

Remembering Ann

Duncan Gillies MacLaurin



“A lovely tribute – and in apt ways an amusing one too. A fine blend of the serious poet and the inveterate busker.” Nigel Stuart, poet

“A really beautiful, heartfelt eulogy of love.” Ian Lukins, poet

Saeby, 2023



Ann at 20

In memoriam
Ann Bilde
1961-2020



Ann at 35

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Ann Gone

A star has fallen from the sky,
and now the world is weeping.
But in my heart you'll never die.
You are only sleeping.

You're still so good to me.
You're still so good to me.

*You're the sprite in the spark,
you're the light in the dark.
You're no longer here on the beach anymore.
Ann, the reason we fell
to our season in hell
was our stairway to heaven before.
Though they never took place,
I endeavour to trace
animated scenes where you breeze through the door
and incredibly say:
"Du-un, you're ready to stay
on your own on this foreign shore."*

You're still so present in my life.
You've made it so worth living.
You'll always be my darling wife.
You'll always keep on giving.

You're still so good to me.
You're still so good to me.

*You're the sprite in the spark,
you're the light in the dark.
You're no longer here on the beach anymore.
Ann, the reason we fell
to our season in hell
was our stairway to heaven before.
Though they never took place,
I endeavour to trace
animated scenes where you breeze through the door
and incredibly say:
"Du-un, you're ready to stay
on your own on this foreign shore."*



A Karen Blixen

This photograph of you, from golden years
on Daisy Close one sunny summer day,
still makes me smile, then splinter into tears.
You asked me to remember you the way
you were before you blossomed. Ever since
I met you in Assisi long ago,
you've been my rose, and I, the Little Prince,
would see a simple garden flower grow
into a Karen Blixen. Here's the bed
where your sweet-scented, pure-white petals shone.
And even when an evil canker spread,
you bloomed again, undaunted. Now you've gone,
I sing for you, just like I've always done,
and catch you smiling as you catch the sun.

Remembering Ann

Ann didn't like to hang around.
She grew up by the sea.
She learned to love the sight and sound
of seagulls wheeling free.
She'd skip and jump and swim and walk
along the sandy beach,
come evening, see the lighthouse talk,
forever within reach.

*Sooner or later, there's no telling when,
sooner or later, we'll see her again.*

She found me busking on trombone
one afternoon in May.
I happened to be all alone
and asked her, "Won't you stay?"
Our joint ambition was to tell
the story of our life.
We made our paths run parallel,
forever man and wife.

*Sooner or later, there's no telling when,
sooner or later, we'll see her again.*

While poetry was our first choice –
and what I later chose –
Ann listened to her inner voice
and turned to writing prose.
She started as a journalist –
sea safety was her niche –
and then became an activist,
forever off the leash.

*Sooner or later, there's no telling when,
sooner or later, we'll see her again.*

The Woman with the Garden Fair
was quite a pantomime.
Ann almost fell out of her chair
with laughter at the time.
We then moved back to where she'd spent
her childhood. Here she'd write
a kids' book showing her dissent,
forever shedding light.

*Sooner or later, there's no telling when,
sooner or later, we'll see her again.*

Our summers numbered thirty-five,
our winters thirty-four.
I see you, Ann, as still alive,
still talking on the shore.
You're still misquoting "I'm Your Man",
your favourite Cohen song.
You'll always be my lighthouse, Ann,
forever bright and strong.

*Sooner or later, there's no telling when,
sooner or later, I'll see you again.*

Note: Ann's fifth book, published in 2011, was a docu-fairy-tale, *Kvinden med den smukke have* (*The Woman with the Beautiful Garden* or, as here, *The Woman with the Garden Fair*). It's autobiographical. Ann heard someone refer to her in the words of the book's title. A neighbour stalked the couple, and they had to leave their home on Fanø. The woman's husband is called the Poet, and the eight pieces he writes were written by DGM.

Now Comes Another Year

The day I met you, Ann, would be
the day that I began to see
I had to take a chance
and ask you for a dance.

You showed me such compassion that
I'd no choice but to cash in at
the bank of destiny,
forever you and me.

*I wasn't any longer wasting time
looking for a reason or a rhyme.
The bits fell into place.
It's hard to understand you've really gone.
I can't imagine how I'll carry on.
I miss your cheeky face.*

You meant the world to me, you know.
I couldn't bear to see you go.
Now comes another year
of you not being here.

