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AZALEA:

A Magazine by Third World Lesbians



fiction • poetry • articles • reviews

graphics • journals

• special features •

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Robin Christian

Contributions (letters, poetry, prose and articles)
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Third World Lesbians interested in working on
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AZALEA is a magazine for Third World Lesbians.

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Linda Brown

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a. S. Natawa

Rashida

Prose by Linda Brown

Namesake

Diesel dyke -

daughter of the witches

and god child of the Gorgon

Medusa was your grand dame

young matriarch.

Your cousins are the sphinx and phoenix

the moon and sun,

sky and sea,

all this earth is your inheritance.

Men turn to stone

on the thought of you .

You belong to an ancient tradition

they will always call you bad

One more Wicca woman gets her mark

Butch

Donna Allegra

Why the flowers grow

a poem for Nana

There is a woman I'm coming to love like the sun
once I trusted my face to her
and found myself a flower
each day shows a petal brighter
This is love, sweet season and a garden
There is a woman I'm coming to love like the sun,
like the sky she lives in,
like the earth I come from
and from this light
I can never stop growing

Girl poem

Dannianne,
I saw the moon this morning
she was like you
an amazon blazing.
Some would say,
blood red,
she's out of season,
but horsewoman
rearing glory,
between the moon and sun,
the earth must sit in wonder.

MICHELE'S NEW HOUSE

I recognize this building
When the downstairs door shuts
Out the day: The unmended steps,
Pile of disconsolate
Furniture that clutters up the entrance-way.

I know instinctively
That something doesn't work right here--
Perhaps the plumbing, freezing in winter,
Or doors that won't shut tight;
Perhaps the gas space heater has a flaw
Where the pipe doesn't
Quite connect.

About this new house of yours
Is something I cannot put my finger on.
It shows
Through the cracks in the old linoleum,
The holes where the flakes of paint expose
The faded wallpaper of many tenants ago.

It masses like a smell
Heavy, and oppressive as the odor
Of cabbage cooking,
Catboxes, or cockroaches.

It is delineated
By the square
Of plain, unvarnished floor-boards
Where a rug was removed,
The broken-bottomed rocking-chair
You told me not to use,
The battered veteren chests and buffets
Included in the rent.

It is the sense
Of dampness always present
Or of too much heat.
It is the sense
That no one was ever proud of this home-
And that however clean you make it,
It will not become
A Nice apartment.

You ask me much too eagerly
If I like it.
I only say I like big rooms and lots of space
And windows letting in so much sun.
I do not say what I want to tell you:
To take care. Take care
For I have lived more than once
In this kind of place
And Paula died in one.

Becky Birtha

FIGURE STUDIES

I.

She sits in public places
with no regard for convention
as if she's never worn a skirt
knees apart feet flat on the floor
hand on her thigh and elbow turned
out like that
she swears and laughs loud and
makes herself safe.

II.

woman who dances alone
small body compact, controlled
her strength
contained, unspent. She
dances for herself alone
does not know
I want to come up close behind her
circle my arms open
to capture her and hold
her dance enclosed.

III.

woman all in blue
faded denim and chambray
one leg across and knee flung out
elbow leans on back of folding chair
her two hands clasped over her breast--
woman, is it your heart you hide?
I want to cover those two hands with my own.
I want to steal it away.

IV.

Patterns of liquid, fluidity
flow and stop short, abrupt:
I could spend hours across a room
watching the way you move--
could find you in any size crowd.

I want to memorize the diagram,
catch you like a camera
still-- a classic--
I want to paint portraits of you
in smudgy, soft pastels
take reels and reels of film

In any size crowd
I look at all the women.
Always, you're the one
I want to take home with me.

V.

it is very late when I
crawl into bed beside her.
she is curled in an s, her
back to me.
I can't see her but
can feel her warm
beneath my hand.
she doesn't wake but
draws my arm around her
takes my hand and
places it against her heart.

Becky Birtha

I never had a valentine before
never had anyone love me in the
deepest parts of my
winter--clear on through to spring.
And I'll take you flying kites
come spring--we'll run against the wind
and reel
out yards and yards of string.
Come summer we'll find you
a sleeping bag, too
and sleep out under stars
you've never seen
the milky way.
In fall we'll take the train
to the country again
or walk to the little pond
at night in fall we'll
return and remember
how it is to fall in love
And we'll enter winter
hand in hand
I'll take you sledding and
we'll be each other's secrets
we'll be each other's sweethearts
a year from this time again
we'll be each other's valentines.

