

Poetry Series

Mandy Baldwin
- poems -

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Mandy Baldwin()

Freelance writer. Born in London, lived for many years in Cornwall, now in France. Divorced, mother of three grown-up children.

Has worked as film-extra, aromatherapist, special-needs tutor, and artist.

Now writes short-stories for publication, and working on second novel.

Blogs:

A Day On The Beach

In my mind I'm going home
Down long green lanes by an empty sea
To an old stone house, with lilac trees
And my Prudy-dog, to welcome me.

There's wild-garlic in the hedge
As we go down to the long white beach
And kelp washed up by the water's edge
And skies as high as the heart can reach.

A soft wind plays with the children's hair
As they dig for gold in the salty sand
And they know there are dragons, in the cave
So we go and hunt them, hand in hand.

It's a long walk home, with a sack of shells
But the sun is low, and the waves grown tall
And all the way, there are stories to tell
Of a world that is big, when you're very small.

That time was dear, and now it's gone
But in memory, it's easy, there.
The nights are soft, when the day is done
And life is simple, and love is fair.

Mandy Baldwin

December Souvenir

I was sitting by the water
When they told me it was ending
And the estuary birds flew over - crying, always crying, as I did then.
Then I knew that hope was gone
But the peace, and the icy water saved me.

Then I found some words from you
And I told you how it was
And the estuary birds flew over - crying, always crying,
as I did then.
Then it seemed that you were hope
And your words, and your love, saved me.

I am sitting by the water
Thinking of that bleak December
And the estuary birds fly over - crying, always crying,
As I was then.
Now, both hope and you have gone, but still
The peace, and the icy water save me.

Mandy Baldwin

Empty Nest

It's quieter now, and the old cats, once kittens
Can sleep in the sun, remembering, as I do.
But yesterday was now, once, and
It wasn't the good old days, then.
The faces you washed and kissed
were older each summer, then older again.
And the little bare footprints on the path
That dried in the sun of those summers past
Are larger than yours, now
And walking alone;
and the eyes that looked earnestly up into yours
Seeking the wisdom that only you'd give
Now regard you fondly but briefly then
Look past you and over your shoulder, when
(having tough new adventurous lives to live)
They leave with a hug and a grin and a wave.
And it seems only moments since you walked away
Impatient with all that had gone before
But nervous as you heard the closing door.
And you know that for all the books you read
And the nights of fever, sat by their bed
And the fun you had
And the tears you'd dry
that nothing was ever so loving or brave
as opening the door
And smiling goodbye.

Mandy Baldwin

English Summer

English Summer

In a place of rich perfection which I love
I close my eyes and feel a distant magnet tug.
And it's small things which follow me:
Shingle beaches; fitful sunshine on brisk days
A history of people under white cliffs
And nonchalance, and cool, independent ways.
Egg-sandwiches on mornings never too hot to play
Smell of salt and green sweep of hills.
Damp wooden bridges over small brown streams
and castles, towering, rotting, old and grey.
And all of my winters and summers are in me
On a sharp blue morning here, so far away
From steam trains and cloudy beechwood valleys
From fish and chips and beer at wooden benches
in sappy gardens on soft, cool summer days.
Is this homesickness? Is this what it means?
The ache for things so gladly left, revisited in dreams?
I am it – and it is me.
I left her – but still
England is my Mother Country.

Mandy Baldwin

Eyes, And Other Parts

Your eyes, your eyes are with me still in my mind's eye.

Smiling at me, and as I watched,

laughing with friends at jokes that I don't understand.

And your hand.

The hand that I held when walking, warm and safe and with you, not alone.

The feeling of your shoulder, there for me to lean on in the night, and your

strong arms which held me far too tight

And your chest where my hand rested, and all your body, which was also mine.

Your voice, which could not wait to speak to me and which I could call up at any time

And your heart which beat for me, in pride of me, and full of love for me.

And all your tomorrows, which you promised you would spend with me.

Mandy Baldwin

First Love

You with the sunset in your hair
And the slanting shadows from the hazel hedge
And the bats, flitting in the evening air
And the damp green stones by the waters edge.

You with the morning in your eyes
And the smell of grass all wet with dew
And the bracken lit by the sweet sunrise
And the dear beloved touch of you.

You as we climbed the hill together
Your voice which I remember still
And the feel of our fingers, linked forever
These things I hold, and always will.

In quiet times, when you are alone
Are these few memories what you see?
As you sit by the fire in your happy home
Do you ever pause to remember me?

Mandy Baldwin

Heritage

We, the survivors, salute you.
We stand, divided by the miles, having lived through half a century
Seen unimaginable changes, feared many which have never happened
Been taken unawares by others.
Our worlds have been shattered. Our hearts have been broken.
Our minds have cracked and reformed.

We have buried our loved ones, and nurtured our babies.
We have boldly danced down aisles in all good faith
Then bitterly wept as the papers were torn up
Yet we have loved again.

We have grown fat, then slimmed down.
We have experimented with every passing fashion.
We have tolerated then learned to love
The lines which cross our faces

No longer pristine, but written on so well.

