

CHRONICLES I  
Prose Poems  
by  
Anita Cornwell

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First Printing

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1986

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TO MAMA  
Who always believed

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About the author: Anita Cornwell was born in South Carolina and educated in Pennsylvania. A professional writer for more than twenty years, her work has appeared in Essence magazine, Negro Digest, Liberator, Phylon, The Feminist Review, Black Maria, Asalee, Motherroot Journal, and Sinister Wisdom among other publications. Her first book, a collection of essays, was published by Naiad Press in 1983. This is her second chapbook of prose poems. Several years ago, Anita Cornwell also turned to playwrighting and is a member of the Dramatists Guild.

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TO MAMA

Who always believed

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I. FIRST LOVE AND OTHER TRAUMAS

1

Your love was not just another lifeline. It was a tempestuous joy that I yearned to grapple with each time you came my way. True, you were a wild leopard, stalking the earth with flaming heart, your eyes piercing my shallow defences,

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11

"Do not grieve for me," your eyes pleaded each time we met. Still, even I, so wrapped in fearful ecstasy, felt the longing of your lacerated dreams. How dare they do this to you? I pondered each time your gallant smile faltered, and the light left your eyes, plunging my world into nothingness. Then your laughter would come, making the earth bright again, if only for a fleeting hour.

## I. FIRST LOVE AND OTHER TRAUMAS

### i

Your love was not just another lifeline. It was a tenuous joy that I yearned to grapple with each time you came my way. True, you were a wild leopard, stalking the earth with flaming heart, your eyes piercing my shallow defences, and night was never long enough to contain us--the wandering wounded. But that was eons ago, when my life was cresting like angry waves, and your spirit was hitched to the howling winds of winter.

### ii

"Do not grieve for me," your eyes pleaded each time we met. Still, even I, so wrapped in fearful ecstasy, felt the longing of your lacerated dreams. How dare they do this to you? I pondered each time your gallant smile faltered, and the light left your eyes, plunging my world into nothingness. Then your laughter would come, making the earth bright again, if only for a fleeting hour.

## iii

Finally, the floods came--a wild, rushing madness that left few survivors crawling on this ravished shore. I am one of those, stranded but alive. Although I cannot fill the space left by those like you, I straggle along with your fallen symbol, holding tight until another generation comes to claim it. Perhaps, somehow, they will not let the matted blood on this battered torch quench their lusty zeal for justice.

## iv

What happens when an entire culture loses its cool; when Law & Order polarizes the land; when Mr. Law tries to restore ole Marse's Order with Mrs. Charley as Section Boss? When Legal Demons prowled the byways, where did you spend your days? Did you huddle barricaded in a back alley street? Or did you flee to the woods to watch the ravaged trees lift their stunted arms to pray? Anyway, I could not find you. I searched every avenue not held by the Occupation. Then I began to inquire about you. The armed forces laughed, touching their rusty bayonets. "You wasting your time, gull. Do you think we care about the likes of her?"

v

The ghastly calm that settled within my world when you vanished stretched like rubber chains. In the beginning, I thought the earth had merely turned another of its many corners. Although it slanted downward more than usual, how could the wandering wounded notice? Then came the icy rumors, that I discounted daily. How could you, the finest and the brightest, not survive?

holding the threads together. We can never survive without these connective tissues." vi laughter soared across

"Ah yes, she has finally sunk from view," the magpies chortled, their hearts flooded with joy. "It is not so!" I shouted. But they knew. You cannot drown disaster with a banging of drums. It worked for a few seasons, however--the lull before the thunder. But storm or no storm, I knew better than to lie down in darkness. "Run! Run toward the setting sun!" the clamoring voices commanded. And I leaped from the burning wreckage and began my race with the world.

3

"Imbecile! Why persist in your search when the world wallows in ruins?" taunted the magpie. Then her fingers poked me like daggers. "Do you believe they're going to give you brownie points for your stupid idealism?" I shook my head. "I am a pragmatist. I am holding the threads together. We can never survive without these connective tissues." Her laughter zoomed across the wasteland. "You are indeed an utter fool. Here, have a joint. Don't be a jug head. Live while the daylight is saving time!"

the sky--a  
band of buzzards seeking the denatured remains  
of a demolished nation.

## viii

Finally, I crawled from my caustic refuge and took to the highways again. They had become silent, glossy--like well-fed alley rats. "Peaceful, aren't they?" gloated the magpie. "Yes. Peaceful and treacherous like vin-covered cottages nestled in a bed of neutron bombs," I replied. The magpie snarled. "So what? Do you really care if they blow up the world? What do you have to lose?" Good question, I realize. I am not dissuaded from my searches, however. Then the Occupation Forces dropped from the sky--a band of buzzards seeking the denatured remains of a demolished nation.

