

VOL. 1 NO. 3

\$1.25

MORE IF YOU CAN,  
LESS IF YOU CAN'T

SABAŠU '78

FALL 1978

# AZALEA

A MAGAZINE BY THIRD WORLD LESBIANS

ATLANTA LESBIAN FEMINIST ALLIANCE

P. O. BOX 5502

ATLANTA, GA. 30307



Done at Come! Unity Press (13 E 17 Street, NYC 10003 (212) 675-3043), a cooperative where we learned to do this printing. The press does not demand \$ from us or other movement people who print materials that provide equal access to the poor. The press needs the broad support of many donations: monthly pledges of \$2, \$5, \$7, energy, food, skills, joint benefits, etc. to continue movement access to printing facilities. Don't let this be the last month! YOUR MOVE!ment.

APR 2 1978

Copyright 1978 AZALEA  
all rights reserved

Editor: Linda Brown

Contributing Editors: Joan Gibbs and Robin Christian

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

The proposed deadline for the next issue is December 21, 1978.

Subscriptions to AZALEA are \$4.00 per year.  
AZALEA will be sent free to any women in prison.  
Send us your address.

Cover graphic by Irene Sabasu.

If you cannot afford the price of AZALEA, send us as much as you can.

This issue of AZALEA comes a little off-schedule. We made the decision to combine our summer and fall issues. When our summer deadline had passed, we realized we didn't really have enough material to warrant publishing an entire issue. Our "shoestring" budget made the decision for us to wait until fall.

We sincerely thank our generous, anonymous contributor. The spirit of your gift is the kind of thing that helps keep AZALEA alive. We appreciate it.

\* \* \* \* \*

During the past months, wimmin have been asking, in increasing numbers, for a more detailed explanation, statement, of AZALEA's editorial policy. In an attempt to further clarify our hopes, aims - aspirations - for/with the magazine, we offer these things:

1- We see AZALEA as a vehicle; one of the voices of the 3rd World lesbian community. We hope sisters will fill her pages with the things they feel are important for us to share with each other. We hope you will utilize varied mediums; express the diverse talents present in the community: writings, photographs, graphics, etc. We hope that you will feel free to speak to whatever issues you feel need to be addressed.

2- We see ourselves, as editors, functioning in a non-traditional, non-hierarchical, non-elitist role. We do not make judgements, as to content, about what will appear in the pages of AZALEA. The only right we reserve is to exclude those things that oppress, insult, or are destructive in any way to us as 3rd World lesbians. Some things may be excluded from a particular issue ONLY on the consideration of too little available space, or the need for rewrite(in the interest of clarity). Also, any graphics, drawings, or photographs must be done(using any black & white medium) to fit either an 8 $\frac{1}{2}$ " x 11" or 8 $\frac{1}{2}$ "x22" page - allowing for  $\frac{1}{2}$ " margins all around. We would like to print as many things as we receive, but since our funds and our working energies are limited, and since we firmly believe that all wimmin should have a chance to be heard, we may hold over some material for future issues. We would also ask that if you want your material(s) returned to you that you try to provide a self-addressed stamped envelope.

3- The theme of a particular issue is determined by the material we receive. Some issues may turn out to be intensely political, while others may lean heavily toward the cultural sides of our lives. Some may be a mixture of many things. It all depends on WHAT YOU SEND. Our personal politics (which are, in some cases, even different from each other's) may not always agree with those of some of our contributors. But we recognize our vast and diverse community and the politics within. We see AZALEA as a place where these can, hopefully, all be expressed.

4- We urge every woman who is concerned about keeping AZALEA's voice alive; who supports the concepts and ideals we have expressed here, to take an active part in the magazine. We need typists, proofreaders, printers, collators, and the many more things that any publication needs to be born again and again with any regularity. It goes without saying that we need to share our ideas with other wimmin. If you have an idea/skill you would like to see put into motion in AZALEA's pages, come and work with us and help that idea to be. You can reach us at these two addresses:

J. GIBBS 306 Lafayette Ave. Bklyn, NY 11238

L. BROWN / R. CHRISTIAN 314 East 91st St. #5E NYC 10028

*Linda* FOR AZALEA

## Table of Contents

	Page
A CASE OF TELEMANIA by Ann Allen Shockley	1-5
Word Graphic by Linda Brown	
MYSELF by Brahma	6
Two Poems by Becky Birtha	7-8
Three Poems by Leocadia	9
Two Poems by Irare Sabasu	10
Chinese Woodcut	
A MEASURE BY JUNE by S. Diane Bugus	11-21

A CASE OF TELEMANIA

A SHORT STORY  
by

ANN ALLEN SHOCKLEY

Freda sat on the edge of the bed in the criss-crossed shadows of the night table lamp, restlessly smoking her third king-sized Winston cigarette. The radio/clock facing her showed eight p.m. Kimberly had left an hour ago to attend a faculty committee meeting. The apartment was quiet and entirely too still for her. She thrived on people and talk, sounds and movements. The tranquility gnawed into her like the teeth of a worrisome rat.

Even the usual Friday night traffic noises were halted because of the falling featherlight snow coating the streets. At times, a lone car could be heard moving clumsily down the white frosted road. To her, it seemed to do nothing but snow in this small, campus town nestled in the Pennsylvania hills.

Irritably she drew heavily upon the cigarette, thinking of all nights for Kimberly to have a meeting. They could have had Tonnie and Laverne from upstairs in for a little party. Hadn't the college officials here ever heard of TGIF?

The room breathed a slight chill against her. She could go into the living room and turn up the thermostat, but this was secondary to her thoughts. Instead, she simply fastened the plaid robe tighter around her pajama clad, short chubby figure, while her eyes fastened hard on the telephone beside the bed, cigarette parting a smoldering white line between thick, brown fingers. The yellow telephone, color selected by Kimberly to harmonize with the beige walls and green rug when they first moved in together four months ago, seemed to hypnotize her as she stared gravely at it.

Really, Freda, she cautioned herself silently, you shouldn't. Last month's bill was a terror. Luckily she had gotten the mail before Kimberly that day. After all, the phone was in Kimberly's name even though she did pay her share. Times like the last, it was a mad race trying to beat Kimberly to the mailbox. On those occasions, she simply told Kimberly that she would take care of it and Kimberly never saw the bill.

