

# At Seventeen

## Chantal Chamberland

I leaned 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  
'Cause they only get what they deserve"  
And the rich related hometown queen  
Marries into what she needs  
With a guarantee of company  
And haven for the elderly

So 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 knew 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  
When 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  
They call and say, "Come on, dance with me"  
And murmur vague obscenities  
At ugly girls like me at seventeen

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