Becky Birtha

multiple choice

- a. these feelings are enough to drive me insane. i am aching with desire for her. it has been just two days since we were together.
what is this POWER we have?
- b. "brothas" in white clothes, strolling arrogantly, confidently in the park - like men do thru the world.
we were sitting on the cool wet grass - sweet mother earth. different(wimin); black(wimin); lesbian (wimin)-
strong in another way of being about strength.

"brothas" passed by selling 'incense' - selling something or other.

usually i am bothered by them on the street. usually on the street i am alone. but, together, we are a different woman and their smiles and voices and walks are changed -
subdued, apologetic, respect-full.

what is it - this POWER that we have?

- c. i love you because you are beautiful; because you are good and gentle, because you are like me and understand, because we can open to each other like a morning flower, because you are hot, strong and sweet and are my sister and love me back.

there are still so many more ways and reasons.

what is the POWER - we have?

- d. all of the above

For Real...

you turn me on
walking down the street -
a handsome woman, brown
in tailored clothes.
you smile and look
directly
into other women's eyes.
you are
hardness,
softness,
exquisit - ness -
gentle;
my electric fantasies under
the covers.
my earnest eyed
liquid
black sisterjewel-
you and i are
dykewomen
from the land of
ancient amazons
and this planet
is just about to be ours.

Linda Brown

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butches

are wimmin - black, pink, brown, pale

flirt, gamble, read, cry, fly, make love

are wimmin - hard, soft, big, tall, little, small

smoke, write, laugh, party, fuck, scream, fight

dream, lie, get clean, die, have babies

can do the do on you

rip you off, rap to your womon, possessive

jealous, truthful, responsible, jive, lovers

happy, truthful, concerned, loving

humon - humain

Robin Christian

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they take us
and tear us apart
rip my people
limb from limb
i got told to love 'em

you know, they wouldn't give
my child a book
they gave her a number instead.
gave her a room - without mirrors -
left her all alone
but i got told to love 'em.

how they whipped her brain, goddess
they just beat up on it - hard -
my child is bleedin'
my child is screamin'
she's hurtin' - don't -
they watched her cry, watched her moan,
an' i got told to love 'em.

heard she's had it, heard she's cured
my baby's raisin' up now,
the girl is grown the woman
she's strong,
dora's ready to get up to shove 'em.

she's puttin' us back together
gatherin' up all those limbs.
my dora - woman - is set now
to do what she needs to.

ain't no more listenin' to that
got to love 'em bullshit,
all that mess is through.

Robin Christian
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it started with a good morning
and smiles

we lay there all open and ready
our pores like suc-tion cups
your body warm and moist like my cunt
after an-oh so -pleasant/earth shattering explosion
eyes soft and misty as the dew at dawn
we smile

i tenderly caress your breasts
you squeeze the cheeks gin-ger-ly
do it slow -real slow
touching you
feeling you
feeling you feeling me
tasting you
smelling you
oh what it is to be pleased
smiling

we gyrate rotate meditate
yeah and don't forget
come late
we pant
we sweat 'til we're so damn w-e-t

what's happening here?
do you know
do you sense it?
youandi -meandyou -we - us - my lover
my love
all on a voyage
voyage to out there

as we smile

Robin Christian

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SUNDAY THOUGHTS

this morning
i woke up thinking
of pecan trees
the smell of honey suckles
corn growing

lite a cigarette
eat breakfast with my mother
and observed out our window
another black family on their way to church
: dressed beautifully:
somethings never seem to change

the thoughts on my mind
are old,
unoriginal,
learned, heard-
inherited
?- my ancestors had to come over on slave-ships
pick cotton and die for their sins

what truths i know
was gathered mostly from books-
filled with contradictions
people: relationships : people
that didn't fulfill their promises
or live up to their potential

Malcolm, your words are on
the sides of burning buildings
in the minds of junkies-
i have seen them
wandering down 125 Street
cold dead in southern towns
in search of you

Black is
a question we answered
to ask
again and again

this is not just another poem
about being black by a black woman

there are no men in my life
and i am wondering-
if-
the old ways weren't easier

(better? -no)

I would have at least had company
2, 3, 4, children-
to share my life with-
husband gone:
the welfare department might have send me
a handout.

this way
there are no children and
no one seems to care
that i and alot of my sisters
are continually unemployed!