She would have rather had the listing in her name, since she used the phone more than Kimberly. Only Ma Bell wouldn't trust her until she finished paying that Greensboro bill left over last year. Stupid, considering all the money Ma Bell had. But that wasn't as bad as her mother. God! Her own mother put a lock on the telephone whenever she was home, constantly bitching about the enormity of the past bills she made when visiting, and worse of all, yaking about all the women

she called up across the country. Why did she have to call up those women all the time? She must have a case of telemania, her mother coined.

She didn't know why her mother bitched so much. She tried to pay the bills, and what were telephones for if not to be used? To her, a phone was what a drink was to some people at five o'clock, exquisite cuisine to others, and a good screw to those who needed one. Talking over the telephone was her thing, something she had to do and enjoyed doing. The telephone served as an outlet to family, friends, ex-lovers and potential lovers.

Like right now, she had this urge to call Harriet in Camden. She reached down for the almost forgotten glass of chablis on the floor. A bad habit, Kimberly chastised her, because invariably at sometime or another, the glass was knocked over, adding more spots to the rug. She sipped the wine, feeling its warmth relaxing her, crumbling prudence.

Just one little bitty call shouldn't upset the equilibrium. The new phone bill wasn't due for two weeks. Besides, she hadn't seen or talked to Harriet in a long time. Harriet used to be her sounding board, lending a sympathetic ear to her problems. Too bad she never made it with Harriet. If Gloria wasn't always in the picture to keep such a goddam protective eye on her and her business, personal and otherwise, she was certain that she would have gotten through. Anyway, she should call Harriet to tell her how much she enjoyed her latest book of poetry. She owed her that, considering their friendship throughout the years.

Setting the wine glass back on the floor, she squashed out the cigarette among the dead stems of like ones and got up to get her address book out of the bureau drawer. Running a finger down the R section, she found Harriet Ruse's telephone number. With bare feet flip-flapping in run-over houseshoes, she went back to sit on the bed and dial the number.

There were several rings before she heard Harriet's gentle, low-keyed rich poet's voice answering. Thank goodness it was Harriet and not Gloria. "Hi, Harriet, this is Freda Delaney--"

"Freda! How are you?" The woman on the other end seemed delighted. "It's been a long time."

"Un-Hun-n-n--" Freda hummed a musical tune. "It has. I thought I'd call to let you know how much I enjoyed your new book, Black Gems for Black People."

"How sweet. I'm so glad you liked it."

In the background of the phone's opposite end, Freda could hear Natalie Cole singing Inseparable. "In addition," she continued in her husky Yale graduate school affected preciseness, "I wanted you to know that I am now on the faculty of Wilshire College in Willy, Pennsylvania. It's a predominantly white school, private and in the middle of nowhere!" she laughed.

"How did you get there? I thought you were at that all-girl black school in--"

"I was," Freda interrupted, pausing to cradle the receiver be-

tween her shoulder and neck to extract another cigarette from the half empty pack on the table. Eyeing it fretfully, she hoped Kimberly would remember to bring some home. Quickly she sparked a flame with the gold lighter Kimberly had given her last month for a birthday present.

"Didn't you like it?" Harriet cut into the suspension.

"Loved it! My first teaching position out of Yale. I loved going back to my roots, so to speak. Being around my people for a change. You know, after all those years being exiled at white schools. Scholarships to Putney, Marlboro and Yale."

"I understand."

Harriet would understand, for she was a sensitive poet and writer. Although Harriet was forty-five, twenty years older than she, Harriet could relate. Furthermore, she got along better with older women, even when she was younger and the pet of all the black teachers in her hometown of Anniston, Alabama. "As I was saying, Harriet, it was wonderful being there, teaching history to all my beautiful black sisters--"

"Well, why did you leave?"

Freda loudly sucked in a pit of smoke, then exhaled it in one spontaneous cloudburst. "Because the black male administration over a girls' college, mind you, namely, the Dean, wanted to get rid of me."

"How awful. Why?"

She could imagine Harriet's handsome sharp, creole face screwing up into knots, the dark eyes widening questioningly. Harriet's deep, engulfing eyes were the most memorable feature about her. She could hear the record player being turned up. Gloria must be home signifying, she calculated. Gloria could be so ridiculously jealous sometimes for a lover who had lived with Harriet for eleven years. Case in point now when they were merely having a friendly chat.

"Oh, Harriet, because a very close--at least I thought at the time--friend of mine, who taught in the department with me, spread the rumor that I was a lesbian."

"Really!"

"Un-Hun-n-n. And you know how black people feel about lesbians. Or bulldaggers to use our race's favorite label. They'll tolerate fags, but not people like--" She started to say us, but caught herself. Harriet hadn't actually come out. Silly, since everybody knew. "Homophiles--" she supplemented, thinking that was a good aesthetic word to use with Harriet.

"Oh--" Low and thoughtful.

"It was a rumor and no one could prove it. Of course, if you aren't seen dating a male or letting one go to bed with you, people start surmising.

"Yes, but on what basis--"

"Like I was saying, this supposedly close friend, who had taught there for years, was jealous of me. Students signed up for my classes more than hers and were always either hanging out in my office or at my house. Plus, I was younger than she and the girls could tie in better on my wave lengths--" Christ, she rebuked herself, she had slipped and exposed the generation gap analysis to Harriet. "Besides, I had a degree from Ya--ale," she continued, putting out the cigarette in the congested ash tray. "This person told the Dean, according to my source, that I got loaded one night over to her place and made a pass at her. Imagine! And her as ugly as Job's turkey."

The wine glass was brought up to her mouth. Perpetually something to the mouth as if solacing an oral need: cigarettes, wine, telephone receivers. The record player blared Patti LaBelle's group a phantasmagoria of female bleating rock rhythms cloaked in a night-marish colorful garden of mind blowing soul motion sounds.

"Now, Harriet, the night in question," Freda continued, "I must admit that I was drunk, and I may have--" She set the glass back on the floor. "I away; I guess, I did rather like her. As I look back, it was probably pity. She was so ineffectual--helpless, although Jesus-s, she had per--so--na--lity. And, shit, the way she hung around me all the time, rubbing up against me and reading Audre Lorde's poetry, I just assumed--"

"Un-Hun-n-n." Harriet at times could be so damn guarded. Freda extracted another cigarette, flicking the lighter angrily as memories began to stir. "I should have sued her for damaging my reputation. You don't know how uptight and straight-assed those black bourgeoisie colleges can be. It practically ruined me for the rest of the year. Faculty members avoided me like the plague. If they only knew a fourth of the student body is gay." She bent to sip from the glass again. "Oh, well, pity all those self-righteous people who can fuck each other's wives and husbands and get students pregnant, yet want to act all pious and knock the other."

