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ATLANTA LESBIAN FEMINIST ALLIANCE
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AZALEA

A Magazine by Third World Lesbians

• **Articles**

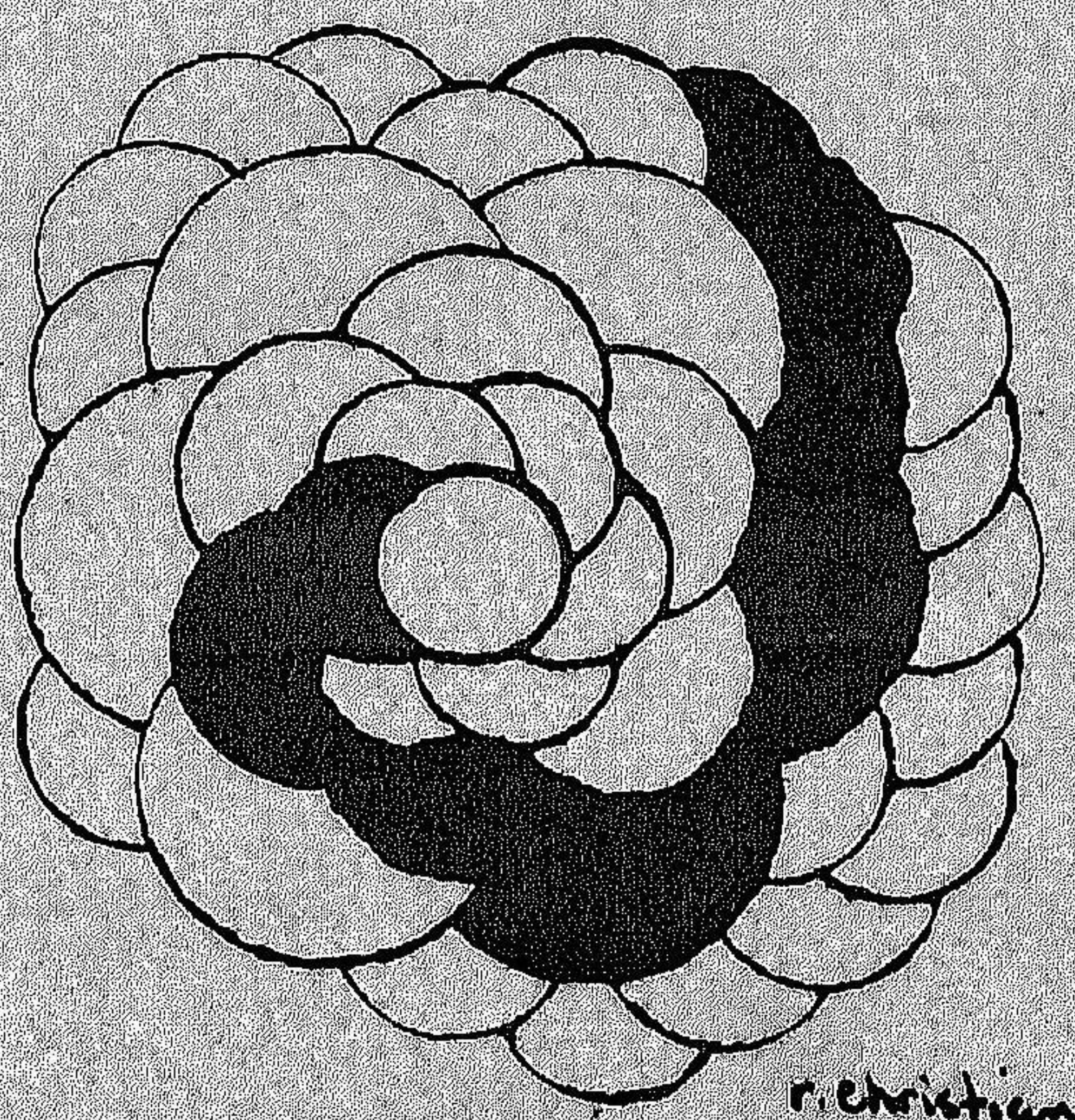
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Special Features

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Contributions - articles, letters, prose, graphics, poetry - for the next issue should be sent to Linda Brown 314 East 91st Street, Apt. 5E, New York City 10028 and Joan Gibbs 306 Lafayette Avenue, Brooklyn, New York 11238.

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Send us your address.

* If you cannot afford the cost of AZALEA, send us as much as you can and we will send you a copy. Enclose a self-addressed stamped envelope.

In this introduction, we would like to take the opportunity to welcome our new readers and explain how we work. As it says on the cover, AZALEA is a magazine by Third World Lesbians. We are publishing this magazine so Third World Lesbians will have a space of their (our) own. Beginning with this issue, we are rotating the editorship of the magazine in an effort to reduce some of the elitism that is usually associated with magazines which always have the same editor. Work is selected for publication in AZALEA basically on a first come first served policy. However even though we set deadlines this does not mean that sisters whose work arrive late is not accepted- if we have room, we try to include it and if we don't we put it aside for the next issue. A little more about the selection process: we do not view ourselves as Black Lesbian-feminist arbiters of culture so we try to include as much as we can from as many women as we can. Like any other publication, we don't publish everything, but our standards are defined not by judging the work so much as trying to understand the content. Probably work that defames Third World women will not appear in Azalea nor work that attempts to use this forum for the perpetuation of goals foreign to our own- namely, the creation of Third World Lesbian "stars". Azalea was created partially but not totally because we feel that alot of feminist and/or lesbian publications build walls around themselves in the same way as establishment publications do and it has been our experience that whenever standards are set in this country the people who most often set and judge them are white and thusly have not sought to include third world people. This is an unfortunate thing to see occur in the women's community but it has and is still continuing to occur so...

Hope you enjoy this issue.

Joan for AZALEA

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A COMMENTARY

by Linda Brown

Benefit Reading for Chrysalis Magazine

Columbia University - Lehman Auditorium - Altschul Hall

December 16, 1977 - 7:30 pm

I have really not decided whether I should write this, as I have so many mixed feelings about the event. But some things are flowing from my pen onto this paper that I feel I had better say.

We arrived late, after much confusion (poor directions) to find the reading space packed with people and oppressively hot. My first glance at more than a handful of men was unnerving. I am a lesbian and a feminist and my personal politics are mostly separatist, so the main thing that offended me about the men's presence here was that Chrysalis is by and for women. Women were reading to benefit the magazine. I felt that the space for the reading should have been kept woman-identified. It's important for us to take care of our own business.

The concept of a women's reading is always exciting to me. I can say the usual positive feelings (the strength, the vibes, the specialness) were there on the surface in some places that night. Upon closer examination, however, certain things broke through the proverbial ice.

Third World women are nearly invisible at these events - both in the audience and on stage - in relation to the number of women present. This time we were better represented on stage. That is something to be pleased about, I suppose. The Third World women on stage were names I keep hearing in almost every women's circle I am part of. One might think it is fine that a substantial number of Third World women writers are getting recognition - it is indeed - but I find something else is happening. An elite class among us is being created. There is "Jane," the black lesbian poet and "Mary," the black straight woman editor and poet; and "Susie," "Doris" and JEMIMA (of which I am one), the black lesbian writers' collective. It seems as though the womens' community is telling us there can only be one title filled under each

category.

I have been asked (as a representative) important questions about BLACK WOMEN WRITERS that I cannot possibly answer. I am a woman who writes. I am also a black woman; also a lesbian. But to try to speak for all my sisters would be more than a bit presumptuous and pompous on my part. There are numerous Third World women writers. We all have our own answers. Last year, as an independent writer, I submitted some poems to a womens' anthology of writing that was being published. They were returned - unusable. They were RE-considered after RE-submitting them as a member of my black women writers' collective.

Talking to one of us IS NOT the same as hearing what we all have to say. I believe there is strength and support for Third World women in our own groups. They build our sense of power and positiveness about our images. They enable us to reflect ourselves to each other; to teach and learn from one another and share our concepts. I don't think elitism is a movement Third World women should be caught up in.

What do you say?

WOMEN INMATES ARE DENIED

THEIR RIGHTS TO PRIVACY

- Robin Christian

In January 1977, male guards were stationed in the women inmates' housing units at Bedford Hills Correctional Facility (BHCF), Bedford Hills, New York.

During the Spring of 1977, eight (8) women inmates filed a "right to privacy" suit against BHCF. These women hope to have the privacy of their toilets, showers, sleeping quarters, etc. once again - permanently.

In June of the same year, Judge Richard Owen issued an injunction against the prison which ordered the male correction officers be removed from the housing units.

Correction personnel testified that males were placed in the housing units to decrease tension among the women, to maintain equal employment throughout the facility, and to make the women "ladylike". The term "ladylike" was defined as passive, subservient and submissive behavior.

The trial was held at the US District Court of Appeals, Foley Square, New York City. It was in session from December 1977 to mid-January 1978. During this time, the inmates (prosecution), correction officers (defense), and witnesses for either side testified. The trial was adjourned until Judge Owen makes a decision on the case.

As of March 1978, the judge's decision is still pending.