We have accepted that once, we were mocked for being young
And now, without ever having been just the right age
We are mocked for being too old.

We saw our skills degraded. We saw our beliefs discarded. And yet still we stand,
ready to learn more; ready to help you along the path
The path which, somehow, it seems we laid for you
While we were busy struggling to pay our mortgages.

We know something of what you will face tomorrow
We have walked a part of the road.
We love you dearly, not because you are our children
But because your future mirrors our past.
And because we know.

Be brave and loving. (And remember, the latter is no use without the former.)
Go on now, start walking! and know we are behind you.
And tell your children about us, as we have taught you the past.
You'll never know what we live through.
Take up the torch.

We, the survivors, salute you.

Mandy Baldwin

His Mother's Son

She gave him his life in a welter of pain
in the pit of a cold March night.
The wind blew cold so the fire was lit
and they lay there, all naked and white
And she thrilled to the dark, primal gaze of her son
as his first morning bloomed into light.
And she never let go of his small, wizened hand
and the cradle was always in sight.

Now he sits in the chill of another grey dawn
and he's old - but then, she's older yet.
And for all his grey hairs and his lines and his years
still the child in the man can't forget
All the days he was safe in the world of her arms
All the love that he saw as a debt.
And in grieving, he clutches her small, wizened hand
as he did on the night that they met.

Mandy Baldwin

Morning Show

She dances alone in the kitchen
where morning spills light on the floor
and the radio plays all those bright yesterdays
that will never be hers, any more.
while the teabags are brewing she's moving
to songs that made that summer theirs;
in the long grass she's sweetly unfaithful
while her husband lies snoring, upstairs.
There was more to her, once, than her pastry
and being the shadow called 'wife'.
There were hints of the gypsy inside her,
before she got settled in life.
There was moonrise on Blackwater Lake, then -
now dishes stand waiting in rows.
So she dances and dreams in the kitchen
And hopes the old man never knows.

Mandy Baldwin

Mum's Garden

When I was a child the garden burst with marigolds.
Pungent tomatoes climbed the walls in the dusty sun
And new cut grass with daisies lying slaughtered
And ponds with drowning fan-tails and proud peonies
Spoke of a love that showed itself in growing
Days in the sun that I knew before I was knowing.

When you were older you tended the wild Valerian
And the African daisies that spilled across the lawn and path
And birthday irises, July's gift to Julia
Baby's Breath that misted the pots you made for her
Slower you were, but still the seeds were sowing
Gifts of your heart to a love who would soon be going.

Now on the unmarked place where the earth has claimed her
Drowsing beneath the beds of rose and freesia
Warmed by the blanket of blooms with which you cover her
Stone would be far too cold for your blue-eyed Julia
Seasons marked by the buds unfurling and showing
Love of your life in the garden you are still growing.

Mandy Baldwin

My Kids

Thanks for all the lessons learned from you,
For eyes that said I knew it all, and trusted.
For times when there was magic in a Christmas tree
And love that didn't judge, and lasted.

Thanks for small gifts wrapped in borrowed paper
And letters written with a careful hand and leaky pen.
For rainy days of videos and made-up games
And sheets and chairs, that made a den.

For woodland days of rucksacks and wandering
And conkers on a string, and kittens in a box.
For pride that made a gift of fear and drudgery
For birthday cakes, and dirty socks.

I think I taught that you were loved and wanted.
I tried to make each milestone a special thing.
Well, maybe you learned a word or two, from knowing me.
But you - you taught me everything.

Mandy Baldwin

Naomi

Naomi walked with me in the winter
Along a beach that was bleak and wide.
Like broken dolls propped up together
I was strong with her at my side.
I was her mother, but she was my friend
And the days went by too fast;
Now this little moment has come to an end
And I wish it was starting, not past.
Now we are walking away from each other
But memory turns to see
The days in the sun which we spent together -
my daughter, my friend; and me.

Mandy Baldwin

On Becoming Saggy Just When You've Got Your Act Together

It's a fine irony, that's all I can say.

Just as you've got yourself straight between the ears

You find those ears are attached to a structure that's dropped six inches.

Don't debate the point; you know it's true:

If you are smirking at these words, it's happening to you!

When you were a perfect 10, and looked just stunning

No matter what you wore

You thought you looked like Shrek.

Oh; yes, you did! You were gorgeous: peach-skinned and trim

Pizzas were something you just ate; they didn't attach themselves to your skin

So afterward, you need a bigger jeans-size for two days.

But you agonised about each non-existent inch; and your hair!

Well – you know as well as I do - that was just a nightmare!

If only now, it could be confined to your head; and not be grey!

Poor thing, what agonies you suffered. When you got stares

you thought that you were going stylistically wrong, somewhere.

Now, you could be clad in army-boots and tutu –

nobody would care.

And dare I say it? least of all you:

because now, you simply have too much to do.

Now, you are a tranquil, loving, tolerant being.

You are evolved! You know exactly how you want to live.