"How do you like Wilshire?"

Freda placed the cigarette on the edge of the ash tray to scratch her Afro. "So-so. I'm the only black faculty member aside from a Hambuk Tore' who goes around all the time in his tribal robes to let people know right off he's not a black American," she giggled. "Frankly, I think he's hiding a swish underneath that African garb. Isn't that a new wrinkle?" Distantly in the receiver, she could hear Harriet whispering her name, probably to nosey Gloria. "I've seen four black students since I've been here. There aren't enough of us black folks here to give this God awful constant snow a color tint," she lamented facetiously. "Furthermore, I do prefer warm weather. Wasn't that why we were brought to this country? Because of our ability to sustain and work in heat--"

"Black fruitful labor courting seeds of fertility--" Harriet intoned poetically.

"Actually, I think most of the people here are racists. I had to fight tooth and nail to teach a course in Afro-American history.."

"In this point in time?"

"I don't believe they've ever heard of a black or gay revolution--" The cigarette was retrieved again.

A single female voice singing in a whiplash beat about love love love replaced LaBelle. "Who's that singing?"

"Lib Tolson--"

"Un-Hun-n-n. I hear she's gay. Turn it up louder."

"Wait a minute. Gloria's gone next door. I'll have to go in to the living room."

"Ok--" Freda bent down for the wine glass. Seeing it empty, she put down the receiver, got up and started to the kitchen, carelessly dropping a trail of ashes from the cigarette as she went. Opening the refrigerator, she refilled the glass from the bottle on the shelf next to the milk. Then she took one last draw before stubbing the cigarette in the overflowing kitchen ash tray. Returning to the bedroom, she resumed her place on the bed, picking



up the telephone. "Ok--back. Harriet?"

"Right here. Can you hear the record better?"

"Un-Hun-n-n. Lo-o-ve it!" she exclaimed, twisting her body sexily in time with the music. "Yeah-h-h, sing it, sister!"

"This call must be costing you a fortune."

"Don't worry about it. I called you, didn't I? What are phones for, if not to keep up with old friends." She gulped the wine, getting a buzz on which began to create a little fire of nastiness. "The more I think about that skinny legged, yellow bitch spreading that malicious tale about me, the madder I get!"

"Did they actually fire you?"

"No. Just didn't renew my contract. Isn't that a bitch? That Dean, who'd been trying to feel my legs under the table at meetings all year, ought to be hung. The old gizzard'd probably need a prop to keep it up! Men can sometimes be bastards, can't they?"

"Are you going home for Easter?" Harriet evaded the question.

Freda remembered that Harriet never said anything bad about men in conversation, or her poetry in which she wrote of them as beautiful, strong, black men, while in reality, she lived with a beautiful, strong, black woman. "Un-Hun-n-n. I'd rather be in New York with the gang and run over to see you. But you know my mother would have a fit if I didn't spend Easter there with her."

"Are you happy there?"

Harriet forever worried about people being happy, her muse's preoccupation with feelings. "I miss my black sisters--"

"You may get back in a black college," Harriet said sympathetically.

"Yes, my black sisters need me." From the next room, she heard the door opening and closing. "Well, Harriet--sweetie--I must go," she said hastily. "It was wonderful talking with you. I'll be writing soon. Bye,bye."

This time, she carefully set the wine glass on the night table and went quickly to meet Kimberly entering the living room. The stately looking whitewoman with checkered gray in her brown hair looked tired as she threw off her hat and coat. "Meetings can wear you out--"

"I know--" Freda said consolingly, kneeling to help her take off the wet-stained boots. Moving up, she kissed her gently, breathing in the outdoor breath of winter still enmeshed in her face and hair. The closeness to the woman, combined with the wine, kindled a small, familiar flame. "Missed you--"

Kimberly leaned her cheek against Freda's. "I think I'll get a glass of wine--"

"I'll get it for you. You go and get undressed." In the kitchen, Freda got the bottle of wine and a glass, taking it to the bedroom. "Here you are." Handing Kimberly the glass, she refilled her own. "Did you remember to get cigarettes?"

"On the dresser--" Kimberly murmured, fatigued.

"Good. Now, darling, tell me all about the meeting--" Freda invited, snuggling into bed beside her, next to the telephone where she always slept just in case.

Copyright 1978 by Linda Brown

today, i have learned to let go.

i have learned to wait and to suffer, like a woman,  
without crying heaps of tears.

i've learned not to believe what everyone says.

and to see beyond my nose - when things are  
too dark.

i have learned to keep secrets to myself.

and to save the paper fortunes from chinese  
cookies.

i've learned that the comfort of a friend's arms is  
sometimes better than the passions from many wimmins' hearts.

i have found out, finally, how to care for myself.

and how to make my own sunflowers grow.

i made enough money to buy good books, silk shirts and  
golden apples.

i learned, yet, another route on the subway

and wrote a paper on the nature of affairs  
in this community.

but, when it's quiet and black tonight

and i am suddenly awake at 3 a.m.; sleepless-

i will miss laughing, us sharing hot milk;

sitting by you on the bus, holding hands and

lying warm

next to you in bed.

i remember you dressing my ears with

new, silver earrings and then showing me my

face in the mirror - "you're so pretty".

i remember the last line you gave me.

last night, walking out of the door, you didn't even say

good-bye.

today, i have learned to let go; but, also, learned that i will  
take your memory with me for the rest of my life.

i thought my lessons were done

when i no longer carried books to school on my hip.

i learned, today,

that you never stop learning.

---

MYSELF

I question myself, why must we receive the PAIN before the PLEASURE

Does this really help us to appreciate the goodness?

It's our own self undoing we who torture ourselves, It's tripping  
without any acid

I heard your voice, you spoke to me

It's my life with you flashing back, so beautiful

Please don't go away, let's talk some more

Who said dreams don't come true?

My lesson is to see me, in, around and through

Sometimes it's not easy looking at yourself

I find myself thinking me to sleep, It makes you drawn,

A where do I go from here attitude?

Can you understand me?

I want to start off on a new road to success

Whatever I do, wherever I go, Please friend, wherever you are,

Say that our friendship will be indissoluble

I promise you

Will you promise me?

BRAHMA

---

In the beginning I didn't understand.  
I had lived with so many  
others  
I didn't know it could be taken  
seriously.

You had lived with only one  
other  
woman  
for ten years.

So you've begun to count our time together  
only recently:  
a month,  
three,  
six months now  
we've shared this house.

