see the light of day sort of
 Solitude in the corner
 with a *red wavy light*

Blinding you,
 Binding you in
 his left-ventricle, nested in his heart
 where you only catch
 a glimpse of life
 through his heart-beat,
 his breath,
 his friends,
 his world
 and you understand why Toni has problems breathing!

Girl, can't you see.
 It's a trick, a game
 And you're the one to blame for
 The situation so ta speak that you're in.

So now you turn to me

As if I could help you by
 mistakenly,
 inadvertently,
 oops-ing my way into figuring some
 mathematical equation of reinventing the wheel
 To fix everything.

Well this is your world,
 your forest,
 your sea
and I'm just a squirrel,
 a snake,
 a fish
trying to hang on to the end of your split ends hoping your
 weave won't break loose.

SO don't you dare turn to me,
 I'm just a little voice on the inside,
 constantly reminding,
 checking the time, and
 picking up the sign on your left ventricle situations

So you can put your own
E=mc game
back in your life
And get the hell out of his system.

-Ninita Brown

journal entries from a year in afrika

Friday & hot
january 96'

listenin to the lil' bits and pieces of shiny stuff Roger wrapped in my ears. thinkin thoughts of far away lovers and waist beads under my skin. wishing you all the love circling above these flashes of blue in my mind, and as always, trying to find your almond scented skin lingering in a crevice of my day. and yo, when I be lookin' around my room at night, and the shadows dance from my candles to my walls, I be hearin' you whisper and know its okay to close my eyes.

-Salah Jason Ross Brown

amen

wash all of my sins away and make me as white as snow white, and look into my soul to cleanse my iniquities with transparent baby blue eyes that embarrass pecola's impenetrable brown saucers; give me strength to get through this ain't no blonde, sure ain't straight crown because i'm not happi to be nappi; heal my body of these evil swellings that make old toothless men sway and bus-stop boys swagger.

darlene anita scott