WHY JOANNE?

by Claudette Furlonge

"They hate you momma*
cause you expose their madness
and their cruelty.
They can see in your eyes
a thousand nightmares
that they have made come true."

When 62 year old prison guard, Clarence Alligood entered Joanne Little's cell on August 27, 1974, icepick in hand, with the intention of forcing her to submit to him sexually, he was merely carrying out the traditions of his white grandfather and great, great grandfathers before him --- from the earliest days of slavery when the first African woman was brought to this country in chains.

By her natural reaction of self-defense, of resistance, Joanne was hardly any different from her Black grandmother and great great grandmothers before her who suffered a similar fate. (Contrary to white supremacist myths, slaves have never been happy and have always fought back). This 20 year old sister was a little luckier or a little swifter than most and the weapon of her oppressor fell into her hands.

Otherwise, nobody would have ever heard of Joanne Little. The records of the Beaufort County jail would have noted another Black prisoner "killed while trying to escape." Instead, true people's justice was administered to a racist old white man that early morning as can only be appropriately dealt out by a weapon in the hands of the oppressed. This was considered so sensational and so extraordinary that it made front page news.

Violence and especially rape against women can be traced back to the origins of the patriarchy and class society because it is steeped in the concept of private property. Since women have been defined as an extension of and subservient to men, the laws on the books concerning rape are not designed so much to protect women as to insure against their damage as the property of men.

For example, last year, a famous singer was raped in her hotel room. She filed a suit against the hotel for it's faulty security system. Her husband also sued the hotel on the basis that it's negligence resulted in the rape which deprived him of his wife's services for a certain period of time.

*from "Rhinoceerous Woman" by Assata Shakur

Many studies have shown that rape in the majority of cases has nothing to do with sexual frustrations or passion. It is an act of possession. That is why during a war, there are always reports of the invading army plundering and pilfering the land and raping the women of the country. This translates into racism since imperialist armies are involved in acts of aggression against third world countries. The conduct of U.S. soldiers in Vietnam or Portugese soldiers in Africa against the indigenous women contrasts greatly however with the attitudes of the N.L.F. or the African liberation movements who regard women with respect --- as comrades who are essential components of a revolutionary movement to overturn all exploitative class relations.

The case of Joanne Little, as well as others such as Yvonne Wanrow and Inez Garcia have contributed toward creating a climate of the realization, if not the acceptance, of the right of women to self-defense against rape, in particular and against male violence in general.

It is no coincidence that many of these cases involve third world women because historically we have been the most frequent victims of brutality and rape. We have also learned the hard way that the courts have no solution to our problem and that to resort to the police is usually worse than useless. To report a rape is to subject oneself to a humiliating ordeal where often the victim, the woman, is treated as if she were to blame. When the woman is non-white, she must face an additional horrifying realization that the underlying racist and callous attitude by these predominantly white male legal institutions is that no real crime has been committed.

Our bodies are not considered valuable property by a state apparatus that serves the interests of the rich exploiting class. When the state does prosecute on rape charges, it nearly always involves the violation of a white woman. It is also well known by oppressed people that more often than not, the rape charge has been used to frame up countless numbers of Black men who are either politically active or just "uppity". The majority of men who are put to death for rape are Black.

There are probably very few if any cases of any man ever being executed for the rape of a Black woman. Maya Angelou described in her book, "I Know Why The Caged Bird Sings" how her mother's boyfriend who raped her at the age of eight was let off with a one year and one day suspended sentence. (Subsequently her family intervened and he was made to pay ---with his life.)

Rape has often been referred to as a "fate worse than death"; and it is truly regarded as such by most women. It is an act of

violence which afterwards as Ntozake Shange observes, "makes us unable to love. It leaves us with memories that haunt us." As Black lesbians, we of course are not immune to these fears. Even though we choose to give our bodies to women, we are still vulnerable to being taken by force. We probably have the least amount of illusions of the state and/or a man waiting in the wings to avenge our "honor"; nor would we have it any other way.

As a woman who dared to struggle and dared to win, Joanne Little's story holds lessons for us in particular as well as for the masses of people who feel exploited and oppressed by this system.

Of course in 1975 the tremendous support of thousands of people who identified with her resulted in the acquittal of the murder charges that the state of North Carolina tried to pin on her. This political and legal victory was only the beginning of her ordeal. She was still required to serve out the rest of her time on the original robbery conviction which was why she was in prison in the first place. Like so many oppressed people, she had been railroaded into prison by a shoddy legal defense and received a harsh sentence of seven to ten years for a \$200 robbery by a racist court.

The prison officials' attitude towards her was more aggravated after her victory over the murder rap. They singled her out for punishment over minor infractions of the prison regulations and thwarted her attempts to get parole for which she was eligible on more than one occasion. Under these conditions of constant harassment and tension, Joanne quite naturally felt that the state was out to destroy her and that not only would she never be granted any type of parole, but that her very life was in danger. When the opportunity presented itself, Joanne took her freedom and escaped. However she was apprehended in New York City last December 7, 1977 and placed in Riker's Island. The state of North Carolina immediately began to file for her extradition.

The racist and sexist media did a real hatchet job on reporting about Joanne which had the effect of clouding the real issues. They portrayed her as a desperate criminal and a confused person who couldn't wait until parole. They exploited and played up the fact that under the strain and pressure of incarceration, and the harassment of a certain prison official at Riker's, she made some conflicting statements about her attorneys. Joanne retracted these statements later and initiated legal action against the prison and the person responsible for harassing her.

When Joanne was granted bail, fortunately the \$51,000 was quickly raised so that she was out on the streets to tell her story. She was attempting to pick up the pieces of her life and had expressed

a desire to live and work in New York and to bring the rest of her family up from North Carolina to be here with her.

Joanne has said that she feels that she will face sure death if she is sent back to North Carolina because she remains a strong and victorious symbol of resistance to the racist and sexist forces of that state. A legal petition was filed with New York State Governor Carey which included statements by former inmates and professionals and there were reports of an unnamed North Carolina prison official who was willing to testify that there were definitely attempts by the authorities to isolate and destroy Joanne Little.

Governor Carey quickly capitulated to the pressure from the racists in North Carolina (and undoubtedly conservative elements in this state) and on February 23rd he signed the extradition orders to send Joanne back. The courts lined up solidly behind this and upheld the decision. Since March 23rd, when Joanne was taken back into custody in order to be transferred, one appeal has been turned down. She waits in Rikers Island pending a second appeal which is scheduled to be heard on May 3rd in Albany, at the Court of Appeals. Every legal option is yet to be exhausted but clearly time is running out.

It should be obvious that at this point, only a mass struggle similar to the one mobilized in 1974 could possibly turn things around and at the same time, it is painfully obvious that this is not what is happening. And to the degree that a significantly large visible and militant support movement has not rallied around Joanne's case could perhaps best point to the reason for Governor Carey's hardened attitude and apparent disregard of the fact that his "liberal" mask is all but disintegrated in an election year. It also points to an undeniable trend towards the rightwing in this country which is characterized by increased attacks on the rights of women and gays and the gains of minorities and workers in general.

Many "activists" have been conspicuous by their absence, particularly the white "feminists" who had come out so vigorously in support of Joanne Little in the past. I think that this is due to their susceptibility to bourgeois media hype and their own white blind spots. They perceive Joanne Little as a "bad woman" who got caught. They can't relate to her because she doesn't think like them, act like them or want the same things. I've heard remarks from white women who consider themselves terribly relevant and aware; they write off Joanne Little as "lumpen" or conclude that her case is not a feminist or political one. What they mean is that they are not comfortable with her as a symbol around which they can rally. This inability to link up other struggles with theirs hurts them in the long run. Their white arrogance and insensitivity is the main reason

that the "women's movement" continues to be irrelevant and ineffectual to most third world women. It seems like "the sisterhood" only responds to our struggles to the degree that we are fighting and killing men. The very essence of our struggle is against racism and classism as well as sexism and this puts us ultimately on a head-long collision course with the whole state apparatus and its repressive forces. We do not have the luxury of picking and choosing whom we want to support.

Joanne Little did not find herself in prison as a result of conscious, political activity such as Angela Davis or Assata Shakur but like thousands of oppressed people who in their struggle to survive ultimately come into direct conflict with the racist society around them. If a unique set of circumstances has thrust her into the limelight, it should be viewed as an opportunity for injecting much needed political awareness amongst the people of this country of the brutality of the racism and sexism that is pervasive through out every aspect of our reality and the inevitability and righteousness of the resistance that this oppression breeds.

If I had never met Joanne personally, I would have remained committed to the struggle for her freedom because I know my own class interests are bound up with hers. My own political consciousness was developed as a result of becoming aware of earlier struggles such as the Harlem 4 and the Attica uprising. Undoubtedly, many workers and oppressed people are being affected in a similar way because of their awareness of a Joanne Little. Joanne herself is a primary example of the politicizing process that many people seem to undergo while they are in prison. The whole purpose of the prison system which is not to rehabilitate, but to confine, contain, repress and eventually destroy any one who rebels in any way against their impoverished and stagnant conditions, can sometimes turn into it's opposite. In the process of melting down the "scraps", out comes steel! With a slight trace of a smirk around her lips, and a gleam in her eye, Joanne is the first to admit that "they created me". She has been dumped on all her life and she has come out the stronger for it. She has learned "their" ways and she is ready to deal. Her iron determination to be free, whatever the cost gives one an immediate sense of confidence that she will be able to endure all the pressures that are still yet to come.

