

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)**
- 4     To —— (1955)
- 5     Anniversary (1957)
- 6     Dirge (c. 1955)
- 7     A kiss (c. 1954)
- 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

**10            Gist for the Psychologist**

Last night I dreamt of everything  
And surely every one  
(Almost) that I've ever known  
Since my life begun.

I dreamt of stories in old books  
I read when just a kid  
I dreamt of an old chocolate box  
With roses on the lid.

I dreamt of chairs that furnished once  
A convent long ago  
I dreamt of an old stair-case  
And a fig tree branching low.

I even dreamt of noises  
I didn't know I heard  
I dreamt of an old dress I had  
With the waist-band round it shirred.

I dreamt of getting sunburnt  
And looking at a shell  
I dreamt of ships that sail away  
And falling down a well.

I dreamt of packing in a rush  
And then to make it worse  
The suitcase wasn't big enough  
And I couldn't find my purse.

I dreamt about a woman  
In a hat with cornflowers on it  
I dreamt about a Persian cat  
In a white crocheted bonnet.

I dreamt about the children  
And of my oldest brother  
I dreamt about the magazine with the  
Frenchman on the cover.

I dreamt of walking down the street  
This afternoon with Kim  
I dreamt about a glass of beer  
It had a broken rim.

Oh such a mad procession  
Filled all the night hours through  
And yet (it's rather curious)  
I never dreamt of you.

#

undated – late 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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