## II. SECOND COMING ix

"Brooding is the absolute pits," the magpie said. "Don't you know change is inevitable?" Words froze in my head. What manner of delusion was this? Was it not a tactic of our eternal foe to confuse and conquer? Then the magpie spoke again. "We all have our watermarks, our high points, low ebbs, and medium plateaus by which to gauge our march along the steps of Time," she rambled in her soothsayer's voice. "What is your watershed?" she finally inquired. The frozen words locked in my brain refused to trickle. Perhaps it was just as well. How could such a cynic understand that for me, the universe became a disjointed spoke when you stepped into the abyss? *ring Fathers.*



## II. SECOND COMING

11

i

During the days that followed, her eyes were  
The face of war wears a thousand disguises.  
Hers was sunny and soft, like a kiss under  
palm trees at high noon. Still, I sensed her  
fear of the upcoming night that had been my  
refuge since the practitioners of matricide  
had turned my world around. "Communion is not  
my thing. I only dance when I control the boys  
in the band," she declared. "Ah, but that is  
not music you hear. That is Time splintering  
again," I told her. Her laughter came, as I  
had expected. But I could not see her eyes as  
darkness had descended for the Festival of the  
Floundering Fathers.

ii

During the days that followed, her eyes were like the eyes of Salome who danced with the gory head of a Fallen Father cradled against her bosom. Then, still playing with Life like a child toying with matches, she edged into the raging current with me. "I do not worry about tomorrow. I live and let the world be damned!" she declared. Ah, at last, I thought, a woman determined to etch her vision upon the tepid waters of Time.

hidesaway,  
oblivious to the thunders of the Floundering  
Fathers. "They can never touch us," Salome  
boasted. "Haven't you been walking between  
the crevices of Time for a decade?" Ah, yes!  
I had developed that Clair. But not when it  
came time to Two Step, however.

iv

"Stop fretting about the Floundering Fathers,"

Salome finally demanded. "They only have the

iii

courage of despots. When the going gets tough,

"This is not a game!" the Fearful Fathers  
warned. "We do not tolerate gaiety in the  
hearts of heretics like you. You were born  
to endure the indignities of mankind. We  
always decimate those who shrink their des-  
ignated destinies!" So what did we do when  
the Dancing Dupes capered in the squares of  
Iniquity? We frolicked in our hideaway,  
oblivious to the thunders of the Floundering  
Fathers. "They can never touch us," Salome  
boasted. "Haven't you been walking between  
the crevices of Time for a decade?" Ah, yes!  
I had developed that flair. But not when it  
came time to Two Step, however.

## iv

"Stop fretting about the Floundering Fathers," Salome finally demanded. "They only have the courage of despots. When the going gets tough, they retreat into platitudes." Alas, what a fine theory; too bad it had never been tested in the airless vaults of the Keepers of Good House. Then she called to me as the cannons roared like Satan's thunder, "Are you ready to do battle?" "I am here, ready or not," I said. Then we plunged ahead, two Dancing Daughters, undaunted by the blinding face of Total War.

not a sense of nobility that goaded me now. It was the flame from an inner fury. And when I turned toward the Dancing Dupes once more, I saw that my fury had incinerated them. Oh, but they were not the target I sought. Why would they shield their Ex-10utioners?

## III. BORDO MANSIONS

v

Really, being an outcast in a land where chicanery is king is no big deal. Besides, one knows that somewhere, waltzing between the cracks of Time, a few other Emancipated Sisters lurk. "But just try finding them in your hour of need. They are the Missing Link. It is easier to locate the Lost Chord than to hook up with your timid Sisters," the Dancing Dupes taunted. But, as the magpie had asked a decade ago, what did I have to lose? Besides, it was not a sense of nobility that goaded me now. It was the flame from an inner fury. And when I turned toward the Dancing Dupes once more, I saw that my fury had incinerated them. Oh, but they were not the target I sought. Why would they shield their Executioners?



