

# A Crown for Ted and Sylvia

by Kim Bridgford

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## 1. The Reader

You never know the truth, but try to guess.  
You dream a farm of moon-lit wolves and foxes.  
The oven makes you pause: the inside boxes  
Of a marriage. Hard to say who is most jealous,  
Hungry for the clapping literati.  
What do you have to give up? Put on offer?  
What ancient spirit is the ruling cipher?  
The profits from The Bell Jar make the party.

Now everyone is dead but Frieda.  
But still there is the context, and the rope,  
And Nicholas hanging down. Inside  
Family it is terrible; the soap  
Of the concentration camp, the gas  
That sickens you as it will come to pass.

## 2. Sylvia

What sickens you as it will come to pass?  
Hindsight sifting the rubble, the relics.

Electro-shock. The other schizophrenics  
Making lambs of paper plates. Your choice

Was to write.

I want to be a god.  
It is not that I want to be dead. I want perfection.  
Assia's kiss something I saw, the kitchen  
Dirty now. I backed away from Ted.

And there were more, and there had always been.  
I wanted to will the world into my own.  
I didn't like it, terrified or cold.  
It was ruined. You can't go back, then.  
Betrayal nibbled there, along my bone.  
It was inside that kiss that I grew old.

### 3. Ted

It was inside that kiss that I grew bold.  
Sometimes there is relief. No one to see  
(Except, it seems, my wife). Sometimes, a beauty  
Is inevitable. Maude Gonne. Yeats failed,  
But his poetry would make his singing name.  
I wanted everything. A language. Awe.  
I wanted the insides of what I saw.  
And so I left. There was a separate room

For Sylvia, and for Assia.  
Not too many people know a third.  
So the world can be. I was dividing.  
I didn't see my conscience as an idea,  
But rather as a way inside the word.  
When Sylvia died, I was in hiding.

### 4. Olwyn, Ted's Sister

When Sylvia died, I was, in hating  
Her already, an unexpected state.  
Bitch. Like Barbie on a primal date,  
She choreographed what we'd all be wading  
Through for life: *her* life, *her* observations.  
Like Virginia Woolf, she made the money  
That paid for everything. It was like honey,  
Her papers and her poems. Shrewd. Way stations

To the dead. Meanwhile, I watched the children grow:  
To school, *tra-la-la*. It is hard to be the story  
Of a ghost, of people's own vague narratives.  
It seemed it wrote itself a long time ago.  
I loved Ted too. I am not really sorry.  
You tell yourself the story as it lives.

### 5. Shura, Ted's Daughter with Assia

You tell yourself the story as it lives,  
And mine was that my mother was as dead  
As I was. You see, we lived inside the head  
Of Sylvia, and because she had her sheaves  
Of manuscripts, then, doubled, so would we.  
I was four when I died, and I was "one up,"  
The child who died, a pretty buttercup,  
Along with Mother. This, too, is family.

There are things that I would like to have done,  
But sometimes you're a prop, or almost placed  
To give dramatic contrast to the act.  
We were more than Sylvia, the one  
Who was two, the one who was twice blessed.  
We were an undeniable fact.

### 6. Nicholas

We were an undeniable fact,  
And we were a fiction, in other words, a family.  
I was a baby, both Ted Hughes and Plath:  
And Otto too. From genealogy,  
The traits could re-connect, for all we knew,  
But something else as well. A mythic true.  
I had a well inside that I'd look down,  
Like sorrow's fetus, opening. No sound

The day I killed myself. I was my mother  
Without her fame, but I would know the loss  
Of ambition hurtling down, with vicious seething.  
I was, in the end, a version of her father.  
My hanging was ancestral. All our eyes.  
In a row, we are our silent voices mouthing.

## 7. Aurelia

In a row we are our silent voices mouthing.  
I want to be last. As the official word,  
I want the world to know my girl was good.  
I don't want people thinking of her breathing  
Out these lies. I want the smart and normal,  
The one who would do anything for Mother.  
I want to take the rights back from the father.  
She was sad then. She cooked. She shaped a formal

Way that everything was going to be.  
I didn't like that she was cruel about  
The things I did. But either way, I bless.  
My goal is to control her legacy.  
It doesn't matter in her winding sheet:  
You never know the truth, but try to guess.