The "media" has a way of creating national news figures that seem bigger than life. Actually, Joanne Little has a slight, rather delicate build and is 5 feet 4 inches in height. Every photograph I'd ever seen of her looked different but oddly enough she seems to resemble them all. One is immediately struck by her personality that is like quicksilver. She is keenly alert, perceptive; all her senses honed by a combination of experiences in the street, being in enemy territory and on the run. She moves quietly, carefully but

her responses to everything going on around her is immediate, direct and precise. She is expressive and communicative but without really being physical or demonstrative. She talks non-stop in low Southern tones with a voice like soft gravel that resembles music to ears attuned to New York accents. I never could remember so much actual words that she spoke as much as the images that she transmits.

When she describes her early life in Washington, North Carolina it sounds all too common; almost like a cliché movie that is being re-run this very moment in every teeming ghetto rural or urban--- everywhere, every hour, young Black lives being ruined. There aren't too many options for Third World youth. Except for the few lucky ones that make it to college, the rest are trapped in a balancing act between wage slavery (if they are lucky enough to get some kind of menial job) and maintaining a hustle of some sort just to make ends meet, or slip deeper into a life of crime or drugs or both. Joanne was the eldest of nine children, and while her mother in the fields and in the factory literally worked herself into an early grave, (she dropped dead at the age of 38 in 1976 while Joanne was in prison) there was never enough to eat----just only increased frustration and dashed hopes of things ever getting better. The police are able to control the ghettos, in addition to sheer brutality, by simply waiting until these conditions drive people to step out of line and pick them off. Joanne had stepped out of line more than once by her 20th year. She recalls those years with humour, almost with pride, like a cat and mouse chase ---she is a good story teller. But even she cannot escape the network of police, agents, detectives, juvenile courts and judges. When the police grabbed her on that final charge, they offered her a deal to turn in some local drug pushers. Rather than collaborate with pigs, she told them to go shove it; so they turned the screws on her younger brother who turned state's evidence. She never had a chance. She was represented by a wheeling and dealing profit mongering attorney who was used to trading off Black people's lives like so many chips in a poker game. Since she couldn't afford \$25,000 bail, she had to remain in a county jail which is when the incident with the white jailer occurred.

Life in prison can't be recalled with humorous anecdotes. Joanne's face goes dull and her voice drops to a low murmur as she talks about it. Her body seems to tense up Or am I imagining that she held herself together that way the whole time: in a knot, with the feeling part of her put away.

Her jailers were successful most of the time in isolating her from the other inmates either through intimidation and threats of spreading rumours. When the inevitable fights broke out as a result of the tension, Joanne was always punished more severely. She had supporters on the outside who tried to find her employment so that

she could qualify for parole, but the state and prison officials always tried to prevent this. Finally she started on a work release program with a local Black dentist in Raleigh. The pressure never let up but increased especially as another parole date was to be scheduled. Once when she was going to take the bus after work, to go back to the prison, she made a casual remark to a man whom she always passed on the street. The informers who always seemed to be following her reported this; so that when she got back to the prison, she was immediately stripped and searched for supposedly receiving drugs.

Eventually she was falsely accused of missing 2 days of work. Although her employer and his nurse submitted affidavits swearing that Joanne had not missed work on those days, the prison superintendent removed the statements from her files. (This was witnessed by another inmate.) This was sufficient grounds for revoking the work release permit.

Her jailers also allowed her health to deteriorate. It was later revealed that although the prison authorities knew that Joanne had taken a skin test for TB which came back positive, they never gave her any treatment for it. She was also suffering from a neglected thyroid condition. Finally in an act of self-preservation and desperation, Joanne scaled the 12 foot prison wall. She reacted humanly and predictably to an insane and inhuman situation.

It must be seen as a political reality that Joanne Little would have never been in prison if she had not been poor and Black. The overall composition of the prison population is disproportionately non-white and economically disadvantaged. Yet the corporate heads, the politicians, the banks---who wage the wars, who profit off of our labor, who close down our hospitals, evict us from our homes, turn off our heat, sterilize and experiment with our bodies--- these real criminals who commit mass murders and genocide are walking around free and are running the country.

Joanne's struggle as an act of defiance against these forces is a political act. A victory for her exposes the injustice in this country and proves once more that the only way oppressed people can realize their true liberation is to take it. The governor of North Carolina and the ruling class know this. That is why they want to take Joanne Little back to their dungeons and silence her once and for all. It is in our interest to defend her---we must fight to keep her with us. We don't need another Black martyr. Joanne Little is all of us. We must free her and free ourselves.

VISIONS OF WHITE EXTENSION

all the black "sistas" come.
... YOU CAN LEAVE.

yes, we need all the
black "sistas" to come.

... OK, WE'VE DRAINED THEM
THEY HAVE GOT TO GO NOW.

- Copyright 1978 Robin Christian

being drained of our energies as third world lesbians - for whatever reasons - happens frequently when we are in white women's spaces. this draining process exists in social gatherings (with a minimum of two people present), work-oriented atmospheres and in homes. for all aspects of racism, white women want us to be advisors - a co-worker asks what you think she should do before dealing with a 3rd world co-worker; mediators - a lover will go to your friend to find out how to deal with you in certain situations; and spokespersons - a woman asks what she can do in reference to third world lesbians. these are a few examples of how we are drained.

whenever any activity occurs and we are involved, a lot of us go through unnecessary mental changes to be included. often we experience negative changes to not be included as well.

take a look at the panel, "third world lesbian visibility," held oct 22, 1977 at the women's center, nyc. the event was listed in the monthly calendar of a well-known lesbian group, with other fully described events. this panel in question named only one person as a scheduled speaker for the panel - a professional gay black woman. it was peculiar that this program was the only one not elaborated on.

this panel proved to be another discussion on racism in the lesbian community instead of being a panel on our visibility. the result of the discussion was that white women want-

ed 3rd world lesbians to help them with their racist attitudes. this request is a clear case of whites trying to drain us of our energies. they wanted to be told what was needed to get rid of their individual - as well as collective - racism. we replied that their problem with racism is one that we cannot and should not be involved in. they have got to work it out among themselves. only then can we come together to work in a unified group. whenever white dykes work to have us in attendance at political functions, the discussion of racism seems to always be the point of discourse.

the majority of women present were white women, the remainder of the audience consisted of black women and a couple of hispanic women.

the panel had been planned and scheduled at least a month in advance. a week prior to oct 22, third world lesbians were being called to appear at this event. panel participants were still in demand two days before the panel was to take place.

the lesbian art show, held jan 20, 1978 thru feb 11, 1978 at the 112 gallery, nyc was another example of including us as an afterthought. the planning of this show started in the fall of 1977. some of us had been informed that we would be contacted to plan the event. this never happened. three months later, we were called to "appear" in the show on one of two dates. in a discussion on wbai radio station, nyc, the organizers stated that 3rd world lesbians were responsible for one night's performance. at that point, no one from our community had made a commitment to the art show. included in this issue of AZALEA is a statement made in reference to this art show.