And
what is a poem?

" Yes...Yes "
everyone says they understand
' why, it's a small matter? '
the lives of Blacks
women,
blackgaywomen
have always been hard.

" Don't you know?-
Joann Little put to death
the white man
that dared to assume control
of her body."

my thoughts are old,
unoriginal
this morning i woke up thinking
of pecan trees
the smell of honey suckles
corn growing

Little Rock
Malcolm
Martin
Joann

Boston
Dade County?

Joan Gibbs

12/28/73

c'est la vie
a young Black woman died today
a bird sings

she could have been
the first in the family
to go to Med school
become a lawyer
(fighting for her people)
a poet
good if not famous
or a soul singer
the young woman at the piano
who sings the blues

a young black woman
addicted to drugs
walking the streets of New York for sell

a dog barks
whatever will be will be ? !!

he laughed
when I said it
old man
Black
almost always in the street
wine bottle in back pocket
in right hand
moving towards a mouth
made darker by the spirits
he drank
daily
" A writer?
(a woman's place is in the home)
just like your mother..."
he laughed
they laughed
not understanding the forces-
our herstory-
that gave rise to it
a writer
poet
woman loving women
me
and I laughed
reached out my hand for his bottle
" Daddy, you shouldn't drink so much...
Daddy..."
he shook his head "NO"
smiling
he drank again
" Just don't forget where you started from."
and walked away.

2 poems
by
Joan Gibbs

125th And Abomey

Head bent, walking through snow
I see you Seboulisa
printed inside the back of my head
like marks of the newly wrapped akai
that I kept my sleep fruitful in Dahomey
and I poured on the red earth in your honor
those ancient parts of me
most precious and least needed
my well-guarded past
the energy-eating secrets
I surrendered to you as libation
mother, illuminat my offering
of old victories
over men over women over my selves
who has never before dared
to whistle into the night
take my fear of being alone
like my warrior sisters
who rode in defense of your queendom
disguised and apart
give me the woman strength
of tongue in this cold season.
Half earth and time splits us apart
like struck rock.
A piece lives elegant stories
too simply put

while a dream on the edge of summer
of brown rain in nim trees
snail shells from the dooryard
of King Toffah
bring me where my blood moves
Seboulisa mother goddess with one breast
eaten away by worms of sorrow and loss
see me now
your severed daughter
laughing our name into echo
all the world shall remember.

Audre Lorde
Copyright 1977

SUNDAY AT 4 PM

Sometimes I need
you
before me
open
spread like a chalice
of flower
into which I reach
my fingers
before I drink.

Sometimes I need
to drive
through your portal
up to the chamber door
there to explode
like a bee
whirling direction
until shaken loose
drained of honey
I rest
in the after-smell of you.

Audre Lorde
copyright 1977

amazon moving

Goddess of Stars
Your Nova cape of holes
I cannot assume
Woman of Breasts
the laws of the heavens
Arch of the sky
I can not only be inspired
Awe Full Siren
that standing in Your gaze
Stone Mother
the Great Mirror Image
moving without You.

BED OF ROSES

roses coming
around
red
instead of immature
warmed by the
sun woman
spread
the day folds dewing
in roses bed
pointed
in the dew
like yes like
coming apart
roses gracefully
subtle rose
coming red

19

Three poems by Rashida

A Paradox: Happiness

We met like Winter approaches Spring
Just as the groundhog is hesitant
So was I

When allowed to happen - naturally
I was overcome with your being/beauty.
You have left me completely naked and I love it
Wanting you the way I do is like longing
to make snowmen in the sand
Very natural...
...inappropriate for the season.

spring 77

guilt

the white dyke and Black lesbian greet
"how has your life been?"
the Black lesbian responds -
"as a matter of fact, it's been very lonely."
leaving herself wide open

A monologue from the white dyke follows:
"Black women are so strong,
Black women are so oppressed!
I can't imagine experiencing triple oppression....
Who am I to say? I'm not Black!"

