

A 4x4 grid of 16 images showing a person's neck and shoulder area. The images alternate between a red background and a black background. In each image, the person is wearing a thin black strap with a small clip. The strap is positioned around the neck, and the clip is visible on the side of the neck. The person's hair is dark and appears to be pulled back. The overall composition is a repeating pattern of the same subject in two different color schemes.

CARNIVAL

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"[...]pretending you're unseen, pretending you have a life of your own, that you can wash your feet and comb your hair unconscious of the ever-present watcher peering through the keyhole, peering through the keyhole in your own head, if nowhere else. You are a woman with a man inside watching a woman. You are your own voyeur."

– Margaret Atwood, *The Robber Bride*

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ARTWORK

Public Domain, from The British Library's collections (cover excluded)



De ugifte Frøkeners Badehytte.

If I Am a Pharaoh

I chose a spot next to my parents
and asked to build a pyramid.
There will need to be room enough for my car, I said.
I've almost paid it off, I said.

My film has been developed and dated
and sorted into boxes by Phase.
Phase 1: Learn how to swallow.
Phase 12: Learn how to swallow more.

I've had busts cast of my crushes.
There is a portrait gallery of my friends.
I have the end of every novel I've read
torn out and conquered and stapled to my bed.

My financial records framed,
my dream job checklist dreamed,
every sob I've heaved and idle alternate conceived—
catalogued—for the supposed progeny to read.

I am a library now.
I am catacombs
for my own wandering, youth-stuck ghosts
still bickering about whose voice can be trusted,

still shushing to catch the top breeze gusting
over my grass-grown cheeks of tomb:
*what if the love is all that remains
to bind these illegible tomes?*

Kathryn Schuyler

untitled

The evening started as plainly as most
Days—a drive along unfamiliar streets,
Unemployed acquaintances along the way
Making excuses for all those years ago.

A smooth sales manager with a lilting
Swagger, a shy school-boy who still
Couldn't find the words I wanted to hear,
But who could?

I hadn't taken the time to remember my
Lunch, too far away by dinner to go back.
Dressed in a bed-sheet gown, I walked,
Brocade napkins folded around to hide

My tits, avocado and tomatoes tucked
Into the pleats, until I found a drive-through.
But when I got back, the others had
Finished eating and I had forgotten my

Food again. Back and forth and so many
Familiar faces—a brick-layer who wanted
To give me grass in exchange for ass, but we,
It had grown, the grass—and the ass.

Liz Fox

Passing by a storefront, forearm-tall Baste statues in the window

"I'm dating a French girl," my friend says.

"Really? Where'd you meet her?"

"At a coffee shop."

I asked where she grew up.

"Sherman Oaks."

"Oh, so her parents are French?"

"Her name is Charmaine!"

I didn't care enough to roll my eyes.

Everyone's always exotic in LA.

In Heat

My boyfriend said he couldn't make love to me
because of the heat.

I think it was because he knew he could have me
any time he wanted.

Instead, we lay around like sea lions,
his futon a sorry excuse for a rock jutting
out of the water.

Nadia Davi

Lovely

"You were perfectly lovely"
He would say about me
Not wanting to commit to anything
Or be quoted later, on topic.
"It was a beautiful respite
That being with you,
On your couch, on your bed,
In your arms.
But I must go home.
My wife is expecting me and I have emails
To answer..."
etc,
and
etc.

Jeri Thompson

Leaving

Since I heard about it, I've been talking to myself,
trying to explain why she left a marriage
of thirty years, a husband I knew as long.
I'd taken them for granted, people who had settled in.
Without warning, or none we noticed, she left a note.
She left a note and flew to another continent
with a change of clothes. Their marriage contained
contrasting temperaments, so stronger, we surmised.
If taking for granted was our case, we're now disabused.
If God is the inexplicable, we're believers now.