I began to count  
before  
though I wondered where to begin--  
from when we met  
or when we knew  
or when we first made love?

How long we've been together--  
one year  
one year and a half  
two years next fall

And I wonder how long  
two years is  
for you.

Becky BIRTHA  
April 6, 1978

## THE DISILLUSION. OF THE DREAM

Half a pot of split pea soup left rotting on the stove  
Dead flowers in a jelly jar on a cold windowsill.

And she's lost now in the mirror  
Between flashes of purple and black  
in a thread of smoke from the hash pipe  
among scraps of garbage  
the cats scattered across the kitchen floor.

No light can pass the dirt on the stained glass windows,  
And the curtains and tapestries hang gaudy and limp.

Robes she wears become old bedspreads again

As the season of  
The sun decays.

I can't tell her face anymore,  
Picking among the haggard eyes of the crashers on the floor.  
I hear her crying  
But it seems like a long distance  
from here to the next room.

Becky Birtha  
October 15, 1972

Night Song

Can I stay

the night

with you?

Yes

she answers,

I like you too!

A State of Affairs

the church money  
is the state and  
controls the country.  
And somebody's playing God! Complex?

So where's this world going to  
now that we've got cloning?  
And Hitlers!

Hey! War can last forever!

March, 1978

to Dian

I am pregnant with you  
about to give birth to our  
love-child.

My midwife be thee, sister.

Leocadia

Got to reprogram me  
 Got to learn not to  
 Say BITCH, so  
 Easy to my sisters.  
 Got to learn to let  
 The smile reach up  
 And touch...  
 My eyes again....  
 Like when.....  
 We used to doubledutch..

Got to not let the man.  
 Explode his plan...  
 Seperate the women  
 From their warmth...  
 Their sister warmth.

Got to get me back  
 To the Goddess  
 Got to go back when  
 Earth Mother  
 Took care of her own  
 Got to find an oracle  
 Let her send me back home.

Got to catch  
 The Amazon Express.

Got to reprogram me  
 Got to re-turn re-learn to  
 Touch my sisters softly  
 .... softly.

Right now.....  
 There are too many miles  
 Too many distractions  
 And hour - eating situations  
 For you to even call, or

drop  
 a  
 line

But, it's cool....  
 But it's fine....  
 And I understand.  
 And in time.....

I  
 suppose  
 i'll  
 find

That I have surreptitiously  
 Crawled into some corner of your  
 Sentimental hardly opened closet  
 To be stumbled over in mid-search.  
 For something/someone else....  
 But.... it's still alright...  
 And I...

I do so understand.

IRARE SABASU





## A MEASURE BY JUNE

by

S. Diane Bogus

(published by GPU News Magazine, February, 1978)

"June?" I said after he'd told me his name. "You mean like Junebug?" I knew lots of boys with such a nickname.

"Naw," he grinned, baring those brilliant teeth which made more handsome his tar black face. "Not, Junebug, just plain June. June Johnson. I was born in June so my mama named me June. Now say you'll meet me on the football field at lunch."

I looked down at the presumptuous grip that he had on my elbow, then back to his Cheshire face. "June?" I repeated. "What kind of name is that for a boy?"

That was high school. I was a freshie, a naive, untampered fourteen. I was she who envied other girls' attractiveness, but was helplessly unconscious of her own. I was the she whose very attractiveness June had coveted from gym day one.

Our Birmingham, Alabama high school had been built large to accomodate a large student body. But with so few Black high schools to serve huge Negro communities, even it was over-crowded. So, in gym, while some boys' classes were always being held outside, others, for boys and girls were held inside. For sure a division had been made.

Down the hardwood basketball court, where the Home scoreboard hung, the boys exercised and learned skills. At the Visitors' end, we girls did the same. A maroon line, drawn to mark the gym's half way point, definitively set our co-educational boundaries.

No boy was to cross to our side, and no girl was to cross to theirs. Violation meant swats, or worse, suspension.

On the day I crossed, I'd thought that the boys would fearfully, protectively shoo me back. Instead, they received me like I was a turkey strutting into the Pilgrim's Thanksgiving camp.

"We've got a Vi-si-tor!" June, (whom I didn't know), shouted. He rubbed his hands together like the turkey he was seeing had already been plucked, roasted, and readied.

The other boys cheered, "juicy, juicy! Hey Miss Fine!" They whistled and clapped.

Embarrassed only to have had to come in front of all these people, I veritabily whispered to their coach, "Our teacher wants to know if you'd like to bring your class over to do square dances with us."

Instead of answering "yes," or "no," their gym teacher took time to write a note, (which to this day I believe he did on purpose). While he did so, I stood there barely clad in my blousey, blue gym suit.

Though it fit loosely enough, it had a belted waist and elastic thigh bands. My trembling legs sprouted through the suit's tight leg holes and ran naked to the doughnut roll of my hobby socks. Above my waist, my heretofore considerate breast just then enunciated

their ampleness, and I stood there becoming conscious of a body I didn't know I had, and awakening to the eyes of maleness.

The teacher finally handed me the note; I took it and hurried back to our side. I had barely given it to my instructor before the boys flooded over and were laying claim to desirable partners.

June must have giant-stepped to get to me. When I turned to join the class, he was at my side, taking acquisitional hold of my waist. "It's me and you, baby," he said.

"I'm not your baby!" I snapped and tried to pull away.

"Aw, now you're going to try to play hard-to-get when you know you already like that I came all the way over here for you." He flashed a cozening smile and winked.

"I'm not, and I don't!" I tried not to smile, but I couldn't help it. Although his coming for me was a compliment, and did indeed make me want to dance with him, I hadn't had time to really think about it. Besides, it was funny that he could act so cool and familiar when he didn't even know me.

"What's your name, Miss Fine?"

Just then the teacher started giving us instructions, and like I was his to do with as he pleased, June drove me to a spot in the circle that had been formed. "Come on, tell me your name, Miss Fine."

This boy had some nerve, treating me like he owned me! I ignored him and really listened to the dance instructions.

"Come on," he said giving my crossed forearms a little pinch. "Tell me your name."

I pulled my arm to my side and glared at him.

"You're really not playing, huh?" His charcoal face clouded so sincerely.

"No!" I was about to tell him, "and keep your hands off of me," but the music started and all the boys stepped behind the girls, placing their left arm around the girls' waists. Then taking their hands, they extended them outwardly. The reel began.

When it was all over, June had to talk fast before all the boys went to their showers. "Quick, tell me your name, baby."

