At Seventeen

Janis Ian

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 retiredThe valentines I never knew
The Friday night charades of youth
Were spent on one more beautiful
At seventeen I learned the truthAnd those of us with ravaged faces
Lacking in the social graces
Desperately remained at home
Inventing lovers on the phoneWho called to say, "Come dance with me"
And murmured vague obscenities
It isn't all it seems at seventeenA brown-eyed girl in hand-me-downs
Whose name I never could pronounce
Said, "Pity, please, the ones who serve
'Cause they only get what they deserve"And the rich relationed hometown queen
Marries into what she needs
With a guarantee of company
And haven for the elderlySo remember those who win the game
Lose the love they sought to gain
In debentures of quality and dubious integrityTheir small town eyes will gape at you
In dull surprise when payment due
Exceeds accounts received at seventeenTo those of us who knew the pain
Of valentines that never came
And those whose names were never called
When choosing sides for basketballIt was long ago and far away
The world was younger than today
When dreams were all they gave for free
To ugly duckling girls like meWe all play the game and when we dare
To cheat ourselves at solitaire
Inventing lovers on the phone
Repenting other lives unknownThey call and say, "Come dance with me"
And murmur vague obscenities
At ugly girls like me at seventeen

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