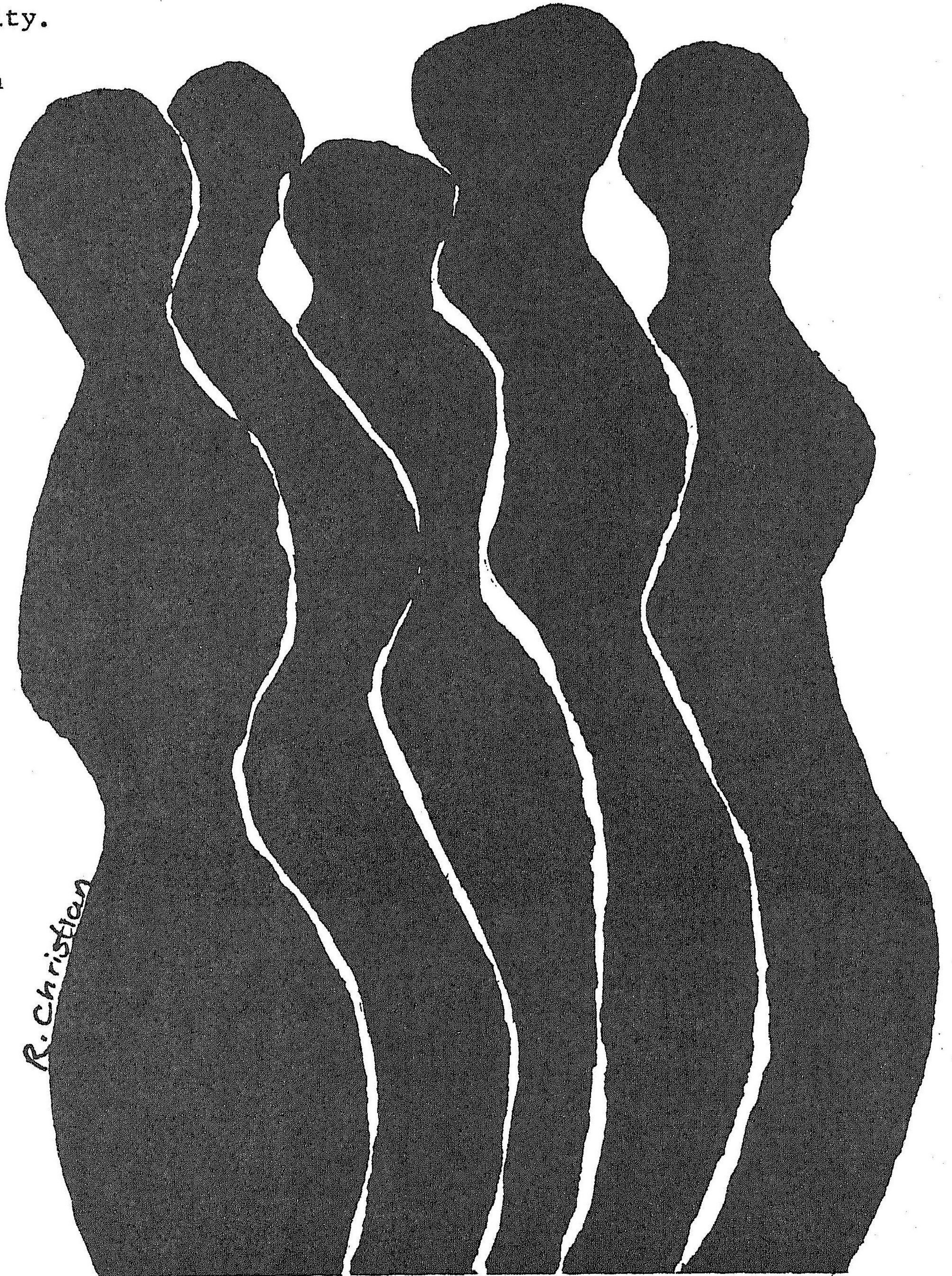
these two examples of how we, as third world lesbians, are dealt with in the larger lesbian community vividly points out the need for us to be more aware, alert, and committed.

aware of whom we associate.

alert in our actions and reactions.

committed to making and maintaining spaces for ourselves in the larger lesbian community.

- Robin Christian



R. Christian

"A LESBIAN SHOW", an exhibition of visual art, performances and readings by lesbian artists, was held at the 112 Workshop, Inc. (112 Greene Street, New York City) from January 21 to February 11, 1978. The following is a statement by the Third World Gay Women's Organization (Salsa-Soul Sisters) and the Jemima Writers' Collective (a black lesbian writers' workshop).

The "Lesbian Art Show" was funded on the basis that all lesbian artists would be included. The gallery space here is being used for lesbian artists to exhibit their work. Lesbian performers are giving performances. The organizers of this show call it a chance for the lesbian community to come together to share and experience ourselves as artists.

We would like to call your attention to the absence of THIRD WORLD LESBIAN ARTISTS participating in this show and explore, briefly, some of the reasons why.

First of all, we are here tonight after many hassles, dialogues, hurt and insulted feelings. If we, as third world lesbians, did not work to include OURSELVES in this show, we probably wouldn't have been included at all.

The organizers have admittedly stated that the show was pulled together using "the buddy system". They stated that the show got off the ground by contacting their friends and asking whether they wished to exhibit. Most artists involved in the show border on the brink of being an elite group. A great many of them are involved in the exclusive Soho Art World. There are virtually no grass roots lesbians exhibiting.

Various excuses have been offered to explain away the reasons for the exclusion of third world lesbians. One of the main excuses is that the organizers of this show didn't know any third world lesbians. Salsa-Soul is the principle organization of the third world lesbian community. A word to them concerning this art show and third world women would have been well informed about the event.

This condition is one that happens often in the lesbian community. It happens everyday in the world. Third world women are considered as an afterthought. Events are planned ---well structured ---and then third world women are asked to "fill in the spaces" with our presence. It is racism --dishonesty covered with a well-meaning byline. It is offensive and degrading.

We are all victims of this situation and hopefully, in the future, we can work together for changes in our lesbian community.

February 11, 1978

-Salsa Soul Sisters, Third World Gay
Women's Organization

-Jemima Writers' Collective

Morning Prayer

i thank you my goddess for guiding me through the night
bringing me into this new day.

Keep me strong now oh my goddess

And help me to maintain my faith in myself.

Give me the strength to resist temptation especially when
i am weak

And let me harm no others.

And oh my goddess

Bless me

with the power of love.

Leocadia

Reflections

she Black?!

she says she love herself she black!

so why blue eyes stare back

at her

in the morning!

Leocadia

THIS IS A MAD POEM, AN ANGRY ONE,
 A YELLING SCREAMING POEM
 ABOUT BEING MIND FUCKED, BEING PICKED UP AND BEING PUT DOWN
 ABOUT BEING STROKED AND PROVOKED
 ABOUT BEING PULLED CLOSE AND SHOVED AWAY
 MAKING ME MAD, MAD, MAD AND SOMETIMES SAD
 BUT MOSTLY MAD.
 NO IT IS NOT ABOUT MY LOVER BUT ALL OF YOU
 NO, I WON'T BE A GOOD GIRL AND BE QUIET
 AND I WON'T BE A NICE NIGGER AND KEEP MY VOICE DOWN
 NO, I'M NOT HAVING A NICE TIME!
 THIS IS A VERY, VERY ANGRY POEM,
 A MAD POEM
 ABOUT WHO STOLE MY STUFF?
 WHO TOOK MY MONEY?
 WHO STOLE MY HERSTORY?
 WHO STOLE MY WORDS?
 I'M SCREAMING MAD AND READY TO KICK ASS
 WHO SNATCHED MY HEART?

Yvonne Flowers
 copyright 2/78

fourth month

april you sensuous woman
 sending pornographic thoughts
 of summer through my brain
 rains like milk
 from a woman's breast spraying
 sticky droplets upon my face
 while you passionately wrap
 your winds around my coat
 licking me with hints of warmth
 swirling gusts of dirt
 into the air
 lifting your skirts
 beyond modesty
 snuggling up to me
 as i continue to ride
 trains past definations
 caressing me in my bed
 so that i throw off the covers
 you tantalize me with
 your suggestiveness but april
 i know you're just a tease.

russene marcia rowe

She deals in games
And dreams and schemes
She's fine white powder
And needlepoint sharp
She's a church next door
To a liquor store, she's
A knife or a gun in the dark
She's a deaconess on Sunday
She's a hallway 4-bit whore
She sleeps on the subway
Her whole life in two bags
Can't find no reason to try anymore
She's a school where they
Major in kicking ass
She's an area where you
Can't get a taxi to pass
She's a wino that don't
never use no glass, she's
5 flights up, and no hot water
She fits 6 in a kitchenette
She watches a father molest
His daughter, guilt hasn't
Quite stopped him yet
She's a broken wife that
Can't fend off his fists
She's a radical with
Handcuffs on her wrists
She works for the mafia
Killing brings a good buck
Sweetheart she's gonna
Make it big, she knows
Just who to fuck.
She goes to the mailbox
Her welfare checks gone
So she has to go thru her
Stuff for something to pawn
And both her grandparents
Are mugged by youths
Scarcely out of her womb
While the cops, courts and
Politicians dance to that
"Promise the suckers anything" tune.
And she beats her kids
Because she's frustrated
So she gets sterilized
Cause she's liberated
And she's into survival.
She takes karate

And she's into grass
 Cause it makes her happy
 And she's into soul food
 Cause its sweet and greasy
 And she's into living...
 Cause dyings too friggin easy
 And her folks call her
 Ghetto, with a capital
 G.

Irare Sabasu

being woman
 creator she
 feeds my universe
 from breasts
 of joyousness.
 the ever-birth of good
 is her fullfillment
 and i
 name each child
 love.
 giver she
 is my parental image
 moulding
 as i unfold the giver
 i
 within.
 her face is mine
 her hands are mine
 her heart -- my soul
 rejoicing
 life
 in being woman.

Duet

I love to lose myself in
Your mountains and valleys
Especially on rainy days, when
You're into lazy loving moods
When you curl and curve
And purr when I caress you
When you snuggle backwards
Tangling my thighs
Your back waltzing warm
Against my breasts, and
Your woman smell singing to me
Under covers, just below my chin
When your tongue is slow and
Searching, and your fingers pressure
Firm and more intense. And I
See the mischief playing in
Your eyes and just around
The corners of your lips before
We crumble under giggles
After tickles.....
Little girls again.

Internal Geography
Part 1

This then

be for real:

a blank sheet of white paper,
the world,
filling up with black dots,
words,
that stay put,
come back to haunt
and never change.

How does one talk about change
like going from day to night
you notice the difference
but not the second
the blueness replaced
by a growing darkness.
In summer the blue stays longer
and the darkness is cooler.

How does one feel change
the sensation of swimming
on shore
watching turtles
as a child
I am afraid of water
but
the turtles back's
glistened in the sunshine.

sex bores me
like showers
you know the results
in advance
and I like
long hot baths,
gentle hugs
and stolen kisses.