The Black lesbian stares, without emotion.
The white dyke responds, defensively:
"But you should not limit yourself to Black women."
The Black lesbian responds:
"I gave up men, not my culture."

fall 77

My Greatest Fantasy

Revolutionary woman friend
friend/comrade/lover
A closeness not felt
frustration, anxiety, confusion
lack of time, energy, organization

May I share my work/woman-self with you

fall 77

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Jo uncurled herself from around Maureen. She opened and closed her eyes in almost one motion. It was snowing again, and colder than yesterday. Tuesday, February mornings were always variations of this one, she thought. They had been since she could remember. The alarm clock was ticking wildly, loudly - racing toward the time when it could alarm - shattering peoples' dreams and causing their hearts to stop. Maureen had said the machine had a mind and will of its' own. She said it could actually plot and decided whether to go off on time or make you late. Maureen, jumping up, anticipated the ringing and stumbled to turn it off. She stood sleepy and barefoot in the middle of the cold room and rubbed her eyes. Jo watched her as she fumbled for her robe and slippers and made her way into the bathroom. Feeling colder and grayer than the weather outside, she slipped back under the covers, pulling the sheet up over her head.

Jo and Maureen had met at Bettye's party nearly three years ago. It was Bettye's birthday and the event went on for four days. Jo arrived at the party around midnight on a Saturday night. The rooms smelled of liquor, smoke, fresh pork and women. Voices and music flowed together - sometimes clashing. There were blue party lights- and red ones in the ceiling. The front room looked good, Jo thought. The two big velveten couches had been cleaned and brushed. Their shades of maroon mixed nicely with the pink in the flowers of the wallpaper. Someone had taken great pains to do the floors and the oak shown beautifully. Bettye, as usual, was the life of the party, dressed to the hilt, sporting gems and silk. She was high enough for three people - simultaneously singing along with Billie on the record player and trying to get some woman to come and dance with her. Jo made her way through the dancing bodies. She went up behind Bettye, turned her around and kissed her mouth.

"HAPPY BIRTHDAY, DARLIN'," Jo said.

Bettye whooped and hollered and flung herself into Jo's arms.

"O, DADDY!" she roared, "I JUST KNEW YOU WAS COMIN! THAT BOX IN YOUR ARMS FOR ME?"

Jo nodded affirmatively.

"THAT'S SWEET! I TOLD DALY YOU WOULDN'T FORGET ME!"

She took the gift and sat it on the blue, glass-topped coffeetable with some others.

Daly was Bettye's lover. The affair was still a short one. They had only known each other, for two months. This, in fact, was alot longer than many. Jo was, at one time, one of Bettye's lovers but unlike most, had come away from the affair with genuine feelings of friendship and love that goes with sharing those feelings. Bettye was a woamn to respect, even if you couldn't bring yourself to like her. She had worked hard most of her life to acquire what she had

and all of it was hers fair and square (she liked to say). In reality, Bettye had done all sorts of things and conducted "business" ventures that now allowed her to live with a good amount of self-determination in her society. They, she and Jo, had become close some years ago; confidants, plotters, sometimes partners, and loving friends.

"GO ON OVER TO THE BAR AND FIX YOURSELF A DRINK, HONEY," Bettye urged Jo. "DALY BOUGHT ME SOME 150 PROOF RUM FROM ONE OF THEM ISLANDS AND I GOT J & B AND I.W. HARPER - ALL THE THINGS YOU LIKE. I'LL SEE YOU LATER - SOON AS I GET MY DANCE."

She smiled at the woman whose hand she had taken again, trying to persuade her to dance.

Jo headed in the direction of the makeshift kitchen table bar, greeting people she knew - exchanging handshakes and kisses and slapping five. She stuck her hand out to Daly, a shy woman of about 35 with deep chocolate skin as black, surely, as Africa, and with piercing eyes. Daly's hair was close cropped - slicked back with "Royal Crown" - a part on the left side. She had a ring on almost every finger. It was hard to tell what to feel for Daly, but Jo guessed she felt some liking for her. She momentarily pictured some of Bettye's past lovers and tossed events around in her mind, deciding that Daly might be good for her. It had been Daly's idea to have this birthday party and it was a gesture that, indeed, excited Bettye.

