

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 1,118 (which corresponds to Litir 1,422). Ruairidh can be contacted at fios@learngaelic.scot.

I'm going to finish the story from Caithness – 'The Dairymaid and the Hunter'. At night the Gille Garbh heard a sound outside. He rose. The Calder brothers were coming close, with evil intention.

He picked up his bow but the string was broken. He went to where the other strings were. They were all cut. He understood that Magnus Gunn had deceived him. He had cut the strings with his corkag – a small knife. The Gille Garbh went to where Magnus was sleeping. He killed him.

The Gille Garbh said farewell to his lover, Miss Calder. He went out. He didn't survive long. He was buried where he fell.

Miss Calder would have nothing to do with her brothers from that day on. She stayed in the bothy. She was extremely sad. And she lost her cattle. They were driven back to Dunbeath Strath.

Iain Bàn Mòr from Dalnawillan – the foster-father of the Gille Garbh – was now an enemy of the Calders. When some of the Calders' horses were lost, four of the brothers went out to find them. They had crossbows.

Tha mi a' dol a chur crìoch air an sgeul à Gallaibh – 'A' Bhanarach agus an Sealgair'. Air an oidhche, chuala an Gille Garbh fuaim a-muigh. Dh'èirich e. Bha na bràithrean Calder a' tighinn dlùth, le droch rùn.

Thog e a bhogha ach bha an t-sreang briste. Chaidh e gu far an robh na sreangan eile. Bha iad uile gearrte. Thuig e gun robh Mànas Gunnach air brath a ghabhail air. Bha e air na sreangan a ghearradh le a chorcaig – sgian bheag. Chaidh an Gille Garbh far an robh Mànas na chadal. Mharbh e e.

Dh'fhàg an Gille Garbh beannachd aig a leannan, Miss Calder. Chaidh e a-mach. Cha do mhair e fada. Chaidh a thiodhlacadh far an do thuit e.

Cha ghabhadh Miss Calder gnothach ri a bràithrean bhon latha sin a-mach. Dh'fhuirich i anns a' bhothan. Ach bha i muladach. Agus chaill i an crodh aice. Bha iad air an iomain air ais a Shrath Dhùn Bheathadh.

Bha Iain Bàn Mòr à Dail a' Mhuilinn – oide a' Ghille Ghairbh – anise na nàmhaid do na Calders. Nuair a chaidh cuid de dh'eich nan Calders air chall, chaidh ceathrar de na bràithrean a-mach gan lorg. Bha crois-bhoghachan aca.

When they were going past Ian Bàn's house in Dalnawillan, one of the brothers fired on a window. He expected that Iain Bàn Mòr would be sitting on the other side. But he wasn't at home. When he returned home, he and his three sons went out in pursuit of the Calders.

The four men had gone into two groups. Two were on the Altnabreac road. And the other two were up the Thurso River. They were killed by Iain Bàn Mòr and his sons in both places.

Miss Calder did not live long. But, before she died, she wrote a song – a lament – in Gaelic. It was translated into English. It is known as 'Miss Calder's Lament'. I haven't found the Gaelic words for it. If you have them, I would love to hear from you.

Fhad 's a bha iad a' dol seachad air taigh Iain Bhàin ann an Dail a' Mhuilinn, loisg fear de na bràithrean air uinneag. Bha e an dùil gum biodh Iain Bàn Mòr na shuidhe air an taobh eile. Ach cha robh e aig an taigh. Nuair a thill e dhachaigh, chaidh e fhèin agus a thriùir mhac a-mach an tòir air na Calders.

Bha an ceathrar air a dhol ann an dà bhuidhinn. Bha dithis air rathad Allt nam Breac. Agus bha an dithis eile suas Abhainn Theòrsa. Chaidh am marbhadh le Iain Bàn Mòr agus a mic anns an dà àite.

Cha do mhair Miss Calder beò fada. Ach, mus do chaochail i, rinn i òran – cumha – ann an Gàidhlig. Chaidh eadar-theangachadh gu Beurla. Tha e aithnichte mar 'Miss Calder's Lament'. Cha do lorg mi na faclan Gàidhlig air a shon. Ma tha iad agaibhse, bu mhath leam cluinntinn bhuaibh.