How does one know about change
like feeling pain
it needs to be identified
the cure is in recognition

yesterday my sister died
in a dream 4 years later
the memory frightens me still-
in cars
I sometimes travel to the graveyard
tears on the way to a friend's house.
In my mind
the day going further away
returns.

How does one talk about change?

This morning
I did my laundry
the clothes smell sweeter
and the dirt
disappeared
in the water.

Joan Gibbs

Heartaches

(Heartaches.....you ever wonder why your heart aches)

Well sometimes.....

i wish

that i didn't care

or that

i just couldn't care

'cause then

my heart

wouldn't fracture

so often

Leocadia

The woman on the corner
has a chip on her shoulder:
her rent is due,
her welfare check is late,
her old man can't be found

The man in the store says
she's been out there for the past four hours.

Saying,
"Don't believe everything you hear-
the world has already ended!"

Saying,
"David, bring back the stereo."

Saying,
"Denise, I'm doing the best I can."
Saying...

The sister is definitely mad,
going out of her mind,
trying to keep it together,
enraged-
ready to do bodily harm to
the first person who looks at her sideways,
touches her on the shoulder,
steps on her feet-

God help 'em if they're white.

Watch Out!

Joan Gibbs

You probably never noticed her
on subways she sits
surrounded by dirty shopping bags
and her own bad odors
sleeping-
slipping in and out of old dreams
like new age plastic
they won't burn or be destroyed.

In winter
she wraps herself in
several bright colored scarves
her mother's old clothes
and stays inside
riding from the top of Manhattan
to the bottom of Brooklyn
5 times a day

The thing is
to recall
different songs.

Joan Gibbs

Marvelous Manifestation - Black Goddess #3

I AM THE BLACK GODDESS
I AM SHE
I AM HER PERFECT DAUGHTER
WHOSE SMILE MATCHES HER CROWN

THE BLACK GODDESS HAS SHOWN HERSELF TO ME
HAS LET ME SEE HER FACES
HAS REVEALED HER SELF
GLIMPSE HER IMAGES
KNOW HER INCARNATIONS
HER MANIFESTATIONS

I'VE KNOWN HER THROUGH MARVELOUS MANIFESTATIONS
IN BLACKWOMENLOVERS WHO LOVED
BLACK SISTERFRIENDS WHO ARE FOREVER
BLACK ANCESTORWOMAN WHO DRINK PALM WINEWITH THE
BLACK GODDESS

AND I AM GIVING THANKS,
SINGING PRAISE SONGS
FOREVER GRATEFUL
FOR THESE MARVELOUS MANIFESTATIONS, MY BLACK SISTERS,
AND IT IS MY TASK TO MARK THE APPEARANCE
OF THE BLACK GODDESS AMONG US.

Yvonne Flowers

Answer for the Last Time to hearing
"You don't love me"

If I didn't love you
Do you think I'd
Let you tear me down?
If I didn't love you
Do you think I'd still
Be hanging round?
If I didn't love you
I wouldn't care if
you lived or died
I could've saved all the
tears I've cried over you -
If I didn't love you
I'd leave at any woman's
Beck and call
If I didn't love you
I wouldn't have my back
Against the wall
I wouldn't continue to
Give my all and all
If I didn't love you
I wouldn't suffer this
Misery, put up with
Your jealousy - almost
Lose my sanity
Come close to physical brutality!
If I didn't love you
In fact, I love you so much
I am leaving.
'Cause I can only stand
But so much of this shit!

wow! wee!

happiness

you had me scared -
sudden fear of losing you
made me
possessive
and jealous
of anyone
who would take you
from my side.

happiness

you had my toes tingling -
palms sweating and my nipples bursting
out of
their bra
you were
just that good.

happiness

i still can't get over
the dynamics of you -
how i even
held my breath
to keep in
your fullness -
and just between you and me -
i'm coming back
for another taste.

russene marcia rowe

Irare Sabasu

New York City Tonite

1)

I'm talkin about
a sickness
inside
A feelin I can
no longer
hide
I've gone the
way of
serpents
an' can no
longer find
my way home

2)

I need the
wisdom of the
ancients
The sight of
the soothsayers
the salve of the
blues
a spittitual cathartic
or
I will strangle
in my own
filth
I will be but
a parody
of a woman
livin a death
and life
that ends
with me
with an aversion
to pain
that only allows for
a shallow
mediocrity; not
havin' the courage
to move past
old hurts
I remain bound in
a Peter Pan pubescence
And I am at once lost
and found unsure
of what is mine,
what is creation or
imitation, forward or
backward
I have lost sight
of the Blk. Will
the seventies be
the times of
the Blind

Gropin' lost. Where is the
 vision? All I see is the
 crackers wasteland
 A toilet left unflushed
 Malcolm! And I'm a thousand years
 behind the times
 Nothin' has changed
 ten years ago today I was
 trickin' in L.A. and now
 I'm in New York and
 I repeat nothin'
 has changed!
 I can't find my dreams
 I don't know what
 nothin' means
 I am alone. So ashamed
 I keep goin' but
 want to
 come home

3)

Across the aisle from
 me on the subway
 a nigger in pink
 jeans reads Ebony
 magazine his
 hair processes and
 curled
 Elijah why did u leave us!
 All I think of is gigs
 costumes, gettin' slim, tryin' to MAKE
 IT actin', dancin', maybe a play
 on Broadway like Zaki
 All the while the race
 among the races is
 at a crucial point
 the survival of my people
 is at stake
 and I have elected
 to spend my days in
 petty pursuit
 of pieces of
 the pie. The shit
 pie. I am
 sick. I don't
 Know what it will
 take to get

me well. Malcolm
 is not goin' to rise again. Panthers
 played out. Elijah is dead. Processes
 is back. I can't say nothin' about
 nobodi cause I wear wigs. I can't
 write warrior poems talkin' bout
 clean up the community
 cause I would have to
 wash myself away. I am
 part of the perversion
 that permeates our
 existence

Blk children can
 pass by taverns
 and see me
 on a platform
 g-stringed and
 gyratin', hear me
 cursin' on subways
 street corners, see
 me wid wite boys
 and women.

I repeat I am sick
 and do not know
 what to do about
 it. I have come
 from the sixities
 to the seventies. From
 being the solution
 to being the problem

They should stone me/US
 I did not get this way ALONE
 I am a product of
 humiliations, drowned dreams
 and betrayals. It is
 not all the time what
 it seems. I tried/
 tryin' and am
 still gettin' up

I know in the end
 it will be better
 than it was and
 I cannot berate
 myself 'cause
 of limited resources

and archaic
 survival mechanisms
 I had to use
 I am gettin' up
 and gettin' on
 Comin' home!
 and don't
 want no static
 bout where
 I been. I'm
 comin' HOME and
 like the Bible say
 "Let he who is
 without sin
 cast the first
 stone"
 I got to move past old ways
 sometimes I just don't know how ---
 --- I could be doin' better
 but I could be doin' worse
 I have heard of those
 who walk the way of
 the new world. I don't
 know how I came to always
 be on the outside
 lookin' in. Enlightened
 ones do not leave us. Oh robe
 wearin'/Blk talkin'/knowledgeable
 ones love us let us
 love each other be
 like my grandmother
 whose prayers have
 endured past all
 things, when the dancers
 stopped dancin' poets stopped
 poetin', men stopped lovin', her
 prayers endured
 I remember her when
 ideolgies kings and other
 things had let me down
 and if you can be like she
 and never turn your back
 on your children.
 She said "go grow but don't
 forget you can/must always
 come home"

4)
 I have much
 good to give
 but don't feel
 I have long
 to live

5)
 changes
 pain

6)

On the subway
 home
 people look at u
 like u crazy
 Black mutherfuckers!
 I was with a trick
 last nite
 Oh god! Ain't no use me
 even talkin' about it
 cause u can't know 'less
 u been there. This nauseating
 monkey/factory hands half his fingers missin'/
 cadillac/whiskey drinkin' talkin' bout
 is it good?/ u got some good pussy girl/ tight stuff
 lemme rub it/lemme suck it good for you baby
 lemme grab some of that tittie/ lemme rub---I'm
 not gonna put it back in---come on now I'm
 gonna give you two fifty dollar bills/Do u suck?/

Aw honey u sumptin' else/ I sho likes u/yo skin smooth
 as butter/come to daddy lemme suck some of dat
 tittie