"NOBODY'S EVER GIVEN ME A BIRTHDAY PARTY BEFORE, JO," she had said in frenzied excitement over the phone, "NOT EVEN MY MAMA WHEN I WAS A LITTLE BABY."

Jo felt that Daly cared for Bettye and this made her decide to try to be a friend to the woman. As she surveyed Daly's appearance, she guessed that the party was somewhat of a big event for her, too. She had on red checkered slacks and a bright red sport coat. She was serving drinks and smiling at everyone.

"HEY, JO, HOW YOU DOIN'? I'M GLAD YOU COULD MAKE IT," Daly greeted her.

"YOU KNOW I COULDN'T LIVE IT DOWN IF I HAD MISSED THIS AFFAIR," Jo teased.

The two women stood making small talk, Jo sampling some of the 150 proof rum and nodding her approval to Daly.

The party flourished.

Maureen had come with a few girlfriends. She was a reluctant companion. After she'd arrived at Bettye's house and met everyone - gotten into the swing of things - she was glad she did come. The people were warm and friendly. Maureen watched Jo enter the room out of the corner of her eye. Jo really liked the way she looked that night. She was careful to make movements that showed off her body lines and angles under her new blue suit. She'd just had her hair cut that afternoon and it felt good - like a tight little skull cap. Jo liked the way it brought out her face. Maureen thought her interesting looking and wondered who she was and what she did other than attend parties. She would sneak looks at Jo behind her back and discovered that Jo was doing the same.

She was almost completely taken in by Maureen's black eyes. Maureen, from time to time, would look up, brush her coal-colored hair off her face, rearrange the green dress over her knees and smile. She'd pucker her full, red lips a little and then slowly let them spread into a gentle smile. They played their game for quite awhile until Jo came over and asked Maureen to dance.

"WOULD YOU LIKE TO DANCE? IS IT OK?," Jo teased.

"I WOULD LIKE TO VERY MUCH," wass Maureen's reply.

And they had danced and danced - almost every dance since that moment.

"I THOUGHT YOU WAS WITH SOMEBODY AND THAT THEY WAS COMIN' BACK ANY MINUTE TO PUNCH ME, MAUREEN," Jo would tell her later. Maureen only said that she'd been alone all evening and that there was no one for her to be with, anyway.

Maureen's friends were ready to leave and she went up to Jo and said goodnight. Jo asked if she could

"... call you sometimes, maybe to go dancing?"

and MAureen said that would certainly be nice. She scribbled her phone number on a birthday napkin and handed it to Jo. Then she smiled for a fleeting second and scooted out the door. Jo stuffed the napkin into her back pocket and crossed to the other side of the room. She started a conversation with a friend she hadn't seen for a while. It was about six am when she decided she couldn't party anymore. After a futile attempt to find either Bettye or Daly among the crowd of people still in the apartment, Jo left, taking a cab straight home and collapsing into bed.

Light rain had begun to fall.

linda brown

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

DONNA ALLEGRA, a writer, works at WBAI in New York City. She is a member of Jemima Writers' Collective.

BECKY BIRTHA, a poet, lives in Philadelphia. Becky has had her poems published in Womansmith, Women's Voices and Hanging Loose.

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JOAN GIBBS, a writer, lives in New York City. Joan works at Liberation News Service and has had some of her poems published in The Lesbian Feminist and Focus.

AUDRE LORDE, a poet, has been published widely. She has published several books of poetry, one of which is Coal.

a. S. NATAWA, a poet, lives in Madison, Wisconsin. She is a part of Written Woman Press.

An Introduction to AZALEA

AZALEA comes at a time when we as Lesbian "women of color" must make space for defining ourselves and sharing thoughts with each other. It provides a concrete place for us to explore our own concepts.

We celebrate ourselves as Third World Lesbians with this premiere issue. It reaffirms our creative and spiritual energies.

We need your support. Please share your work with us. Any contribution\$ or time (typing, printing, collating, proofreading, etc...) you give is greatly needed and appreciated.

In the next issue of AZALEA (spring 1978), we hope to include reviews.

A statement of the magazine's goals will be published in a future issue of AZALEA.

Robin Christian
for the staff of AZALEA

