

The Game of Ithaky's Children

O! In another time they play
A tribe of children with the sea
They play the games I'm sure you know
Their names are Bee, Dee, Ell and Vee.

The sky shines bright, the waves run dark
A breeze blows gently from the sea
The children idly floating now
As it is nearly time for tea.

Suddenly, Dee spies a red sail
And shouts "Look, there, blood on the sea!"
Then Ell cries, "Look, the hill's on fire!"
And, "Something's badly wrong!" yells Bee.

"We've got to help!" Dee tells the rest
"We've got to run!" groans anxious Bee
"We've got to hide!" snaps Ell, "Come on!"
And so they all swim out to sea.

They swim towards their secret cave
You have to enter from the sea
Where once the Wanderer hid his hoard
When he returned to Ithaky.

When they were small the elders taught
"Should you see blood upon the sea
"And fire upon the hill, then hide!
"Don't tell us where, then safe you'll be!"

They crawl inside, wet, cold and tired
Huddle together silently
And wait until the sun has set
Then in the dark come out to see:

The fire has gone out on the land
The sail has vanished from the sea
The children, scared, in silence stand
Until at last Ell asks, "where's Vee?"

They climb the black bare hill, the Three
They creep across the ruined land
They stare at sights no-one should see
They stand shocked speechless, hand in hand.

The see no-one, they see no thing
They are alone, the little band
They reach the palace yard; Dee says:
“We have to play the Game of Sand.”

Until you’ve played the Game it is
Impossible to understand
The children went down to the shore
And played all night with waves and sand.

And when the sun rose, as it does
They all slept, lying on the sand,
They woke and stretched, and then they said:
“We must play on together,” and. . .

And so they played the hardest game:
A hundred years alone and banned
From leaving Ithaky, regrow
From nothing but sea and bare land.

Each fish a flock, each child a clan
Each act foreseen, each minute planned
No room for labour—only play
Of each with all could death withstand.

All that the new Ithakians had
Was infinite potential and
Unbound freedom to play it out
No gods, no chiefs to take in hand.

It is now many years ago
The children played where sea meets land
And did not finish; so it is
That we now play the Game of Sand.

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