

From a collection of hand and typewritten pages of verse
by Elizabeth Durack – loosely assembled into five parts
by padc July 2010.

III Questions and Answers ...

- 1 Black cockatoos (1957)
- 2 Someone came (1956)
- 3 **Anniversary (1958)** refer below
- 4 To —— (1955)
- 5 Anniversary (1957)
- 6 Dirge (c. 1955)
- 7 **A kiss (c. 1954)** refer below
- 8 'The building of the Great Wall of China ...' (1951)
- 9 On not taking up an extended hand (mid 1950s)
- 10 Gist for the psychologist (c.late 1950s)
- 11 Return (1976)
- 12 Anniversary (1955)
- 13 Anniversary (1956)
- 14 Anniversary ('56)
- 15 **I shall weave no more spells at midnight (1955)**
- 16 To a suicide (1990)
- 17 In memoria in aeterna (1990)
- 18 Death – questions and answers (c. 1948)

3 Anniversary 1958

Oh I am less sad now
for sorrow
of all of yesterday
then the unburied power
in you
over tomorrow –
This unremitting barrenness
of your persistence
to pursue.
Had you but lived
you could have died
for me
as better men than you
and some more true
that I have buried
of my own accord –

I could have seen
you wed
to some coarse wench
some nag or bore
and patched
a wounded pride with:
"Well matched!"
Or as the years passed
and a string of
nondescript offspring
swung into existence
I could have faced you then
with cool indifference –
or on a chance meeting
(in a pub; on the tarmac;
buying a lettuce;)
seen the hand of time
had thickened your face
thinned your mind
and smiling then

consoled myself,
the way we do, with:
"Lucky escape ...!"

There are a thousand
ways
you could have died
more utterly

(as better men than you
and some more true)
than as you did –
but with your death
(sudden, preposterous
22 years ago)
in one swift stroke
of cunning
you contrived
in me
your immortality –
and I am shocked
from sadness
into anger
at the long
remorseless
continuity
of your living –
better men than you
(and some more true)
I've buried in the sands
with these two hands –

Oh I am less sad now
for sorrow
than for this power
you hold
upon tomorrow —

#

21.11.1958

7

A kiss

'I shall not kiss you,' and
You held my head back with your hand,
'I have no wish to be among
'Those trophies from a belt you've hung.'
Then our glance met eye on eye –
and, like some eagle-hawk that by
air-currents slips and slides till it has found
its witless prey upon the ground
comes swooping down with arching wing
and feet out-stretched to grasp and cling
and gather to itself its goal –
I felt your claws clamp round my soul.

#

undated, say mid 1950s

15 I shall weave no more spells at midnight

I shall weave
 no more spells
 at mid-night,
 nor sit, witch-wise,
 with my lamp
 to light
 the wanderer
 through that no-man's land
 between two souls.

Bleak and uninhabitable
 let it lie
 in limbo-gloom,
 for, far too often,
 have I made of it
 a play-ground –
 safe and bright
 and lit
 with swaying lights –
 a place for gay trespassing
 where, laughing,
 my mirrored face
 reflects the image
 of your own.

I shall weave
 no more spells
 at mid-night,
 nor, with a light
 sprinkling of my hand,
 transform that bitter land
 into a common –
 pluck out the nettled weed
 nor grow
 for deadly night-shade –
 daisies –
 form comradeship
 of lying treachery
 nor turn the bats
 swallows;
 neither shall I carpet
 the sharp-edged rock
 with moss
 nor render
 black quick-sand
 into foot-firm earth.

Let it lie
forever
cordoned off,
for I, no less than you,
am safe from
the dark deceit
of my own spell-bind.

So –
Let the wild
guardian birds
(flapping their moulting
wings)
screech
and let the
sign-post
(tattered with salt winds)
read:
'KEEP OUT'

August 1955

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