

Ian Janis "At Seventeen"

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I learned the truth at seventeen that love was meant for
beauty queens
And high school girls with clear-skinned smiles who
married young and
then
retired.
The valentines I never knew, the Friday night charades
of youth
Were spent on one more beautiful. At seventeen I
learned the truth.
And those of us with ravaged faces, lacking in the
social graces,
Desperately remained at home, inventing lovers on the
phone
Who called to say, "Come dance with me," and
murmured vague
obscenities.
It isn't all it seems at seventeen.
A brown-eyed girl in hand-me-downs whose name I
never could
pronounce
Said, "Pity, please, the ones who serve; they only get
what they deserve.
The rich related hometown queen marries into what
she needs.
A guarantee of company and haven for the elderly."

Remember those who win the game lose the love they
sought to gain.
In debentures of quality and dubious integrity.
Their small-town eyes will gape at you in dull surprise
when payment
due
Exceeds accounts received at seventeen.
To those of us who know the pain of valentines that
never came,
And those whose names were never called when
choosing sides for
basketball.
It was long ago and far away; the world was younger
than today
And dreams were all they gave for free to ugly

duckling girls like me.
We all play the game and when we dare to cheat
ourselves at solitaire.
Inventing lovers on the phone, repenting other lives
unknown
That call and say, "Come dance with me," and murmur
vague obscenities
At ugly girls like me at seventeen.

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