## III. SORDID MANSIONS

"Enough is enough!" Salome finally shouted, and I  
turned and saw her i

The stakes have risen now. Bounty Hunters  
have joined the Occupation Forces. "Bring  
them in! Dead or Alive!" the Floundering  
Fathers proclaim over their conniving  
broadcasting systems. Absurdities by the  
dozen! Don't those pompous phallic wor-  
shippers know the wandering wounded never  
worry about perks or other fringes? Dig the  
smiling Dupes in their royal suites con-  
structing Bombs for Tomorrow. Many bloated  
mansions litter thy Father's Kingdom. Still,  
I will not be moved. I am like the sturdy  
trees planted by the sacred waters in our  
Mother's Paradise.

ii

"Enough is enough!" Salome finally shouted, and I turned and saw her dancing in the acid rains emanating from the rotted mansions of the Floundering Fathers. "If you want to flee, so be it. I cannot work magic. I can never assure you a quiet corner to crawl into when the wrecking crews begin their joyful tasks," I told her. "I am not like you," she retorted. "I cannot continue to live in the midst of chaos. I need the comforts of my Father's mansion to feel like a woman," she confessed then glided into the swirling stream.

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iii

"What will you do now?" the festive crowd inquired. "You have watched two of your beloveds devoured by our courtly Fathers of Righteousness. Now won't you join our perpetual sermading of the Shiny Serpents? It is a tribute all must pay to our Patriarchal Padres." I knew it was useless to challenge such foolishness, but I gave it a try anyway. "Why don't we join with our Underground Sisters? We have the numbers. We can overthrow the Fathers and their Slippery Sons." The crowd chortled with glee. "Madness has warped your mind. Here, let us annoint you with holy spirits from the temple of Righteousness. Then never again will you contemplate such rabid treason. Come! Come! Come dance with us," the beguiling voices chanted as I stood transfixed by the awesome Power of Iniquity.

## IV. IN PRAISE OF THE FOREMOTHERS

iv

Suddenly, the fury raging within overcame me, and I lashed out at the Dancing Dupes. "Fools! How dare you try to suck me into your cesspool?" Their dancing stopped as they stared at me, their vacant eyes sagging like rotting mansions. Then they started to spiel their party-line. "You will never find solace anywhere. We are your only hope. Come! Come! Come! We will make you a Personage. You will be our link to the Floundering Fathers!" That tempted me. Could I get close enough to demolish those Deadly Fathers? Alas! The Simpering Saps spotted the ray of hope flickering within me. "The Fathers do not reside in earthly mansions," they related. "The Sons run the show down here, and they cannot be overcome! The Sons are everywhere! The Sons are everywhere! The Sons are everywhere!" They chanted then began their Dance of Death.



## IV. IN PRAISE OF THE FOREMOTHERS

i

Finally, Salome surfaced again. "I thought you were off living in patriarchal splendor," I said as she slowly approached my open arms. "How have you been?" she inquired instead of responding to my implied question. "Oh, I am still searching the unknown waters for salvation," I replied. Then her laughter erupted. "The Battle of the Universe is about to begin. Our Sisters have united. They will overthrow the Frantic Fathers!" she declared, but I was not convinced. "You will never get me to let my guard down. The Floundering Fathers have corrupted your total being," I accused. She merely smiled. "Come with me, and you will see," she whispered. But I was no fool. I knew what happened when one has lived with Serpents. Then I heard the banging of drums and retreated to my underground hideaway.

iii

Down through the valleys with the shadow of  
Death lapping at our heels, we scampered.

ii

Bathed in the plaintive strains from the Mother  
Goose Suite, we fretted the night away. When the  
merciless dawn finally entered our shaky para-  
dise, we were like wilted morning glories direct  
from Hiroshima's hell. "You are insane to risk  
your life like this," she declared, shielding her  
Salome's eyes with a palsied hand. Her words had  
the authentic ring of doom that I had come to know  
so well. Then a wan smile edged onto her face,  
and once again we heard the faint thumping of drums  
echoing down through the corridors of Time.

"Believe the things I say?" she demanded. When I  
did not reply, she yanked my sleeve and asked,  
"Are you speechless?" "Yes," I replied, yet that  
was not entirely correct. I was busy watching the  
rain bearing down the side of the mountain. "Dam-  
nit!" Salome screamed when the hailstones began  
pelted our unprotected heads. "I must have waved  
the bleeping wand too damn hard!" she exclaimed  
as we dashed toward the wilderness that I had  
sought so long to escape.

