

# Sylvia Plath and Ted Hughes go to a Dance

*by* Joan Hawkins

The night Sylvia Plath  
Met Ted Hughes  
She bit him  
On the cheek

He was handsome,  
Talented,  
Arrogant.  
He'd given her poems  
A bad review.

"When two men  
Meet for the first time,"  
She told him,  
"Their blood  
Before they are aware  
Has bristled  
Into their hackles."

A Hughes line  
From a Hughes poem.  
And hearing  
His words  
In her mouth,  
He,  
Lumbering Narcissus,  
Fell.

Growling with pain,  
He kissed her.  
Stole her  
silver earrings,  
Tore off  
Her red hairband.  
So much  
For the stodgy  
Sexual repression  
Of the 1950s.  
So much for poetic

Courtesy.

"These are mine,"  
 He said.  
 Pocketing  
 Her trinkets.  
 Determined to  
 lead the  
 waltz, fox-trot, jive  
 dance  
 at the juke-poetry  
 ball.  
 Determined to make  
 A conquest.  
 Determined,  
 So the saying goes,  
 To make a  
 Kill.

The real deaths  
 The suicides,  
 The murder.  
 Those  
 Would come  
 Later.  
 Plath first.  
 Careful to  
 The  
 End,  
 She left  
 Breakfast trays  
 In her children's  
 room,  
 Stuffed towels  
 Under their  
 Bedroom door  
 Before turning  
 On the gas.

Then Assia  
 The  
 Other Woman  
 In this  
 Bad-romance.  
 She was not  
 so careful.  
 Took  
 Shura  
 The Dream child  
 Along/  
 On *her*  
 Heartbreak  
 Death-trip.  
 Gas oven,

"Just like Sylvia,"  
People said  
And wondered  
What it was  
About him  
That drove  
Women  
Mad.

Finally, Nicholas  
Ted Hughes  
And Sylvia Plath's  
Son  
Another suicide  
This time  
Bloody hanging.

But this night  
Ball night  
That was all  
Waiting  
In the  
Living theater  
wings.  
Fated,  
Hughes  
Believed,  
To happen,  
But still  
Yet to  
Be written.

"I met someone,"  
Plath  
Wrote  
In her journal  
That night.  
"The only one  
Huge enough  
For me."  
He, Prince  
Not-quite charming.  
She,  
Cinderella blonde  
And clingy  
But something  
Steely  
Inside.

"I shut my eyes,"  
She wrote  
Long before she met him.  
"And all the world drops dead.  
(I think I made you up  
Inside my head)."

She was  
Not a  
Pretty Princess  
Poet.  
He was  
Not a  
Gentle man.

They became  
Lovers.  
Celestial spouses  
Married,  
Superstitious  
Hughes said,  
By the stars.  
The sun,  
In Pisces  
that night,  
Conjunct her  
Ascendant.  
Opposite  
His Neptune.  
A bite, a kiss  
In his  
Tenth house  
Of good  
And evil  
Fame.  
They were  
Doomed.

That's what  
Hughes thought.  
I think  
He misread  
The signs.

"When two *men*  
Meet  
for the first time,"  
She'd told him.  
"Their blood  
Before they are aware  
Has bristled  
Into their hackles."  
A bite  
A kiss  
A pair of earrings.  
A red hairband.  
Memorized lines.  
A planned seduction.  
We are not  
What we seem  
Says the "Mad Girl's

Love Song"  
We are always  
More.

I met someone,  
She told her journal  
Huge enough for me.  
The only one.

Hughes carried  
The mark  
Of that  
Fatal meeting  
For weeks,  
Saw the little  
ringlet  
of perfect-  
teeth scars  
every day.  
At night  
He heard  
Wolves  
Howling  
In Regent's Park.  
Dreamed his  
*Hawk in the Rain.*  
And remembering  
Only the blood  
Of that jive-meeting  
At the juke-poetry ball  
He thought  
she—  
Pretty Cinderella—  
Could be  
Tamed.  
Occult spouses.  
Married,  
Hughes said,  
by the  
Solar system.

That's what  
Hughes thought.

I think  
He misread  
The signs.  
He found  
Her poems  
Sentimental  
Missed  
The Irony  
And the Anger.

"I met someone,"  
Plath wrote in her journal.  
"The only one  
huge enough for me."  
A bite  
A kiss.  
In the end  
He stole her  
Story.

He would carry  
The mark of their meeting  
For weeks.  
And remembering  
Only the blood,  
Would believe  
That she  
Could be  
Tamed.

He had thought  
Her poems  
Sentimental.  
Had not seen  
Their irony.  
Meeting her  
Changed  
His mind.

"I met someone,"  
Plath wrote in her journal.  
"The only one  
huge enough for me."  
Superstitious Hughes,  
Consulted the stars  
Venus trine Neptune  
Celestial aspect of  
Good and evil  
Fame.

He would carry  
The mark of their meeting  
For weeks.  
And remembering  
Only the blood,  
Would believe  
That she  
Could be  
Tamed.

He had thought  
Her poems  
Virgin-sentimental.  
Had read them

for light  
Not for dark.  
She was a woman  
After all.  
But the bite  
Focused  
His attention  
On their irony  
And he thought  
He'd caught  
A whiff  
Of the whore.