"I'm not your baby." I started to walk off. All the girls in my class were heading into the shower room.

"Then I'm goin' call you, Movie Star 'cause you look like one of them fine chicks in the movies." He ran after me, caught my arm and held me. "Come on, tell me your name, Miss Fine Movie Star." He looked me over and ran his tongue across his lips.

"How old are you boy?" I couldn't believe he was a real boy. He acted so mannish.

"Tell me your name; I'll tell you my age."

"Johnson!" his teacher called from down the Home side. "Get your chocolate butt over here!"

"Sucker'd better not have called me black," June muttered under his breath, but yelled aloud, "Okay, Coach!" Giving my arm an urgent squeeze, he said, "hurry, tell me your name!"

"Vy," I said, moving away, scared for him and me.

"Vy what?" He hadn't moved toward his end of the gym.

"Don't hurry, Johnson," his teacher called from the door that lead into the boys' showers. "When you do get down here, I've got something for you!"

"Well, if that's the case," June mumbled indifferently, and turned back to me.

I looked warily around for my teacher. She and all the girls

had gone into the showers.

"My name's Vy Harris." I hurried to the doorway, and leaning out I said, "you'd better go; you're in trouble."

Foolhardily, he followed. He took my wrist and elbow. "My name's June. I'm sixteen."

I had just finished marvelling over his name when I saw his teacher storming toward us brandishing a paddle that could have rowed a small canoe. "Uh-oh!"

Within seconds, he reached June, drew back and gave him an enraged swat on the behind. "I've told you, Johnson; there's only four men in this gym, and they're all teachers. Now get your grown, black butt on back to the showers! And you, young lady; better go on and get dressed!"

Intimidated, I disappeared inside, but even as he scampered to his end, sure to get more swats, June yelled back to me, "See you on the field at lunch!"

As poor a start as it was, June and I surreptitiously courted all through that Alabama time when I could not "receive company" (date in the livingroom). My mama's old fashioned reasoning was that "boys and books don't mix," and receiving company had to wait until after high school.

So, fool that youth made me, I sneaked here and there to be with him, or missed the school bus home to have more time to stand and talk to him, and more and more, his black magic face and Cheshire grin drew me toward my first sexual experience.

In his parents' empty, workaday house, June moaned, "ooh, baby," as he ran his manlike hands over my naked, pimply-cold body. "You sho got something them other girls ain't. I knew you looked this good!" He had me standing before him while he knelt on a Shakesperean knee maturely tongue-touching my goosey flesh. When he got to my pubic area, he encouraged me to lie on his roll-away bed which had been bolstered and covered to look like a sofa. Once I was lying down, he licked his lips hungrily. "I sho nuff want to taste you, VY!"

"Taste me?" My mind jumped into a hysteria. "But that's nasty, June, and you're nasty to say you want to. Why would you want to put your mouth on me down there?"

"Cause I know it's going to taste good," he said leaning over me on all fours, taking a fresh-baked-apple-pie whiff. "Goodness," he congratulated, "that smells so good!"

"June!" I quavered, tears defending my virgin-consciousness, "I don't want to do that! I don't want to do it! Let me go home, please!"

"But, baby, I just want to prove I love you. They say if a man'll do this for a woman, he sho nuff in love. And I'm sho nuff a man who's sho nuff in love with you, VY."

"But, June, you ain't no man. You're a boy. A sixteen year old boy, and you're acting like... like---" The words to describe June's carnal knowledge were not known to me. "Just let me go home!" I bawled.

For me that was a big, sinful sex act. On the lonely bus ride home, I thought myself filth, a whore, the lowest slut. I had let a boy see me naked, I had let him do things and almost committed fornication. If my mother knew, I'd be at the church altar praying for forgiveness for the next three months of Sundays.

So sin-sick was I that I confessed it to my best friend. She frowned and damned me as I wished, and in her silent house, from which her parents were work absent, she hugged me close when I started to cry.

"How did he say he was going to do it?" She pitied, empathetic tears rolling down her face.

"He didn't say," I whispered coarsely, my tears drowning my voice.

"And you had all your clothes off?" she asked in a quiet, but curious voice.

I couldn't tell if she was still crying too, for I remained huddled into her shoulder. How could I face her? Here she was still so pure, so Christian a girl, and here I was a flawed, sinful woman. "I didn't want to take them off at first," I cried, hoping that my reluctance could serve as a point toward penitence.

"You both were butt-naked?" she double checked.

"But I was real cold, so cold that I had goose pimples."

"And how were you standing before he said he wanted to taste it?"

"In front of him." I sat up now and looked into her face. Not only were there no tears on her face, but her face had changed from sympathetic and sisterly to something curiously as hungry as June's had been. Somehow though, hers was softer, more appealing, arousing.

"Show me." She moved away from me and waited.

"I can't," I said with what I thought was embarrassment welling up inside me like a hot vapor.

"You were going to let him do it to you," she charged, "but all I want to see is how you were standing!"

Goaded by my guilt, and in need of her absolution, I slowly stood and reenacted my upright, unsexual stance. I even wrapped my arms around my breasts and shoulders to indicate how cold I was.

"That don't look right," she assessed and made a bored face.

I needed to please her, to be forgiven, after all, we were sisters, best, best friends. We were going to get married at the same time, have a double ceremony, and when we had babies, I would name my daughter after her, and she'd name her daughter after me.

"But this is how I looked," I contended.

"Except one thing," she intimated.

Stunned, but feeling my heart thumping at the prospect, I barely kept from stammering, "you want me to take off my clothes?"

"Will you?" she begged. "I mean, I just want to see."

"And you won't be mad at me for doing it for him?"

"I promise."

I took them off-- with my eyes closed. After a long silence, wherein she said nothing, I asked, with my eyes still squeezed shut, "well, can I put them back on now?"

"I want to lick you," I heard her say.

Instantly my mouth felt like I had been eating dried apricots. My heart thumped, thumped, thundered! "But it's nasty, and you know what comes from there..."

"I want to," she grew stronger.

Surprising myself, I turned the fearful tables, "let me do you first..."

What could have changed between June and me? Nothing. Rationally, I made myself see that a girl my age had to do something, and my mother wasn't jiving about me not "gettin' full of some boy's baby!" That was sho nuff out, and so was any tease that would lead me and June to that end. But while having sex with June was avoidable, June's enchanting grin, and possessive presence at school were inescapable. Besides, who wanted to escape? I liked June's style.

