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A Heart on the Sand

Sylvia Townsend Warner*

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*(1893–1978)

A Heart on the Sand

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Abstract

A sequence of five poems by Sylvia Townsend Warner dedicated to Valentine Ackland and dated Easter 1952.

Keywords Sylvia Townsend Warner; Valentine Ackland; sequence of poems.

A Heart on the Sand

For Valentine Ackland
Easter 1952

Sylvia Townsend Warner

A Heart on the Sand

1

Between the violent sea
And the absorbed land,
Smoothly, speedily,
With a stick in her hand
She drew a heart on the sand.

It was a day when wind
And stress and threat of sky
Bade one immediately
Set down an 'I am I,'
Though none should mark or mind.

The waves along the shore
Scumbled and effaced
A brief self-portraiture,
The marrom blades incised
Their diameter,
And the fisherman unwound,
Slowly, warily,
His autobiography
With every step he paced.

But she, but she
For past and for future
Her signature designed,
Who drew a heart on the sand
Round an S and a V.

2

Oh, spare a trifle to a blinded musician,
 And raise him up from exile and from derision.
 Far and further than far it is my lot to roam,
 Sweet Auburn was my lovely rustic home.

Sweet Auburn, loveliest village of the plain,
 Kind Nolly sang it, who was Auburn's pride.
 He went to sing it in London and in London he died,
 And none will ever see sweet Auburn again.

The day of Nolly's funeral was such,
 Ten thousand beggars followed him to the grave
 And every loose woman was weeping like a wife,
 For the poor have longer memories than the rich.

Like a true son of Auburn, he wore
 Pink breeches neat and clean as the flowers of the may.
 He shared his last crust with my good dog Tray,
 And when I hear him forgotten my heart is sore.

So do not turn away from poor blind harper,
 But bear me home and wash me with soap and water,
 For the sake of kind Nell convey me to your humble dwelling,
 And for Thomas Moore also, and William Butler Yeats, sons of old Erin.

3

I saw the snow-wreaths lying in desolate whiteness
 Like innocent angels thrown down.
 To see them in their solitude of unlikeness
 Scattered upon the usual ground
 And still too heavenly to accomplish dying,
 I thought that I could scarcely forgive the spring.

4

Vault up the ceiling, Vanbrugh, and enchain
 Saloon on long saloon, vast as you will –
 There's no geometry that can contain
 Atossa's voice, so scolding and so shrill.

Stretch out the grand Approach, her little shoe
 Hastening to war, shrivels the promenade;
 Her crowding fantasies of wrath outdo
 The mustered skyline vaunts of your facade.

What's roomy for those who have inhabited legend?
 Huddled in Blenheim, she weeps with red eyes
 The lost majestic dwelling that she planned
 And Marlborough filled up with victories.

5

Between the west and the east,
 Between silence and absence –
 Tower without a bell
 And altar impalpable –
 Stands the green priest,
 And now is grown so tall
 That his wide arms recline on the roofless wall.

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