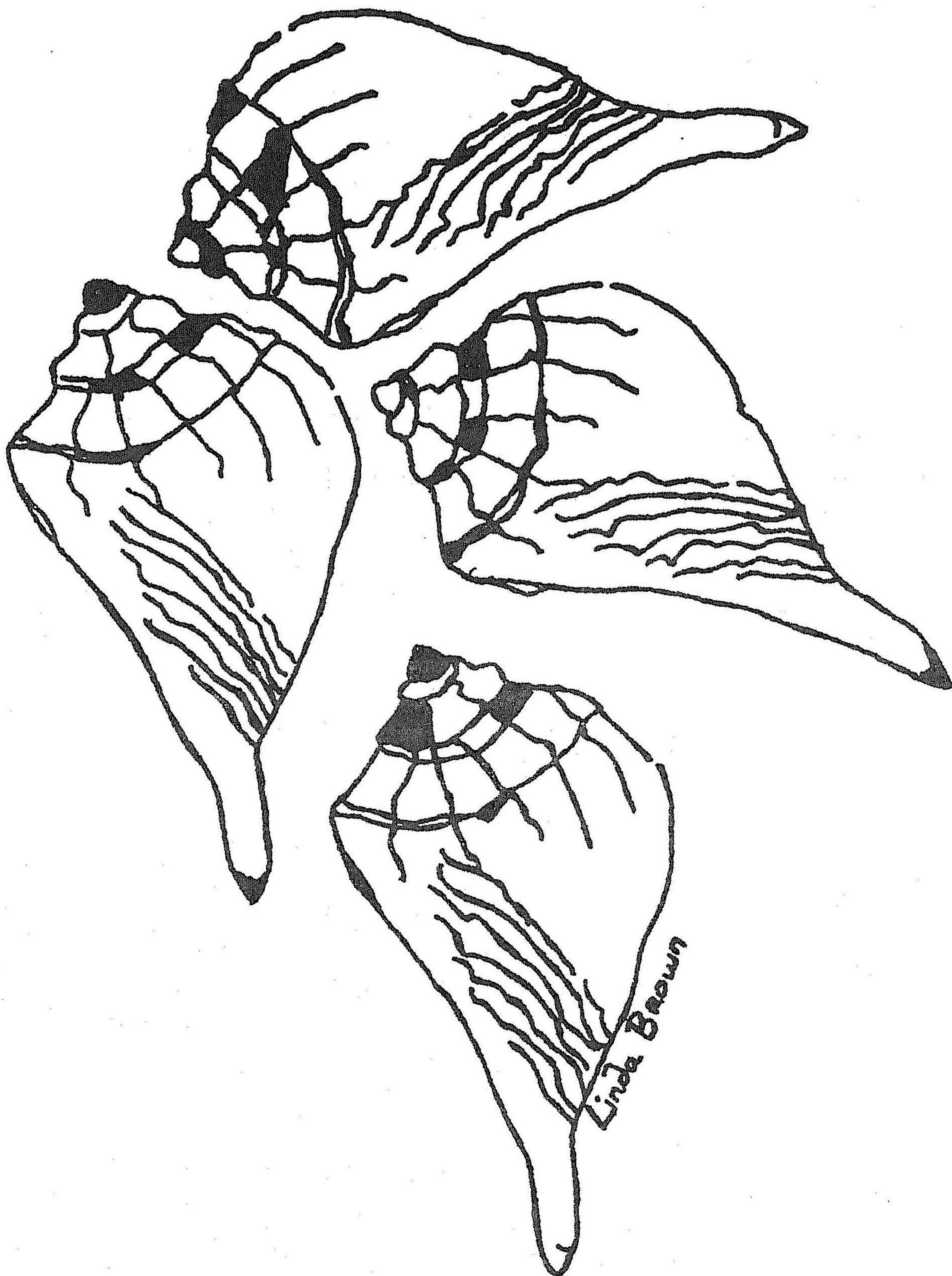
 It was makin me wanna die vomit
 but the rent/tokens/dance classes/food
 taxis/clothes/telephone/gas/lites
 books/food/rent/entertainment made me bite my
 lip an' say Oh baby/ It feels so good/Ahhh

7)

I feel empty
 unfinished like
 this poem
 which has
 no appropriate
 end

Sapphire

April 1977



Linda Brown

A SENSE OF LOSS

They said goodbye to each other at home, in an embrace of faded flannel with the severe black and white cotton print: the two heads close-- Mandy's fine straight light-brown hair against the soft fluff of Liz's afro, their cheeks touching, their eyes full of tears.

"You're sure you want to go?" And Liz nodded.

"You're sure you don't want me to come with you?" Liz shook her head, her throat too full for words. (No, Mandy. I'll be o.k. It won't be heavy. I hadn't seen her for seven years anyway-- I hardly knew her anymore.) No words-- only their embrace that lasted until Liz's taxi came to take her to the airport to catch a plane to Graysburg for her grandmother's funeral.

The two women had lived together for one year, and this was their first real separation, the first place that one had to go without the other. Mandy had offered to accompany Liz, but Liz could not let her do that. Everyone at the wake, the funeral would be black-- all the family, relatives, friends. There would be no place for Mandy and she would stand out conspicuously, inhibiting everyone at a time when they needed to be with people among whom they felt safe. If it were a man Liz were married to, even a white man, perhaps it would be different. A husband would be family by marriage, in-law, someone who could claim a right to be there. But how could she justify the presence of the woman she loved? She could imagine how the voices would whisper, wondering, "Who's that little white girl with Elizabeth?" She could never subject Mandy to that.

Her sister swung the big blue Chevrolet that Liz recognized instantly as her parent's car into the loading-area drive. Charlotte, the sister who was safe, the only one of the family who knew about Liz and Mandy, who knew that Liz was a lesbian. They filled the first ten minutes updating each other on their lives the past few months, and Charlotte told Liz the details and circumstances of their grandmother's illness and death. Negotiating the hills and corners of Graysburg, heading toward its outskirts, Charlotte managed to survey her "little" sister critically.

As it always did under that look, Liz's mind raced with anxieties. (Am I o.k.? I know my hair's all right-- I just had it cut a week ago. And this is the plainest dress I have-- I know it covers my knees, even sitting down.) She gave it a tug, to be sure, then squirmed uncomfortably in the seat belt to get a good look at Charlotte. Her sister always looked so much like a suave, sophisticated model on the cover of Essence magazine, that beside her Liz felt unkempt and disheveled. (Did I remember to put lotion on my legs? Say something, Charlotte. Tell me I look o.k. or I don't. Don't let me arrive looking outrageous and gauche even if I am. That's why I wanted you to pick me up.)

"Liz, you haven't said anything to Mom and Dad yet, have you? About...?"

"Me and Mandy?" So that was it. "No."

"Good." Charlotte was visibly relieved. "Don't. I don't think this would be a good time to tell them."

"For Christ's sake, Charlotte," Liz snapped angrily. "How insensitive do you think I am? You think in the middle of Grandma's funeral I'm going to decide it's the perfect time to announce to the whole family that I'm a lesbian?"

"Well, I never about you. You're always trying to be so Creative and Different and Communicate Honestly and all that. Even why you want to tell them at all is beyond me. No, never mind," as Liz opened her mouth to reply. "You already tried to explain it to me. Anyway," she went on in a less resigned tone, "I'm glad you conceded to wear nylons and a dress."

"What'd you think I'd wear? Overalls and hiking boots?"

"I remember one Christmas you showed up in that bedspread thing you tried to pass off as a party dress." And they were at it again, the sweet good daughter versus the fam-

ily's angry rebel, the white sheep-- bantering back and forth in the typical tradition of siblings of the Free family. Inside, it made Liz smile-- she could pick up the acceptance beneath that surface of sarcasm, knew it was Charlotte's way of showing affection. And anyway, Liz could usually think up sharp quips and retorts much faster than Charlotte.

Besides all the usual furniture, footstools, knick-knacks, photographs, and crocheted doilies, Grandma Free's tiny livingroom was crowded with people-- cousins, great aunts and uncles, aged friends-- all of them black, all of them married, at least at some time in their lives, all of them straight. Liz became Elizabeth Joy, Greg's daughter, the youngest grand-daughter-- polite, cordial, solicitous, sympathetic.

"So you're Elizabeth-- all grown up now. Guess you don't remember your old Uncle Alec?"

(Of course not, Uncle Alec. I wouldn't have known you from Adam.)

"Of course I do, Uncle Alec. How are you?"

Individuals detached themselves from the mass and approached her with formalities, questions.

"Are you Lester's wife?"

(No, I'm Mandy's lover.) "No, Im Marie's daughter. And Greg's." He went off soon, presumably in search of Lester's wife, and was shortly replaced by another.

"Elizabeth! Last time I saw you, you were only this high! But why did you cut off all that pretty hair?" For that one, she groped for an answer. They wouldn't understand that the way she wore her hair expressed her political stance, as much as it expressed her self, her pride. Or that something like short cut hair helped to make her recognizable to other women like herself. Wryly, she answered that it was the style.

"So tell me," her Aunt Catherine said. "What do you do now?" She would have liked to answer: I'm a lesbian now, and live with a woman named Mandy. Or-- I belong to a lesbian writers collective and write articles for the local gay newspaper. She wished she could pull it off, smiling sweetly at Aunt Catherine the whole time. They didn't know what a real radical was, didn't realize she was quite harmless. She sighed and gave the correct answers about her job and education, all the things which did not really matter.

Across the room on the piano stood a photograph of her taken at junior high school graduation-- a chubby-faced little black girl with greasy curls and a string of pearls around her neck. That's the one they want me to be, forever, she thought. Elizabeth Joy Free. Little Elizabeth. She turned and caught a glimpse of herself in the full length mirror by the coat rack-- the smooth cut of the black and white print, slim brown legs, the neat, round shape of her 'fro-- nothing, in fact, to let them know she hadn't become exactly the person that the little girl in the photo was supposed to become. Nothing except the absence of a wedding band. It was a good disguise, but she felt the burden of it, felt like a first class hypocrite.

