

An Litir Bheag

le Ruairidh MacIlleathain

An Litir Bheag is a shortened and simplified version of Ruairidh's Litir do Luchd-ionnsachaidh (also available on the BBC website), designed for those who are at an earlier stage of learning Gaelic. The topic each week is the same as Litir do Luchd-ionnsachaidh so that, once the Litir Bheag is mastered, a student of the language might wish to try the full Litir. This is Litir Bheag 979 (which corresponds to Litir 1,283). Ruairidh can be contacted at fios@learngaelic.scot.

I was telling you about the Cailleach Bheur as she appears in the book 'Wonder Tales from Scottish Myth and Legend' by Donald Alexander Mackenzie. In the second chapter, Mackenzie tells us about Bride.

All winter long, the Cailleach had kept a young princess in captivity. She was Bride. The Cailleach was envious of Bride's beauty. She was hard on the young lass.

One day, the Cailleach gave Bride a brown fleece. 'Clean this in the burn,' said the Cailleach, 'until it is as white as snow'.

Bride took the fleece down to the burn. She spent the day trying to turn the brown fleece white. But it was impossible. 'You are useless,' said the Cailleach. 'It's no whiter than it was when you started.'

Bride returned to the same work on the days following that. But there was no way to make brown wool white. Bride was weeping when an old man came. 'What is upsetting you?' he asked.

Bha mi ag innse dhuibh mun Chaillich Bheura mar a tha i a' nochdadh anns an leabhar *Wonder Tales from Scottish Myth and Legend* le Dòmhnall Alasdair MacCoinnich. Anns an dàrna caibideil, tha MacCoinnich ag innse dhuinn mu Bhrìde.

Fad a' gheamhraidh, bha bana-phrionnsa òg aig a' Chaillich ann am bruid. B' ise Brìde. Bha farmad air a' Chaillich ri bòidhchead Brìde. Bha i cruaidh air an tè òig.

Latha a bha seo, thug a' Chailleach rùsg-caorach donn do Bhrìde. 'Glan seo anns an allt,' thuirt a' Chailleach, 'gus am bi e cho geal ris an t-sneachd'.

Thug Brìde an rùsg a-bhàn don allt. Chuir i seachad an latha, feuch an rùsg donn a dhèanamh geal. Ach bha e do-dhèante. 'Chan eil feum sam bith annad,' thuirt a' Chailleach. 'Chan eil e dad nas gile na bha e nuair a thòisich thu.'

Thill Brìde don aon obair air na làithean an dèidh sin. Ach cha robh dòigh ann airson clòimh dhonn a dhèanamh geal. Bha Brìde a' sileadh nan deur nuair a thàinig bodach. 'Dè tha a' cur ort?' dh'fhaighnich e. Mhìnich Brìde an suidheachadh dha.

Bride explained the situation to him.

'I am Father Winter,' he said. 'Give me the fleece. I'll make it white myself.'

Bride gave him the fleece. He shook it three times and it was no longer brown. It was as white as snow. When the Bodach gave the fleece back to Bride, he also gave [her] a bunch of snowdrops – a wee plant that shows that the winter is over. 'If the Cailleach scolds you,' he said, 'tell her that you got them in the pine wood. And the Bodach left.

Bride returned to the Cailleach's stronghold. She put the fleece on the floor. But the Cailleach wasn't looking at it. Her eyes were on the snowdrops. 'Where did you get those flowers?' she said.

'They are growing in the pine wood,' said Bride.

'That's appalling!' said the Cailleach. 'Get out of my sight!' The Cailleach was angry. She knew that the winter was coming to an end. I'll tell you more next week.

'Is mise Bodach a' Gheamhraidh,' thuir e. 'Thoir dhomh an rùsg-caorach. Nì mi fhìn geal e.'

Thug Brìde an rùsg dha. Chrath e trì tursan e agus cha robh e donn tuilleadh. Bha e cho geal ris an t-sneachd. Nuair a thug am Bodach an rùsg air ais do Bhrìde, thug e cuideachd bad de ghealagan-làir – lus beag a dhearbhas gu bheil an geamhradh seachad. 'Ma nì a' Chailleach trod,' thuir e, 'inns dhi gun d' fhuair thu iad anns a' choille-ghiuthais. Agus dh'fhalbh am Bodach.

Thill Brìde gu daingneach na Caillich. Chuir i an rùsg-caorach air an làr. Ach cha robh a' Chailleach a' coimhead air. Bha a sùilean air na gealagan-làir. 'Càit an d' fhuair thu na flùraichean sin?' thuir i.

'Tha iad a' fàs anns a' choille-ghiuthais,' thuir Brìde.

'Is uabhasach an naidheachd agad!' thuir a' Chailleach. 'Teich às mo shealladh!' Bha a' Chailleach feargach. Bha fios aice gun robh an geamhradh a' tighinn gu ceann. Innsidh mi dhuibh tuilleadh an-ath-sheachdain.