*I wasn't any longer wasting time
looking for a reason or a rhyme.
The bits fell into place.
It's hard to understand you've really gone.
I can't imagine how I'll carry on.
I miss your cheeky face.*

Simply Standing There

Please stop telling me
to wake up to reality.
Don't tell me that it's all about
seeing friends and hanging out.

*I saw her simply standing there
on the corner of the winding stair
with wide blue eyes and long blonde hair
I'd follow anywhere
and feel like a multi-millionaire.
I followed her everywhere.*

Please stop telling me
to wake up to reality.
Don't tell me that I'm out of touch,
that I'm on my own too much.

*I saw her simply standing there
on the corner of the winding stair
with wide blue eyes and long blonde hair
I'd follow anywhere
and feel like a multi-millionaire.
I followed her everywhere.*

Please stop telling me
to wake up to reality.
Don't tell me that I ought to mix,
meet new people, learn new tricks.

*I saw her simply standing there
on the corner of the winding stair
with wide blue eyes and long blonde hair
I'd follow anywhere
and feel like a multi-millionaire.
I followed her everywhere.*

The Turquoise of Your Eyes

I went to see the doctor man.
He told me it was time
to wake up to reality.
No longer in my prime,
I ought to drink and smoke much less
and exercise much more,
or else I'd soon be pushing up
the daisies by the score.

I went to a psychiatrist.
She told me I was lost.
My mind was like a great big sponge
that couldn't count the cost
of all the issues that I faced.
I ought to reassess
my general mental attitude.
I really was a mess.

*No, I'm never ever gonna forget,
and it comes as no surprise.
No, I'm never ever gonna forget,
you were so beautiful and wise.
No, I'm never ever gonna forget,
and it's good to realise.
No, I'm never ever gonna forget,
no, I'm never ever gonna forget,
no, I'm never ever gonna forget
the turquoise of your eyes.*

I went to see the minister.
I told him I was sad
and asked him if there was a cure
for what it was I had.
He said to pray both night and day
and moments in between.
His only words of comfort were:
"The grass is always green."

*No, I'm never ever gonna forget,
and it comes as no surprise.
No, I'm never ever gonna forget,
you were so beautiful and wise.
No, I'm never ever gonna forget,
and it's good to realise.
No, I'm never ever gonna forget,
no, I'm never ever gonna forget,
no, I'm never ever gonna forget
the turquoise of your eyes.*

The Places We Belong

The news flashed in.
I shed hot, hot tears.
Cancer had come like a thief.
They gave you a month –
you lasted a year.
You had so much to give.

*You had so much to give.
You had so much to live for.
You had so much to give.*

It feels so wrong
you've left me here,
though you comfort me in my dreams.
And every day just means
we're one more step less near
the places we belong,

*the places we belong
immortalised in song,
the places we belong.*

Saying Goodbye

She watched the car move out of sight,
then lingered as she lengthened her
best memories of her days in light.
Such moments must have strengthened her
as she prepared to face the worst,
her own impending signing out
that she would never be the first
to advertise or whine about.
She met her end with such restraint,
such candour, such tranquillity,
it broke my heart. She was a saint.
God, grant me the ability
to emulate her elegance,
her courage, and her eloquence.

Poured into Light

I often busked to some cassette.
She stopped to hear me play.
I offered her a cigarette.
She took it straight away.
She'd fallen for me from the start,
could tell it at first sight.
She etched her beauty on my heart.
I poured it into light.

Neither of us had a home
except for inner peace,
so I was on my way to Rome,
and she was off to Greece.
But we upset the applecart,
turned lovers overnight.
She etched her beauty on my heart.
I poured it into light.

We moved to where she'd spent her youth,
and she became my wife.
She was devoted to the truth
and led a simple life.
She made me proud to do my part
and taught me how to fight.
She etched her beauty on my heart.
I poured it into light.

I'm sad to say that she's now gone,
no longer on this earth.
Yet somehow she still lingers on,
whatever that is worth.
She was as sweet as she was smart,
so generous and bright
she etched her beauty on my heart.
I poured it into light.

Now There's Something Very Wrong

Now there's something very wrong:
there's no boat in my sea.
I can turn it into song,
but it's still off-key.

Now there's something very wrong:
there's no star in my sky.
I can turn it into song,
but it's still goodbye.