The facade may be moth-eaten, but you have so much to give.

You know exactly what to say, and when, and how to behave.

You ride the world, like dolphins on the crest of a wave.

You've been there; done that; your collection of tee-shirts must be seen to be believed.

Back then, you were a mess inside; but outwardly? Oh; a whited sepulchre, indeed!

Nature's gone wrong somewhere, I think.

All that inner beauty should reflect in our dress-size

The bloom on our untarnished cheeks; our wide, sparkling eyes;

And the pertness of our buttocks; and the way our breasts defy gravity.

But no. That's not the way it's worked out, at all.

Put the slap on quickly, turn the glass to the wall.

What looks OK in candlelight won't bear the glare of day.

And who invented those damned full-length mirrors, anyway?

Didn't they have more worthwhile things to do?
I know, it wasn't ever going to happen to you.
But it has, and you must use all your wisdom, somehow
To bear the sheer insanity of finding that you now
Look as you used to in the magnifying mirror.
Go on; be brave: look more closely, if you dare!
Yes; you see? that's you, that old bat, skulking in there!
Luckily, you know these things don't matter, any more;
When you go out, your main concern is: did you lock the door?
And so you can enjoy invisibility. You're freed!
But I am just observing – a fine irony, indeed!

Mandy Baldwin

Peace Is Best

Leave me alone now, please.

No more midnight calls and murmured declarations

No more long, hand-holding talks as if we'll share tomorrow.

Since there is silence after each

I'd rather there was silence all the time.

It was you who did the hunting when I put you out of mind

And these lines you'll never read are all to tell you that you won.

Sleepless and daydreaming you still think I am detached

I'll never be another notch on a very well-marked gun.

So leave me alone now, please.

Art I find much safer. And words are all my own.

They don't have moods and whims and tantrums.

And I simply have too much to do

To allow my heart to be broken by you.

Mandy Baldwin

Sixteen

The soul never stops being sixteen.
You can tie it down and smother it but still
There will be magic in the scented night, and love
Will come and seize our hearts without our will
because
the soul never stops being sixteen.

Mandy Baldwin

Un-Used Numbers

There are unused numbers on my phone.
I don't know why I keep them there when I will never call.
To dial them would be to call the time I was a daughter.
In my mind's eye they go along with boxes left unopened
And the door closing on what used to be your home.
(I can still see the view from the window
Still smell the Coty perfume
Sunday roasts still steam the picture windows,
there are still flowers in every room)
And in some dimension you are still there together
Passing over the time of the dingy walls
And the paintings far too large for a room that was far too small
And the years that didn't take the grief from your face.
Neither of you will ever call again; we've said our last
And yet, the numbers are still there, and my heart keeps them – just in case.

Mandy Baldwin

When I Am Old

One day, when I am very old
This hurt will be forgotten.
I'll quietly, carefully, walk through the town
Button my coat against the cold
And think about my shopping.
I'll pass the little bridges
And the church where we lit candles
And I won't remember, I'll have no care
That once upon a long-gone time
We held hands there.

I won't remember how we watched
The water swirl against the old brick wall
And promised we'd come back one day;
Or that you smiled into my eyes
And told me I was beautiful.
I will have forgotten, in the busy passing days
The sweetness of someone my own to hold,
And the sound of your voice and the warmth you brought
when I felt lonely and life was cold.

When I am very old, one day
(just a few million breaths away)
I've promised myself (so I know it's true)
I will have forgotten that I wanted to grow old with you.

Mandy Baldwin

Will I Be A Mad Old Woman?

Now that you are gone, and there's no-one to tell me I look pretty
No desire to please, to drive me to revamp my hair or buy new clothes
Will I be a mad old woman grown fat on tea and biscuits
(Shared with my small dog - a crumb for the budgie - and milk in
The saucer for my cat,)
Going to the shops in slippers, leggings sagging, feet blue-mottled
Given to outrageous makeup and the wearing of eccentric hats?

Now that you are gone, and there's nothing left to talk about with someone
I told everything,
no-one to argue with about how long
I took in the shower,
or how it was at work, or how I feel about the news I heard
or whether I should take a chance
Will I accost strange people at the bus stop, ask them all their business then
never see them again?
Or develop a relationship with my pot plants?

Now that you are gone, and my bed is empty and cold,
and no-one disturbs my sleep any more, or turns over and steals the quilt,
or pulls the pillows from under my head
Will I ever get used to not having another's skin against my skin, so warm and
soft
And will I learn to sleep in the middle again, not perched on the edge of the
mattress, as I still do, now?
Will I find that it is easy, living alone,
and, solitary as a beetle in a crack in the floor, rest easy because you cannot
wake me from where you are?
Or will I find another man to love, somehow?

Mandy Baldwin

Yours In A Heartbeat

Your heartbeat that day.
Strange how I remember that.
Oh, I also bring to mind your eyes
And your hands I thought so beautiful
And the soft violet evening skies
But mostly, I recall the time
When your heart beat to the rhythm of mine.

Mandy Baldwin