And like a department store mannequin, June did style. He managed to be the best dressed boy at school, plus be the one with the most spending change. He'd hop the field fence at lunch and go to buy me gourmet burgers and fries. Frequently, he'd buy records for me that I'd have to sneak home wrapped in my gym clothes.

On the lonely week-ends, when seeing him was impossible, my best friend and I would intimately nestle in my room and moon over the love tunes that he'd bought me. We'd pretend that we were each other's absent boyfriend, cloaking, all the time, our Sapphic exchange.

It turned out that the majority of June's gifts were bought with stolen money. Money that he took from his father's gas station cash drawer. Money that made June's part-time check look like his father's full-time earnings.

His father put him out, disowned him. June quit school, a fact I didn't learn until three weeks before summer vacation, and only did I learn it when I couldn't stand his daily absence at school nor the fact that he no longer had his sister call me (for him, in order to throw off my mother, if she answered).

I finally called him from my best friend's house and his sister was breaking it to me gently when his father took the phone and told me flatly: "That nigger ain't nothing, and ain't gon get to be nothing! You'd best keep on with your education, Little Miss, and forget that ol' half-slick June!"

Like a soap opera heroine, I was shattered, and my best friend comforted me the only way she knew how.

From time to time, I'd get letters from a nomad June, via his sister. He'd write attesting his undying love, telling me that I was still his woman, that he'd be back for me, that he was getting it together. But that summer after our sophomore year turned into my junior year, and summer again, and school again, until many secret boyfriends, but no new best friend later, I arrived at my graduation. Who should show but June?

He didn't look any different, taller, but no different. He was as black as ever with those dark, indented eyes, set under his prominent but squarish forehead. He still had a Caesarian nose, and yes, that smile, that cozening smile.

He came up to me after the ceremony as I stood talking to some of my classmates. And like the June he was, he did not excuse his kingly right to take my waist and guide me away from the group.

"You still as fine as ever, Vy," he said pulling me to him, and soulfully French-kissing me right there in front of everybody.

"June!" I objected, straining away. "We haven't seen each other in a long time!" What I think I meant to convey was "things aren't the same; don't kiss me!" It didn't carry for June said:

"I know it, and we've got to make up for lost time."

"That time was lost, June, and so was what we had," my ears heard my mouth say this. My mind had no advance notice.

"Aw, what you talkin' 'bout, Vy? It's still me and you, baby. I told you I was coming back for you. It ain't never really been nobody but you. I mean, I admit, I had to be a man every now and then while I was gone, but I'm back, sweet mama, and as soon as I run my game off on these country boys, we're going to get married."

"Get married?" I protested, shocked. "I'm going to school, June, to college." I told him the name of our hometown school to which I had been awarded a scholarship.

"That was before you knew I was coming back, but I'm here now. Anyway, we can talk about all that later. Look, I'm coming over to your house tonight. It's time me and your mama got to know one another, especially since I'm going to be her son-in-law--"

"Vy?" My best friend came over. Her face was a challenge. "Your mother is ready to go." She gave June a hostile stare which he did not, (couldn't) read.

"Is this the same girlfriend you had when we were freshies and sophmores, Vy?"

Nervously, I told him yes.

"Then, if y'all still tight after all this time-- and women don't never get along for long-- then, I know we still got a good thing going. So, go on home, Vy. I'll see you tonight, about eight." He started away. "Oh, yeah," he turned back to my best friend, "nice to see you again."

We watched him get into a beige El Dorado.

Mimicking him, she said, "You go on home, Vy. I'll see you to-night-- like he could give you permission!"

For all of the stomach-knotting, worry and hassle, June didn't show. Fact was I didn't hear from him until the beginning of my senior year at college. A letter came from Atmore Prison in Alabama.

In it, June said that he had been busted trying to run a game he'd learned in New York, and he was ashamed to write before now. 'Cause on the for real side, what could he say? But now that he had less than a year to serve, he'd come out and make everything up to me. He still loved me. I was the only woman he'd ever loved. Please write him back and say I still loved him, too. Say that I'd marry him when his time was through.

I hid the letter from my best friend, who of course, had come to college with me. We shared the same room. We shared our studies. We shared everything. But fearing this sharing, fearing to call it by name, I made June's letter a safeguard, made it that which could secretly protest my natural evolution.

Meanwhile, I answered June, again and again, saying, "I still love you, and yes, yes, yes, my darling, we'll get married the day you get out!"

During the time that I was writing to him, my relationship with my best friend became that much more intense. Due to my secrets from her, I was more loving, more attendant, driven by guilt.

In order to off-set the passion we shared, I wrote June more hungrily passionate letters.

By the time June came to the campus, one month after getting out and one week before graduation, he had made motel reservations and was all of the travelling salesman come home to his sex-starved, closeted, little woman. Now at last, he'd show me what a man he'd always been.

"'Cause baby," he said, making a circle of proneness on his chest with his open palm, "if you ain't a man in prison, you'll eat raw meat, and defecate sperm."

I stood there in the lobby of the dorm looking him over. "Do you have to be so graphic?" I hid my lovelessness behind an educated front.

"I'm sorry, mama," he apologized. The hidden seriousness of his personality grayed his happy-go-lucky smile. "Dig, let's get further. I've got some man-loving for you that will make all them wishing letters you wrote come true."

Man-loving, I thought. How ironic.

Upstairs in our dorm, my best friend raved as I packed. "A hotel! You're going to a damn hotel? I know one damn thing, if you go with him, we're through!"

"Then we're through," I accepted the ultimatum. I knew I was challenging her and our unnamed relationship. "I'm a woman," I said, "and I belong with a man. You, too, remember? I'm going to work on my future daughter. What are you going to do about yours?"

I left her crying.

Howard Johnson's. A double. He had really gotten his funds together before he had come to me. He did not want to waste a hungry moment.

"I can't wait to love you, Vy," he said stripping easily, exposing his awesome maleness. Had I ever seen it? Wasn't it smaller before? Oh, yes, during our high school days when we had been playing "prove-your-love" games. There was no doubt that our lives could be measured from there. It seemed that although grown, more worldly, more determined, June had remained the same. He was as unchanged as a thirty-six inch ruler. His total self had always been defined. Yet, strangely, barring my education, he was the very yardstick by which I could measure my growth.

I realized, as I stood fully clad before him, that since that day in the gym, I had been ever growing, sexually evolving. Unlike June, who had early been "a man", no one had stamped me "a woman", while I was yet a girl, and for that reason, if no other, I had managed to grow, unfold.

"Come on, baby!" He urged, whispering.