She reassured herself by thinking that, if statistics could be believed, there were others in the room who were gay like herself. There would be, let's see, at least four. Now who could they be? Uncle Alec? Aunt Catherine...?

As soon as she could, she slipped out of the house and up into the steep backyard, where her grandmother's garden lay. She had spent hours of her childhood summers in that garden. She'd helped to weed and pick beans and mustard and kale in the hot sun, sat in the swing under the cool grape arbor sucking the sour unripe grapes from their skins. She'd picked tomatoes to ripen on the kitchen windowsill, played hide and seek between the high rows of corn. She'd gone foraging, even farther up the rocky hill to where the wild blackberries grew in a bramble, had sacrificed bare arms and knees to scratches, collecting enough fruit for the promised, famous blackberry pie.

Unlike the house full of inquisitive people, the garden did not prod her or scrutinize her or force her to lie. It was living, alive, and it seemed to speak to her in her grandmother's voice. The garden was like her grandma-- tough, determined, resilient. Her grandma had loved this stubborn, wild, rocky piece of ground she had claimed from the barren hillside and cajoled and coaxed to yield food for two generations of daughters and sons. Being here was like being with Grandma Free. Liz could see the brown, wrinkled,

wiry old woman, bent over in a huge sunbonnet and a gingham apron. Could feel the hard, calloused fingers on her own bare sunbrowned shoulder. Could hear her rough, splintery voice, as she used to sometimes talk to the vegetables:

"Now stop acting so pitiful, and grow. I ain't running no greenhouse here. You better get used to this poor, rocky dirt-- it's all we got." She'd tug at the carrots and turnip tops. "Come on out of that ground! Don't you know those children got to have some supper?" Liz remembered the day she'd planted the apple tree. She'd closed a knotted hand around the slender trunk of the little sapling and said, "I know you're little now, but you're going to grow up real pretty and fine one day. I'm going to see that you do."

She had spoken to Liz in the same way-- if the words were short sometimes, impatient, hugs were long, and her love was rich and generous.

At the back of the garden the single apple tree stood, full grown now. Liz drank in the cider-sweet scent of late summer from the full laden branches and the bounty of wind-falls that covered the ground beneath it. The tree seemed so unlikely here at the edge of this patch of kitchen vegetables-- apart, unique, alone. And yet, Liz felt quite sure that it had been her grandmother's pet, her favorite of all that grew here.

Only here in the garden did she begin to feel the reality of her Grandmother's death, to feel the loss. And she returned to the house subdued, saddened, feeling that she too was a part of this mourning, this grieving, that this bereavement was also here.

At the service, the chapel was full to overflowing. Liz sat beside her sister Charlotte and closed her eyes, letting it flow into her senses-- heavy perfume of the flowers, slow somber chords from the pipe organ, and then the intrusion of the preacher's voice. Voice strong and full with that familiar black accent, rich and diverse as the fading tones of the organ, softened by the gentle southern overtones. That wove patterns of poetry, creating of her grandmother's life a legend as simple and pure as a bible story or the words to a hymn. Her goodness, her unwavering faith, her trials and small triumphs were captured in their own language and cadence, balanced and full.

What Liz remembered was Sundays in church as a child. Sundays when a preacher like this one could make the people sigh and shout and echo Amens, could move a whole congregation to tears. Sundays when she, too, was swept along on that current of feeling, burning with the shame of sin, reaching out to catch hold of a faith as tangible as a rock, emerging uplifted on the tide of love that surged through the whole church as if they all were one. This man was working the same kind of spell. The mourners were released by this voice to express their sorrow. Liz felt a tight ache inside her, too, wanted to let go, but she felt distant, far out of touch with the pain that was her pain, too.

Then there was music, the songs she had heard all through her childhood-- in the church, in her home, even hummed under her grandmother's breath in the garden-- "I am a poor wayfaring stranger," and "Deep river, my home is over Jordan." Those sad sweet mournful songs. She felt a surge of nostalgia. This music was her culture, her heritage, her own voice.

She found herself thinking about Mandy-- Mandy who, as a child, had been taken on the sabbath to reserved and unemotional services given in a language she didn't even understand. Mandy had never been in a church like this one, had never known this music. Liz felt that perhaps Mandy could never understand this part of her, of her past. And yet how she loved her, how she longed for her even at this minute, even here where Mandy would be so hopelessly out of place. The sound of sobs near her brought her attention back, and she turned to see that Charlotte, reserved, sophisticated Charlotte, was crying, too.

The line of cars, lights on at mid-day, crawled through the streets to the small cemetery on the hill. Liz felt strange to be inside the car this time, and not one of the people she saw through the window, waiting impatiently to cross the street. The cars pulled up on the side of the drive, and the people gathered around the open grave. The preacher said quietly the words Liz found she had been waiting for, the words about

ashes and dust. And they watched the coffin being slowly lowered down into the earth.

Liz looked around at the circle of faces-- black, brown, tan, pale. Her grandmother's sisters, brother, grandchildren and a great-grandchild, nieces, nephews, children of cousins. They let their grief flow openly, and still Liz could not cry.

She wondered what her own funeral would be like. There would be no children or grandchildren for her, no family. Perhaps Mandy, perhaps a handful of friends. Perhaps, if Mandy had died already, there would be no one left who would really mourn for her. She looked again round the circle, this large family of generations, strong even in their weakness, deriving their strength from each other. And she knew that, though they were her family, they were not there for her as they were for each other. She was of them, but no longer one of them. She had disinherited herself. Yet she would never forget this day, or lose this fresh sense of loss, but would carry it within her all the days of her life.

She wanted to talk, wanted to tell Mandy about it, but what could she say now that Mandy could understand? How could she explain the way she had felt in the church, the way she had felt at the side of the grave? She felt tightly strung, coiled like an overwound spring, yet felt there were no words.

When Mandy questioned her, she began to tell her about the garden. "I went up to her garden, all by myself. I used to work up there when I was a kid, and play there, too. It was so much like her, so tough and persistent and determined, on that crazy rocky hillside. It was her-- much more than that...Coffin they had in there." An involuntary shudder ran through her. She went on.

"Mandy, it was all still growing. The tomatoes were red and they were huge. Something was eating up the leaves-- they were all chewed up into skeletons. She wouldn't have let that happen. And the squash vines were running wild over everything. And the apple tree-- I was there when she planted it, and it was so little, and now it's big-- the apple tree had hundreds of apples on it, and a hundred more on the ground. Just lying there, on the ground, rotting. Nobody gathered them up; nobody cared." She was quiet for several seconds, then said, "I wonder if the apple tree remembers her? I wonder if it misses her... too."

Mandy drew her closer and said, "We'll grow a garden, here, next spring. We'll plant an apple tree-- to remember her-- and we won't let anything rot or die."

And suddenly the awful sadness that was within Liz burst and broke free, and the tears came. That flood of tears that had seemed bound and plugged inside her came effortlessly, easily, the storm finally breaking. In Mandy's arms, she was able to cry.

"My grandma," she sobbed. "My grandma's dead." She cried like a child while Mandy held her close. And she knew now where her home was, her family: here in the arms of the woman who loved her, who understood.

Becky Birtha
January, 1978

"...we see the adolescent girls dancing with solemn, self-absorbed faces to the music of a victrola, spinning around the room in nightgowns like slow-motion tops - separately, of course; they're dancing with their imaginary lovers. they look silly and touching and evocatively familiar; it's the sort of romantic play-acting little girls do when they trust each other enough to be foolish together. they're trying out their sexual identity, rehearsing within the safe confines of the friendship..."

(review of 'Julia') Karen Durbin, Village Voice
January 23, 1978

I had forgotten about Jean until I read this review in the Voice. It reminded me of our friendship in Jr. High - 15 years ago. Seems like lifetimes have passed since then. I guess they have. I met Jean in the 7th grade. I was lonely and scared and very insecure. She befriended me while the other girls were still "checking" me out. She was an outsider too - by their standards. This was 1963 and Jean was a wild girl with a wild head of hair and funny clothes. Her mother was a white woman and her father was Cuban (with Jewish descendents). People in school made fun of her, easily. The school was predominately black and hispanic - a few whites. Everyone was aspiring to the Amerikan dream and Jean didn't fit. I was new-starting late in the term after being transferred - and rather funny looking myself. My clothes were funny, too- more conservative than the other girls. I came from Catholic school and really didn't fit into any of the right holes. Maybe that's why we sought each other out. We became fast friends - closer than I had ever been to a friend before. We all told lies to stay alive - to hold onto what we thought was our self-esteem; little white lies about our families and positions in life. Peer pressure was very high at that particular time in life. My position in the school - as sometimes a result of my lies - was elevated. People started to like me and I felt accepted. The lies also helped me to feel more secure. They normalized me in terms of the other girls and I didn't feel different. That was of extreme importance to me then. Jean eventually came to know all of my lies as lies (as I did hers). We were too close for it not to happen. We helped keep each other's secrets and even helped each other invent some believable stories. We were inseparaable.

