

Some sample poems from 'Four Quarters'

Copyright Edith Speers 2001

Esperance Press
PO Box 52
Dover Tasmania
Australia 7117

love is not a garden it's the weeds

love is undisciplined
love breaks all the rules
love will not come and go where it's told
love only does what it wants to

you want to have a garden neat and clean
but the wind will drop seeds
and the earth is full of roots that rise up
into stems flowers leaves

you can have all the roses you want
you can grow some cabbages too
you can break the earth into crumbs
and plant your crop in rows

you can build a fence a white picket fence
or walls of cement and stone
but come back tomorrow or tomorrow
and all your work will be undone

if you stay in one place and grow old
you can have a garden neat and clean
but it's the labour of a lifetime
to hold back what's wild and green

the weeds will win without working
they will cover your grave

your hands will be empty bones
but the grass will stand up and wave

love is undisciplined
love breaks all the rules
love will not come and go where it's told
love only does what it wants to

nicotine you fiend

nicotine, I thought I had you beat
ten years made me believe you
I could take you or leave you
now I'm kneeling again at your feet

I swear I went through the bad and the worse
and never thought of smoking
now here I am choking
you smell like the devil's own curse

nicotine, I wish you had never been
I broke the first rule
and fell like a fool
oh how I wish I'd stayed clean

no one ever beats you they say
once the game has begun
you've already won
because it's always the loser who pays

you've burned up my life, nicotine
I gave you my youth
and it's only the truth
I'm still chasing your smoke in my dreams

Sonnet 9

Darling! I have to see you! Can you come?
Not right now, of course - I'm up to my bum
In boring things I have to do. Why not
Next month? Not Thursday because I work that day;
And what with this and that, all Wednesday's shot;
Tuesdays are so awkward, too. Let's say
A long weekend. But warn me in advance -
It won't be wise to leave it all to chance.

It's such a pity I'm not on the phone,
But call me at my job, that's quite okay,
Otherwise you mightn't find me home -
A shame if you drove down here all that way
For nothing. Which reminds me - I can't cook,
So bring some coleslaw and a barbecued chook.

Sonnet 23

What on earth am I supposed to do,
Just because you love me? Don't invade
My space! It makes me angry. I'm afraid
You'll force me to be cruel. It has to be two
At once, or didn't you know? Can't you feel
The absence of those tender vibes, you dolt,
That mean your love's returned, that lightning bolt
That zaps you with the news that it's for real.

Hasn't it happened to you? Or don't you know
It's got to be two at once? Are you so stupid
You think by dogging me that somehow Cupid
Will shrug and twang his lousy little bow
At me? Forget it baby, things just don't
Work out that way. My heart won't change. It won't.

Break your heart beautiful

Country to touch the heart this is
country to hit the heart hard with a fist-punch
that makes it jump
and pump hard and come alive from a long deadness
country to make the heart ache for paradise lost
country to make the heart remember
a better time and a better world
neither past which cannot be gone back to
nor future which can never be found
but something that is forever within the soul
the dream of what might be
is this high land of lost hopes rediscovered
is this place of flat valley yellow grass meadows
with horses of all colours heads down browsing
or heads high heels flashing in a just for the hell of it
race around anywhere
and steep rock walls pine-clad rising up on either side
beyond lodgepole pines so tall and skinny and bare underneath
open spaces between them for visions to be seen
and the road running through and alongside the road
the Similkameen the Moye the Kootenay
or Columbia river running through
and maybe a man with a fishing rod casting a line in
gravel-bottomed rivers shallow and clean
so close to the snow source
of rocky mountain peaks in high altitude solitude purity clarity
with the ponds stretched out into lakes

by all the rains this strange season
and fences and sheds
abandoned old log or frame houses empty
unpainted and sagging down
not silver-greied by age and weather
but dark brown like earth like soil or fallen tree
belonging forever
to a timeless land break your heart beautiful country
a country to hold your heart in its hands forever
and make you immortal
valley after valley like a necklace of
green and gold and blue lozenge-shaped gems
threaded on the double strands
of highway and river

Trains in the Night

The beat of the heart that is sun and moon to the child who still lives in the dark of the womb is the rhythm of life and the lullaby that comforts us all till the day that we die but for poor folks who live in a tar paper shack in a country town by the railway tracks the father's boots go boom boom boom in the echoing emptiness of a cold little room and the mother's heart is a clock from the start that counts off the hours and minutes to birth tick tock tick tock and every breath of the two in their silence or talk is a step toward death tick tock.

But out of the night with a mighty roar comes a knight on a horse or the goddess of war clanketty clank clanketty clank wake up sit up kick hard fight back clanketty clank there's more there's more there's more for you to do to do hey you! hey you!

If it just happened once it might be a fright but over and over the trains in the night bring thunder and power that surge through your world and each time you smile where you're cozily curled as the army of warriors goes clattering by with galloping rhythm and battle cry till you listen to hear them they're wiser than words as they jostle and clang in the shunting yards like soldiers off duty the clatter of arms of swords and shields being dumped by the hordes reeking of sweat as they reach for a beer and while they're nearby you've got nothing to fear.

Oh child of poor parents in a tar paper shack in a country town by the railway tracks you can't be slack can't be slack can't be slack you can't go back there's no going back no going back hey you!

The rhythm is life and you love the sound of those metal wheels going round and round the whistle that blows in the dead of the night is the sentry calling all is right all is right you're alright and all of your life the most comforting sound the mother's heart that beats in your ears the lullaby that cradles you warm and tells you you're loved and safe from all harm that dispels all your fears when you're far from home in strange countries with strangers is the sound of the wheels the clanketty clank of trains in the night and the night watchman's call - it's all right it's all right it's all right hey you you're alright.