I think of the aged Tolstoy who fled his wife,
or the wife in a Bergman film, who tells the camera
all her life she'd not been loved.
We look to find the fault in split rock.
Had she entered the breathing shade of the poet
to whose coastal shrine she was a pilgrim?
Was she invited into someone's churning dance?
She'd seemed averse to romance of any kind.
She summed her marriage up and found it wanting.
Something took to pieces what she and he had made.

What they'd given each other amounted to children
who were grown up now, and still were hers.
The business they'd started went on; he'd buy her share.
She could follow a choice of the friends they'd made.
Where they'd travelled she would not retrace
but go where her steps took her in her own time.
What was their compact had only aspired to permanence.
It seems to her what she does now does him a favour
permitting him to find someone more suitable.
To seize the moment abolishes all foregoing.

Fraser Sutherland

Artists

My friend's girlfriend, she
carved in Latin
with a razor blade
on her stomach:
"What doesn't kill me."

He told me she had
come downstairs and said,
Take a picture,
so he did.

They're both artists,
an excuse to be morbid, I suppose.

Why didn't she just get a tattoo?
I asked.

Elegy for Victoria

The train tracks underneath the 91 Freeway
left her “wishing for more” (whatever that means).

I didn’t go with the group to investigate.
They said that most of her remains
had been cleaned off the surroundings,
though they had found little bits of her teeth.

I wished for so long that I had went
with them, but the sight of her broken teeth
would have failed to stir my memory.

I was at her funeral. I thought it wasn’t fitting
for a girl only a week away from turning eighteen,
with the Hail Marys and Our Fathers and all.

She liked her clothes black, loved tattoos,
adored alcohol and the taste of smoke.

Her boyfriend (I think he must have been)
sat at the altar in front of her gummy bear coffin
with a guitar on his lap, crying out the lyrics
to a song he wrote about his “favorite girl.”

When the eulogy was over, her boyfriend
left with some other girl, and there was no
sadness in his eyes—only a mundane longing
for a numb she could no longer bring.

Mikey Bachman

Class Reunion

A gaggle of girls hung around like prom dresses
on sale, waiting to see just how much
weight I had gained. I kept myself
hidden well until I won a raffle, which
I couldn't claim. I wondered if the twins
still worked at the department store. People
change their names and faces
but we still know who they are.

The morning after, I was wearing panties but no
pants and all the girls were going
to breakfast, but I wanted to go with my date—
It had ended without a kiss the night before.
We had been at a beach with my old
roommate and her husband who had treated her
badly when I knew her. But that
was a long time ago. Now, he was snowboarding
in the sand. My friends were my friends.

A flutiphone with a reed. I replaced it. It was
old and crumbling, but the dream changed
before I could play.

Beauty Queen Not Effaced

My figure is of the Italian Renaissance
but in these days of the cloned future
the farmers have built me a sty.

I am not defeated by the naysayers
for I have a few vessels of courage
and they throb of dissention.

My face is not airbrushed.
It is many-nationed with its stripes
and bombed with its pink explosions.

America tries to cover me with the afghan
but I've been kicking since the womb
and my high heel is for combat only.

Amanda Tumminaro

Homage

Steep climb to peak along icy creek,
I round a bend, glimpse through trees

line of women, ridge overhead,
blouses, shorts, panties off.

They face the summit, arms spread,
heads back, eyes closed, breasts taut,

pointed upslope. In wan sun,
bitter wind, we sisters bare ourselves,

pay homage to you, Mother Earth.
Give us inspiration, hope.

Face red, eyes kept low,
I creep downstream, fully clothed.

Timothy Pilgrim

Dirty Martinis

Just For Once
I'd like to be the girl
walking into the room
wearing a skin-tight dress
sky-high stilettos
false eyelashes
and every man's gaze.
I want to have the laugh
that makes everyone stare
while I throw back
shot after shot
glasses of cosmos
and maybe a martini or two.
I want to be so drunk
that I stumble to the door
all eyes on me,
my short hem
and my v neck dress.
I want to wake up hours later
with no knowledge
of the previous night,
a pounding headache,
and an upset stomach.
Just for once, I want to know
what it's like
to be so wasted,
that I feel wanted.

Lorraine Biteranta





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