I went to the bathroom to make preparations.

He came for me when he heard me brushing my teeth.

"Aw, forget all that Vy," he said hefting me into his arms, and carrying me to the bed. "I wants the natural woman. I wants your mouth to taste like Vy's mouth, and not them people's toothpaste. I wants to taste and taste of you, woman!"

Having already turned back the covers, he placed me on the cool sheets. "You ain't still hung up about me tasting you, is you Vy?"

A horde of tears stung my eyes, but I ordered them down my throat. It wasn't that I felt guilt. I felt sorrow for him. How the man had waited, and surely he loved me, surely he wanted this one woman's womaness to complete his own total maleness, but I would have to tell him. Tell him both that I was not his woman nor what he thought a woman should be.

"June... June," my nerve faltered.

"That's all right, baby," he soothed, taking my emotional show for reluctance. "I'll love you so hard the other way that you'll beg for everything else."

"Then go on and love me, June," I said stoically.

"Say it again, Vy, baby." He moved to do so.

"Love me," I said feeling the weight of his body and my debt to him.

His pleasure was immense. When it was over, his praise was for the ears of a goddess. His dreams were of a brick home and "twenty little Black Vy's and Junebugs" running around. "And Vy, honey, I'm going to make you happy. I ain't going to steal or cuss or none of that, so you don't have to worry about me embarrassing you. I know you've got education and class, mama, and a man needs a woman who can handle it when he ain't able. So, as soon as I get a job, you can quit teaching and--"

The entire conversation that ensued was a replay of the past.

"I don't plan to teach, June. I plan to go to graduate school."

"But that's all changed, Vy. You said in your letters that you were going to be my wife."

"I'm not, June. I'm not going to be your wife."

Incredulous, he propped up on one elbow. "What is you saying, woman?" He was suddenly a warrior.

"I'm not going to marry you, June. I have other plans."

"Hey, hey, mama. Be on the for real side. This ain't no time to play. I got everything planned. When you graduate, we gon' already be married, and we gon' move in with this partner of mine-- just until we get on our feet now-- and you'll get a jive teaching job. Meanwhile, I'll try to find something cool to do that'll bring in big dust so that we can live in style. Now, don't be doing that old, jive, high school stuff and change your mind, 'cause you promised, mama, and like that's for real."

"I'm funny, June," I said, my throat twitching.

"Damn-skippy," he swore, "so let's cut the jokes and get our program together!"

"Did you hear what I said?" I know I screamed.

"Yeah, you said you were--funny? Aw, aw," he fell back onto the bed. He had grasped my meaning, but his face said that it was not true. It wasn't true! He began to laugh a deep, tear-bringing laugh. "You?" He said in between laughs. "Fine you? Aw, Vy, you've got to do better than that!"

"What do you mean, do better than that?"



"I mean, I know you feel funny about marrying a con and all, especially since I don't even have no high school diploma, but damn, we can work that out. Remember, mama, it's always been me and you; right from the jump, remember? You plus me, magnets and all that, remember? His eyes pleaded, his smile threatened to die.

"You want to hear something other than what I've told you, don't you?" I couldn't believe my own audacity. "You want me to say I don't want you because we're not equals, but I'm not saying that, June, I'm not."

He sat all the way up in bed. "Vy, how the hell can you still be playing ole, jive, kid games? We ain't kids no more."

"June, I'm a bull dagger, dig it? I like women!"

Disillusioned and angry, he slapped me as hard as he could, and climbed vehemently from the bed. He dressed like a man possessed, muttering and cursing as he did so. "Well," he snorted leaving, "I hope it all tastes as good as yours!"

When I got back to the dorm, my best friend had checked out, gone home. I was surprised and hurt, but what did I expect?

Ten years and four major women later, I had stationed myself 3000 California miles from Alabama. I was teaching at City College and working with a feminist consciousness raising group on the side. I was two summers into a powerful and undiminishing relationship, and I was happy.

One night, as I spoke after the discussion to a woman who had complained of a lack of sexual pleasure because her husband refused to let her, from time to time, become the aggressor in their lovemaking, the husband himself showed up.

Pot-bellied from too much beer and pork, grizzly-jawed, and darkly malcontent, I still recognized the unsmiling June. My heart leapt and I accepted how happy I was to see him. I was about to say, "June? June, is that you? What are you doing here? This is incredible!" But I didn't have time.

He strode directly to his wife, ignoring me, took her by the arm and brought her away. I heard him say. "I told you I've got to get to work on time tonight. Don't know why you up here no way; ain't nothing but a bunch of women whinning and complaining. And there's nobody to see to them complaints but some man."

"I'm learning to see to my complaints myself, June." She straightened her shoulders and jerked from his grasp. The gesture made me flash on that high school gym day, so long ago.

"This is the last time you're coming up here. You're getting beside yourself, woman. Pretty soon you'll be claiming you in love with one of these---"

Clearly insulted, she tore away from June, running out the door.

He started after her.

"June!" I called him, stopped him. "Don't you recognize me?" Even after overhearing their conversation, the joy of seeing him remained on my face.

Turning around, he took a backward step as if to slip unnoticed into the angry recollections of his mind. "Vy?"

"Yes, it's me." I smiled in spite of the sorrowful ache I felt. How he had changed.

"Vy!" He grabbed me by the waist and whipped me into the air. "Vy, it's you, baby! It's really you!"

"Please June, put me down." I looked about the lecture room for observers, but none were present. Everyone had gone. This was so much like that gym day just before the coach had come to swat June.

"Vy," He smiled all of his yesterday's joys. "Vy, Vy, Vy. You just don't know how good it is to see you! And you looking good, as good as Christmas pie, woman."

I couldn't believe him. He was not only happy to see me, but he was talking as if we were not in an altogether different time and, incredibly, a different place.

"What are you doing in California, June?" I managed to wriggle from his grasp.

"Moved here, two months ago."

"That small world business holds some water, doesn't it?"

"Same ol' Vy", he appraised. "Talking proper and sounding like a book. So you the nigger who been teaching my wife to make me fix my own lunch."

I laughed. "I'm one of the facilitators here. What we do is suggest alternatives to established roles and chores in heterosexual unions."

Not really following, he said, "yeah, I can dig it. Well, whatever, she's sho nuff serious. I ain't had no thermos of gumbo since we left Alabama." He grinned becoming old, magnetic June.

"How long have you been out here, Vy?"

"Nearly five years. Before that I was in school and I taught for a while in Georgia."

"It's been almost ten years since we last seen it each, Vy?"