18

iii

Down through the valleys with the shadow of Death lapping at our heels, we scampered. Finally, Salome stopped and said to me, "We really have nothing to fear. I have a magic wand. See!" Her voice floated up against the blank mountain side as I stared at the stick in her hand. "That is nothing but a dead twig," I said. "No. It is a magic wand. Look! I wave it, and the sun will cease to shine," she boasted, shaking the twig at the shimmering sky. Then the sun slide behind a dark ominous cloud, and her laughter floated up against the mountain walls. "What did I tell you? Now will you believe the things I say?" she demanded. When I did not reply, she yanked my sleeve and asked, "Are you speechless?" "Yes," I replied, yet that was not entirely correct. I was busy watching the rain tearing down the side of the mountain. "Damn it!" Salome screamed when the hailstones began pelting our unprotected heads. "I must have waved the bleeping wand too damn hard!" she exclaimed as we dashed toward the wilderness that I had sought so long to escape.

iv

We found refuge with a band of other outcasts.

"I am going around in circles!" I protested.

"I should have stayed on the mountain. At least I could see the enemy's terrain and watch them plan their dirty tricks!" Salome's eyes grew dark with scorn. "You were up there all alone. What fun was that?" she demanded. "Fun!" I exclaimed. Didn't she realize we were in the midst of a deadly war? When had fun spared anyone from the guillotine? "See, you can't even answer," she chided. "You're crazy if you want to be alone. Me, I'm the last of the Red-hot Mama's! I'm gonna turn the town upside down. Tonight!"

19



## V. REMEMBRANCE OF SISTER-LOVE

1

Memory gathers in layers like bundles of old yellowed newspapers. Yet, when I try to recapture the portentous time of that ignoble period, only the Baby Bandit's voice, with its unsteady gait, swims into consciousness. Then I recall her vain efforts to ward off the stately steps of Time carrying its marked deck on that enticing silver platter. Her laughter floats down the long corridors, stopping Time in its track, for a second. "Ah, ha!" she cries, her eyes bright with victory. "See, even Death steps aside when I joy-ride through the night." Then she holds out her hand and says, "Don't be a pussy-foot. Shed your shackles! Come dance with me...!"

iii

"When the roll is called up Yonder, will you  
be there?" the happy Sisters sang. Their long  
choir robes shook with ii muted joy as they salut-

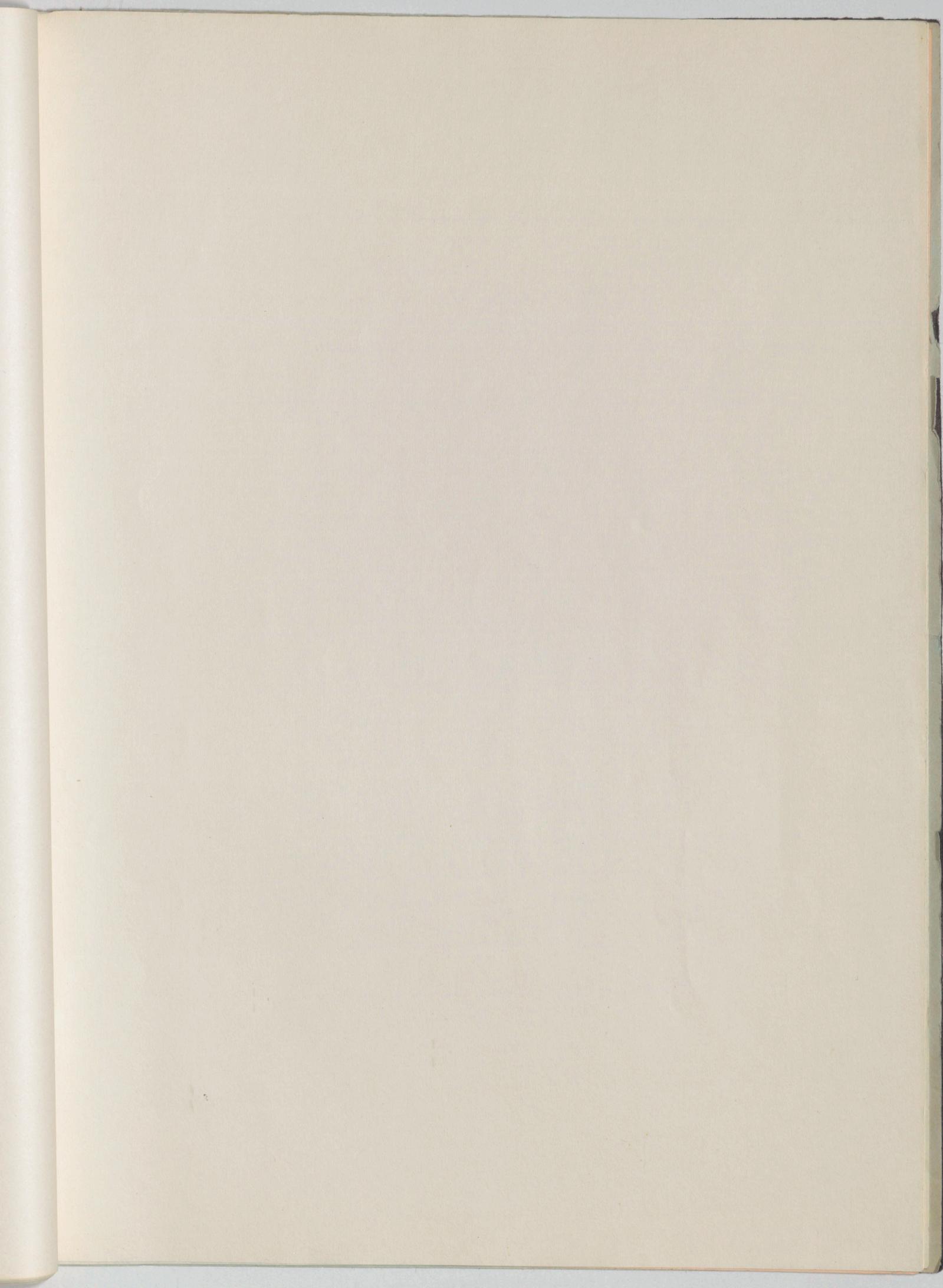
ed our departed Baby Bandit. "She was so young,"  
She thrived on chaos, a Baby Bandit holding  
demons at bay with toy pistols. "They will  
find you out one day," I warned. "Why don't  
you take more caution?" She was astounded.  
"Those ponderous pricks! They know nothing  
worth putting on the head of a pin!" I star-  
ed at her. "Are you mad? Or are you scheming  
with those Floundering Fathers who would  
rather maim than think?" That ticked the old  
girl off. "I am involved with me! What do I  
care about their insipid plots?" she shouted.  
Finally, I took her hand, and we started up  
the treacherous side of the mountain once  
again.