*Distress is often left unspoken:
it's written down instead.
What's left, now everything is broken?
These bagatelles, for all the tears I've shed.
How I wish that I hadn't woken
this morning in my bed.*

Now there's something very wrong:
there's no girl at my gate.
I can turn it into song,
but it's still checkmate.

*Distress is often left unspoken:
it's written down instead.
What's left, now everything is broken?
These bagatelles, for all the tears I've shed.
How I wish that I hadn't woken
this morning in my bed.*

They say that nothing lasts forever,
but that's not really true,
'cause I can promise you I'll never
ever forget you.

About Ann

Ann Bilde was born in Frederikshavn in Northern Jutland on 19th December 1961.

She took degrees in Nordic Language and Literature as well as Information and Media Studies at Aarhus University. In May 1986 she met a Scottish poet, Duncan Gillies MacLaurin, in Italy on a half-year sabbatical, and when she went back to Denmark four months later, he was still with her. They were married the following year. She worked as a teacher of journalism for three years and as editor at the University of Southern Denmark for five years. She then became a freelance journalist to pursue her dream of being a writer, one that she'd had since she was five years old – in other words, even before she went to school and learned to read and write.

She worked primarily with PR and became known as an expert in safety at sea.

She had her authorial debut at Borgens Forlag in 2000 with *Glimpses from the Very Edge*, portraits of people on the island of Fanø, and in 2004 she started her own publishing company, Forlaget Freja. She wrote and published six more books – two novels, two documentaries, and two docu-fairy-tales.

After spending 23 years on Fanø and the west coast of Jutland, in 2014 she moved back to the area where she grew up, Frederikshavn in Northern Jutland, her Scottish husband still in tow.

Ann was dedicated to exposing political scandals and abuse of power, and she earned some notoriety for her documentary, *The MUV Affair* (2006). She later addressed environmental scandals such as Cheminova's pollution of Thyborøn-Harboøre and Total's drilling for shale gas near Dybvad. A fellow author said of her that she would never stop trying to make the world a better place.

In 2019 she became seriously ill with cancer. She suffered a life-threatening blood infection over Christmas, but she recovered, regained her strength, and wrote and published the second of her docu-fairy-tales, *The Smiling Camel Comes to the Pond*, a children's book, but also a satirical exposé of the local swimming baths. It is dedicated to Samir, a Syrian refugee she befriended.

Ann died at home in Saeby on 28th October 2020 and was cremated on 31st October. She wore her wedding dress in her coffin, and on her subsequent wedding anniversary her ashes were spread off the island of Hirsholm, which houses the lighthouse she could see from her childhood home. It was also on a ferry back from Hirsholm that her mother realized she was pregnant with Ann (and her twin-sister, Pia) because she never normally got seasick.

About the Author

Duncan Gillies MacLaurin was born in Glasgow on 22nd June 1962.

He attended boarding schools in Perthshire from the ages of 8 to 18 and won an Exhibition in Classics to New College, Oxford. He passed Classics Moderations, but left soon afterwards without a degree, disappointed with Classical Philosophy's dictum, "Poetry does not exist".

In 1984, he signed up for reading French, Anthropology and Psychology at London University, but took to playing trombone on the street instead. In 1985, he busked in Gibraltar for three months. Back in London, his home patch was the subway (AE: underpass) beside the Hammersmith Odeon. He began to write poetry. In 1986, he went busking in Italy and met a Danish writer, Ann Bilde. They ended up in Belgrade together, where he purchased a guitar. Settling in Denmark, he began to turn his poetry into song. He and Ann were married in 1987, and they were a couple until her death in 2020.

He took degrees in English and Latin at Aarhus University and taught both subjects at sixth-form-college/high-school level, first in Esbjerg (1995-2014) and then in Frederikshavn (2014-2023). He quit after a number of his students had complained about him expressing his grief for his late wife in class.

His poetry has been published widely, including three collections of poetry and twenty pieces in three recent American anthologies, *Extreme Sonnets I & II* and *Extreme Formal Poetry*.

Duncan's poems are often also the lyrics of songs, which is the case with all of the pieces here. Recordings can be found on his blog: <https://gists.wordpress.com>.

Acknowledgements

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Flowers that DGM's sister, Julia MacLaurin, picked from her garden on the day Ann died