

THE RED DRESS

Sylvia Townsend Warner

No talisman but my heart.
No armour but my blood.
I was in my dream
When my kind enemy came,
Saying, Put on your red
Dress for this last night,
For this last time.

Outmoded was the dress
And ill to fasten on:
Cares and sighing had
Me with dull fat overlaid,
But at last it was done,
And brilliant in the glass
My image stood.

Her lips were close to mine
When a summons bid.
Then as I left the room
She with slow stepping from
The mirror disappeared;
And I went all alone
Downstairs to my doom.

Life and Letters Today No. 23, July 1939.

Warner's stories are 'noteworthy for their graceful, witty prose and their tough, uncompromising intelligence'.

Jonathan Yardley

Sylvia Townsend Warner: a 'copious, elegant and witty writer'.

Frank Kermode

'Miss Warner's genius is an uncannily equable openness to human data, and beneath her refined witchery lies a strange freshness one can only call, in praise, primitive'.

John Updike