22

## iii

"When the roll is called Up Yonder, will you be there?" the happy Sisters sang. Their long choir robes shook with muted joy as they saluted our departed Baby Bandit. "She was so young," a voice murmured while I sat blotting out the morning sun that once danced across your restless brow. "Is it true that she tried to shoot the Heavenly Father when he threw out the first baseball?" the murmuring/<sup>voice</sup>inquired. Suddenly, rage pulled me from that tainted pew, and I shouted at the Singing Sisters. "Shut up, you Brainwashed Bunnies! Get up from your aching knees and stomp your Executioners back to the Stone Age!" The Congregation went into shock. Then I raced toward the bearded deacons, sitting in a row like puppet-devils. "As for you, you hypocritical bastards, have a taste of glory!" I suggested as I sailed a dozen hymn books at their shining skulls. Suddenly, I heard your laughter, ringing gaily in my head. Then I ran out of the blighted temple to embrace the sun at high noon.





# WOMEN'S POEMS



# TELL-A-WOMAN

Vol. VII No. 11

PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA

DECEMBER

## FALSE PROMISES NOS ENGANARON

Political theater by San Francisco Mime Troupe  
Presented by the People's Fund, Friday, Dec. 1,  
8:30 p.m. at the International House, 37th and  
Chestnut. \$5 General, \$7 Reserved, \$10 Patron.  
Info: L03-0636

### Read it Out There

I generally rely on coffee and some good reading in a local cafeteria to help prepare me for the usual day of work ahead. That morning, in the Chock-full-of-Nuts, it was the Philadelphia Gay News. The Man in the Grey Suit who Always follows me, sits near me, glares at me and demands conversation from me was there; on cue. With his dull grey tongue he tells me about his little life and wants me to be stimulated. But that morning it was different: he just glared. What luck! He's finally letting me alone! Walking to the cash register, smiling towards what was promising to be a great day, I felt the hand come down on my arm. The arm spoke, "And you, you could be such a nice girl. A teacher or something. Why do you do it?" I looked behind my shoulder and down at my closed blouse. Do what? As he backed away I realized he was still looking at the copy of the Gay News I held in my hand. And, unfortunately, I realized what he meant to say. I had just gotten a gratuitous sampling of the risks involved and therefore the courage required for those who are visibly gay in this society. As a woman rejecting his dribble it would be, though admittedly naughty, permissible this morning. After all, some man somewhere "has me". But if that woman were gay the rejection would just not be allowed: not only doesn't she want him - or any man - she doesn't need him, either. That can't happen. So, the reprimand.

cont'd...