As I got to be friends with the other girls they put pressue on me to abandon Jean - to make fun of her clothes and hair and lifestyle. I am ashamed - very ashamed - to say that I finally did just that. It involves a lot of ugly incidents and things I am not proud of. It is painful to remember even now. We ended our senior year in Jr. High not speaking to each other and not even saying goodbye (we were to go on to different high schools). I have not seen her since graduation day - June 1965. I wish I could turn all the horribleness of it around today

but it is far in the past and done with. I have to let the fact that I was a child, really, who didn't know better - or realize what I was doing - sink deep into my head. It is painful growing to be a mature person.

We (Jean and I) had a lot of good, happy times together. Wild, crazy times. The lines from the article in the Voice remind me particularly of a time when we were in bed, pretending to be making love to our "husbands". We had cut school and were spending the day at my house as we often did (my mother was working). I remember it was cold and we were in my bed, under the covers. I don't remember how it all got started but we were pretending to be in bed with our fantasy husbands. I was on one side with my husband and she and hers were on the other side. The pillows made good, warm, soft husbands. I was naive, mostly, about sensual pleasure (though I did know about sex) and Jean had to show me how to move my body. I must not have been doing too well at it 'cause I remember her saying to me, "You and your husband will be the quietest ones on the whole block." I was too embarrassed to answer her back so I made larger movements with my hips and prayed I'd done the right thing. I guess I had as we continued our fantasy-game. I don't really remember what else happened but it felt safe and OK to me.

We were fiercely loyal to each other for a time. The day I caught pneumonia Jean came to pick me up for school that morning and I wasn't feeling too well. I said I wasn't going and crawled back into bed. Jean said she'd see me later - at lunchtime - and went on to school. I remember suffering all morning -half delirious - and getting up to let her in when she returned for lunch. She'd brought me chocolate canned soda that I tried to drink to no avail. She tried to comfort and amuse me with stories of happenings during the morning at school but I was already far into a comatose state (unknown to either of us). She went back to school - I don't remember letting her out - and my mother said Jean had come over that afternoon after school but I had not answered the door. She called until my mother got home from work but I don't remember hearing the phone. I ended up in the hospital for a month - lucky, today, to be alive. I knew something was terribly wrong with me that day and Jean's presence helped me not to be afraid after she'd gone and I was alone. I remember being able to hold onto the thought that she'd be back for lunch - even long after she'd actually come and gone.

As I mentioned before, I know, somewhat- things that drove us apart -but I can only guess at the entire story. Was it closeness for another girl that I was afraid of? Did I sense, somewhere, that we might be lesbians and that that was forbidden? I'd like to say so today- but I can never be sure how I felt then.

I am remembering Jean today after such a long time. I wonder if she remembers me.

Linda Brown :

By Sapphire

She hated the rain. Never could figure out what people be talkin' bout when they be talkin' bout gentle refreshing, spring rains bathin' the earth's surface! This nasty ass cold greyness pouring down combining with shit in the street sho wadn't sweet. Her wig was wet. Hair spray and rain mingled with perspiration and ran down her neck. Her feet were like blocks of ice. "Mutherfuck this shit" she mumbled, "I'm turning in for the nite"

As she strolled past the likker store she looked down the street at the elementary school she usta go to wondering what her mother would say. "Well" she thot, "least I ain't on welfare." The street was deserted. At three o'clock in the mornin Webster and Grove looked like something out of a movie. She shivered and quickened her pace. Some putty faced pig in a blue chevy slowed down and while cruising along side her leered, "Psst wanna date? Huh honey? Hout bout it?" She almost ran; she couldn't have taken another feebly dick pink hairy son of a bitch if he'd been shittin' fifty dollar bills. She walked over to Hayes St. ---lo and behold --- a bus---a rare occurance at three o'clock in the mornin'. She hopped on the bus, sauntered to the back, hopin' Willie wouldn't be upset bout her not gettin' no whole lot of money. Shit! Wet as it was the mutherfucker oughtta be glad she got what she got. She jumped off the bus and motored down the street hopin' there was some brownies left cause all nite she'd been wantin' somethin' sweet. She started up the stairs, slid up to the door and laid on the bell. No one answered. She wondered what was takin' so long. Shit! Even if no one else was in Jackie be in. She was always the first one in! Sometimes she thot that bitch had a stash cause can't nobodi come up with that much cash every nite! "Hell" she muttered, "What's wrong wid these fools?" She laid the on the bell again. Willie usually be home about this time too. Finally she heard footsteps approaching the door. They musta been fuckin'. Still that son of a bitch didn't have to take till Christmas to answer the door. She heard him on the other side of the door---- his footsteps ---- his breathing.

Willie opened the peephole and said, "What chu want?"

"Nigger r u crazy! she said, "What u think I want! Lemme in!"

"How much cash u got?"

"Bout seventy five"

" U trifling bitch u mean u been out all nite and ain't got but seventy five dollars? You musta been jivin' round smokin' weed wid the other bitches!"

"Willie u know better than that. I ain't lazy. It's just been slow. Come on daddy" she wheedled, "Open the doe."

He opened the door, grabbing her left arm with his right hand, yanked her around and placed a well aimed patent leathered foot in her ass and said,

"Bitch u get in when u got my money"

Enraged and scared she sobbed,

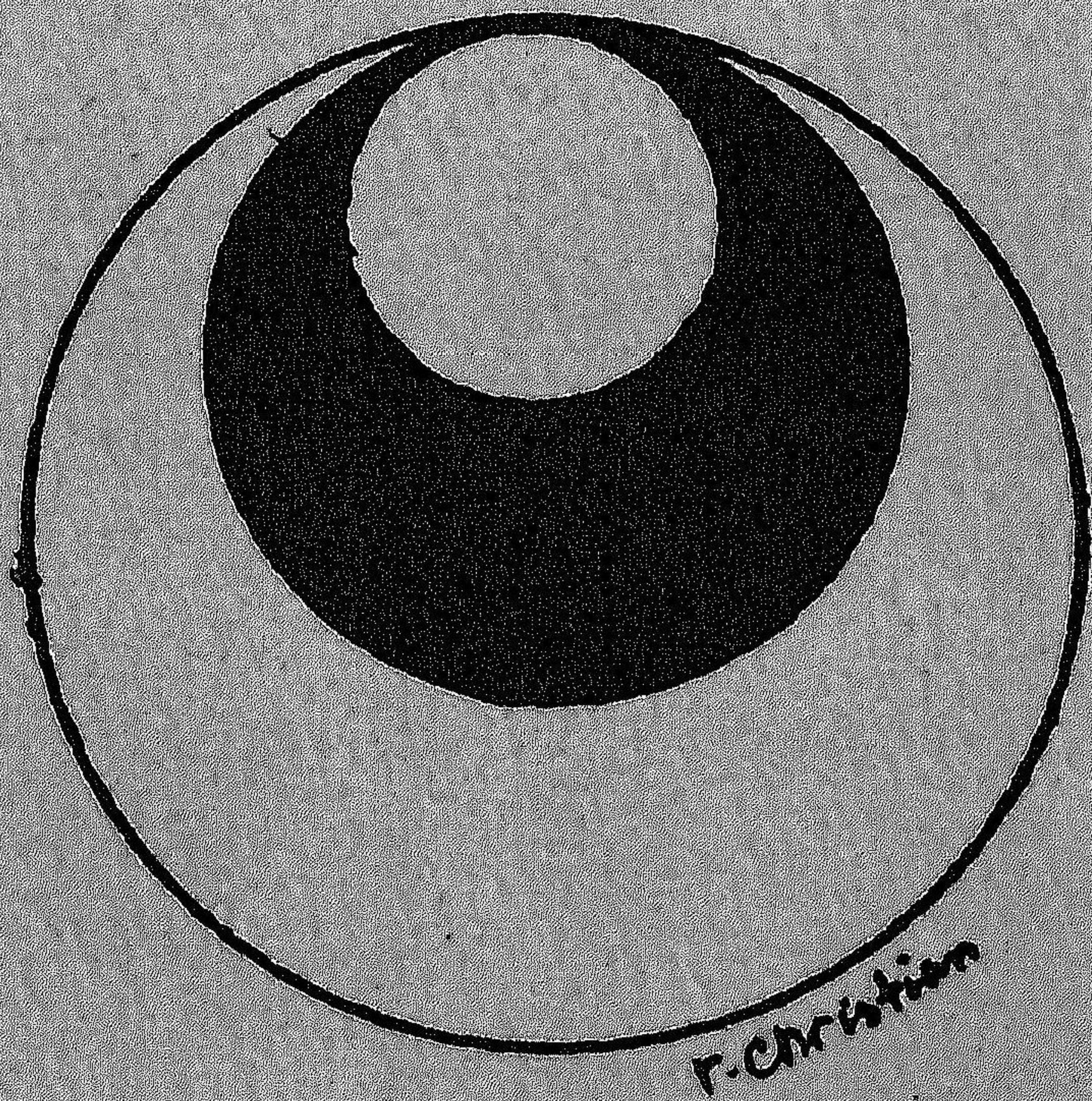
"Bu...But Willie it's rainin'!"

Willie slammed the door, opened the peephole and tole her,

"Walk between the raindrops baby
walk between the raindrops."

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