

# I Burn, But I Am Not Consumed

*On May 11th, 1930, a young woman called Mary Anne MacLeod, from Tong on The Isle of Lewis, stepped aboard the RMS Transylvania from Glasgow to New York City, in search of a better life. There, she met Frederick, whose father had emigrated to America from Germany as a 16 year old boy.*

*And together, Mary Anne and Frederick raised five children.*

*Mary Anne's middle son would return to Scotland years later, the home of his MacLeod ancestors, whose clan motto is: "I burn, but I am not consumed." And here - in the name of progress and profit - and executive golf - he would pit himself against time and tide, and in his wake, the shifting dunes at Balmedie in Aberdeenshire would never be the same.*

*The marbled, metamorphic rock of Lewis is two-thirds the age of Earth - amongst the oldest on our planet. It knows about power, and it's seen a lot. And so I wondered: what might it have to say about the Inauguration - tomorrow in Washington DC - of the 45th President of the United States of America - Mary Anne Macleod's middle son, Donald? And this is what the rock told me.*

Oh son of Lewis, lonely boy,  
hewn from granite, salt and sky  
upon a foreign shore:  
the ocean is a mirror gleam  
in which you see yourself,  
and nothing more.

Three billion years of gravity,  
of strata forged in fire and earth,  
the stone crib of your mother's birth,  
in which your forebears lie.  
I am alive. I am a tomb.  
I burn, but I am not consumed.  
I burn, but I am not consumed.

Fish may swim at your command  
across The Atlantic to the land  
of dreams and self belief and boundless chance.  
An exile tale. An immigrant dance.  
You're captain of a frigate now,  
So set your compass, raise the mast,  
Blow up the sails,  
Erase the past, and future, if you must.  
Together we can stand  
and watch the peat-land turn to dust.

This is your apprenticeship:  
The Gulf Stream doesn't know your name,

nor does the splendid, blazing sun  
that alters how the currents run.  
The North wind never heard you roar:  
You're fired! You're fired!  
My back might burn, the blaze run wild,  
but I am not consumed, my child.

The Minch whips up a spindrift storm.  
The machair shifts. The machair moans.  
From Uig Bay to Luskentyre,  
the gale blows fast, the tide flows higher.  
The shore erodes and disappears.  
And, meantime, you are stoking fears  
and stacking hope into a pyre.  
You strike a match.

Oh ma bairn, mo leanaihb  
Oh ma bairn, mo leanaihb

Your mother was a wee girl once,  
who played upon my rocky shore.  
And you, you are broken boy,  
and you want more and more and more.  
You build a tower. You build a wall,  
You live in fear that they might fall.  
You who see nothing but your own face  
in the sheen of The Hudson River.

Oh ma bairn, mo leanaihb  
Oh ma bairn, mo leanaihb

A balancing is yet to come,  
although by then you may be gone  
and leave a desert to your sons and daughters.  
Still, these waters, they will rise,  
the North Sea haar will cover your eyes,  
despite your appetite for lies,  
and your disregard for truth.

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of strata forged in fire and earth,  
the stone crib of your mother's birth,  
in which your forebears lie.  
I am alive. I am a tomb.  
I burn, but I am not consumed.  
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