"Time has flown, June."

"You married?" His left eyebrow raised noticeably.

"You might say that. I'm with a woman who has two children, so our committment can't be reckless."

"Oh," he said sourly. "You're still like that, huh?"

"Like what?" I knew I was pushing him, but his bitterness had to show itself. I couldn't front with him down that "long-lost and cherished-friend" avenue.

"How'd you put it? Funny. Yeah, are you still funny?"

"You might confuse a leopard with a cheetah, June, but neither will change its spots."

"Damn," he blew out a sigh of disgust, scratched his grizzle, and sized me up. "Sho is a waste of woman!"

"Nothing is lost in the translation, June. What's treasured by a man is not wasted by a woman." I had to say it.

"Well, look," he stepped back, almost leapt back, "I've got this here night shift to pull, but why don't you let me call you some time? We could talk about old times."

"Our old times?" I let him hear my doubts.

"The good old times," he said.

"No, I don't think so, June. I've got to stay abreast of these good new times."

He stuck his hands militantly into his pockets; he seemed to pout. Then a sneer broke his boyish veneer. "You with a lady, huh?"

"Yes."

"And you don't think it's no chance for you and me to pick up and fix up where we left off?"

"June, I'm committed. You're married."

For moments we stood looking at one another, unable to change a length of the past, unable to edit an iota of the present.

A car horn honked loudly, persisted a moment. It was his wife, grown impatient.

"How long you been with your lady?"

"Since June."

"Of last year?"

I nodded.

He made a face that attempted disapproval, but it lapsed into offhand acceptance. "You know something, Vy?" He started away.

"What?"

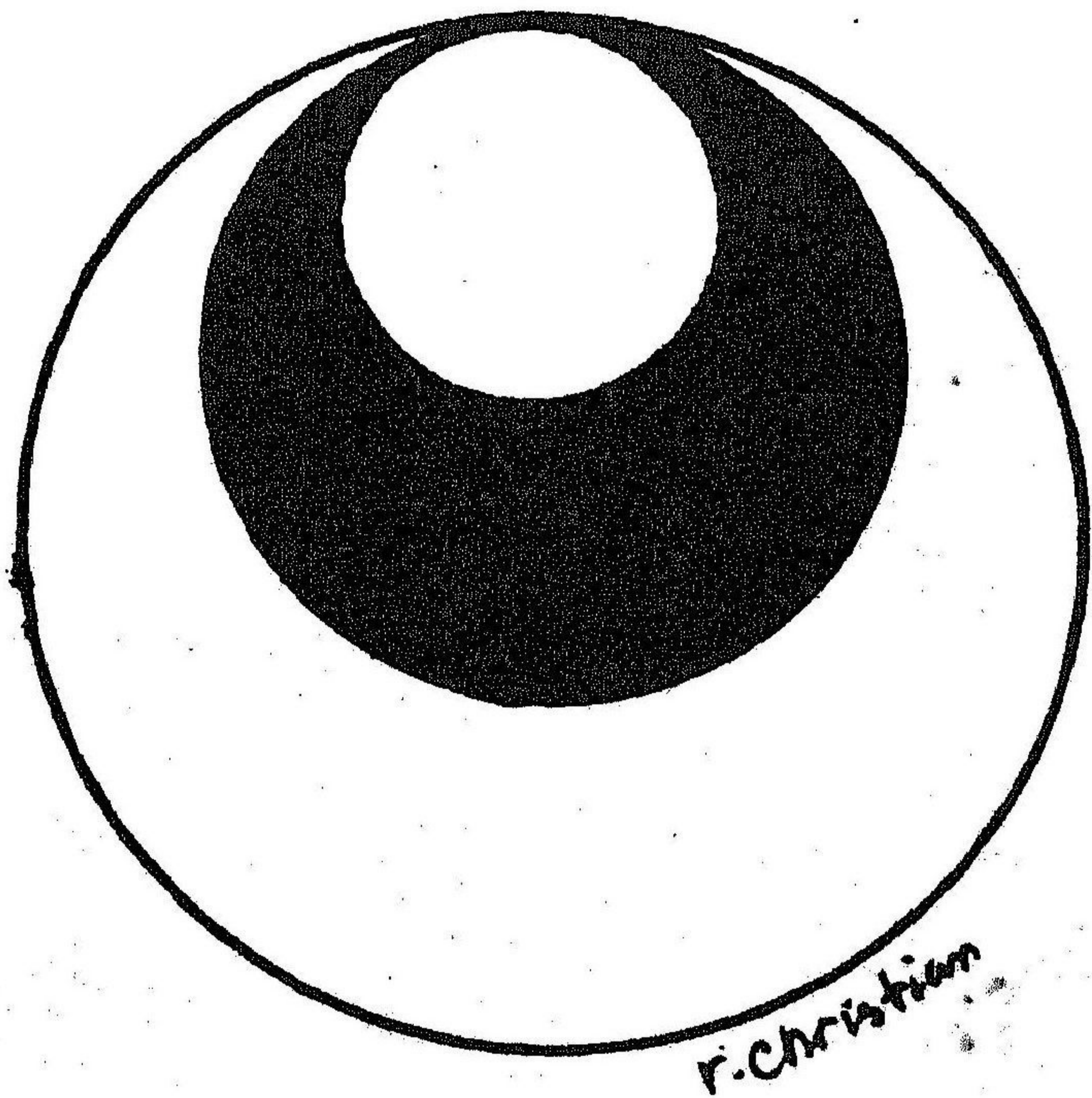
"That's funny."

I watched him go knowing he was right.

THE END

# AZALEA:

A MAGAZINE BY THIRD WORLD LESBIANS



fiction    poetry    reviews    essays  
graphics    journals  
special features

ORDER BLANK

please send only checks or  
money orders. thanks.

Published Quarterly

\$1.25 per issue

\$4.00 yearly \*

40% discount to Women's bookstores and Women's organizations  
All orders must be prepaid. Postage is paid on orders of 1 (one)  
magazine (single issue). On all other orders add 25¢ postage per book.

Quantity \_\_\_\_\_

Amount Enclosed: \$ \_\_\_\_\_

NAME \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

CITY \_\_\_\_\_

STATE \_\_\_\_\_

ZIP \_\_\_\_\_

c/o J. GIBBS    306 Lafayette Ave.    Bklyn, NY 11238

please make all checks or money orders payable to  
to: Joan Gibbs

\* Individual Subscriber\$ - If you can not afford the price  
of AZALEA, send us as much as you can.