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 1,123 *(which corresponds to* Litir 1,427). *Ruairidh can be contacted at fios@learngaelic.scot.*

Iain MacLeòid – Iain Dubh – was a bard from the Isle of Skye. His brother, Neil, was also a bard. *Iain was a mariner. He was often up to mischief. He picked up skills and knowledge in foreign lands. He was excellent as a practitioner of magic. He was known widely in Scotland as* '*The Wizard of the North*'. *'The Lads of Glendale' is perhaps his most famous song. Here's how it starts:* *Stalwart young lads,* *Who are growing up in Glendale,* *Some of you are willing* *To make your living from the sea.* *Now, listen to the song* *Composed by MacLeod who took that route,* *And you'll always remember it* *When you sail from the Clyde.* *Iain was at home in Glendale on leave when he created this song. He was in a bothy with young men from the area. He was telling them about his life as a seaman. According to tradition, Iain created the song ex tempore as a way of telling them the story of his life.* *The song is full of warnings for young men – particularly about alcohol and women. I think that Iain*	Bha Iain MacLeòid – Iain Dubh – na bhàrd às an Eilean Sgitheanach. Bha a bhràthair, Niall, cuideachd na bhàrd. Bha Iain na mharaiche. Bha e gu tric ri plòigh. Thog e sgilean agus eòlas ann an dùthchannan cèine. Bha e fìor mhath mar chleasaiche draoidheil. Bha e aithnichte fad is farsaing ann an Alba mar '*The Wizard of the North*'. Math dh'fhaodte gur e 'Gillean Ghleann Dail' an t-òran as ainmeile aige. Seo mar a tha e a' tòiseachadh: *'Illean òga tapaidh,* *Tha 'n Gleann Dail ag èirigh suas,* *Tha cuid dhibh a tha deònach* *Ur lòn thoirt far a' chuain.* *Nis, èistibh ris an òran* *Rinn MacLeòid a chuir a' chuairt,* *'S bidh cuimhn' agaibh an-còmhnaidh air,* *Nuair sheòlas sibh à Cluaidh.* Bha Iain aig an taigh ann an Gleann Dail air fòrladh nuair a chruthaich e an t-òran seo. Bha e ann am bothan cuide ri gillean òga às an sgìre. Bha e ag innse dhaibh mu a bheatha mar mharaiche. A rèir beul-aithris, chruthaich Iain an dàn sa spot mar dhòigh airson sgeul a bheatha innse dhaibh. Tha an t-òran làn rabhaidhean do dh'fhir òga – gu sònraichte mu dheidhinn deoch-làidir agus boireannaich. Saoilidh

was having fun with the listeners. But, goodness, it's not a kind picture that he creates of the mariner's life. Here is the fifth verse of 'Gillean Ghleann Dail':	mi gun robh Iain a' gabhail spòrs leis an luchd-èisteachd. Ach, gu dearbh, chan e deagh dhealbh a chruthaich de bheatha a' mharaiche. Seo an còigeamh rann de 'Ghillean Ghleann Dail':
You'll see many a thing *Before you return from your journey,* *Bad food will sap your strength* *And the beauty that was on your cheek* *You will see men dying* *Without compassion or pity,* *But chains around their thighs* *And burial at sea.*	*Gur iomadh rud a chì thu* *Mun till thu far do chuairt,* *Gun toir droch lòn do neart asad* *'S a' mhaise bha nad ghruaidh.* *Chì thu daoine bàsachadh* *Gun bhàigh riu' no truas,* *Ach slabhraidhean mun sliasaidean* *'S an tiodhlacadh sa chuan*.
There is good poetry in the poem. But it is different from what his brother, Neil, would write! There was nothing romantic about his life on the briny deep, according to Iain. I'll leave you with the sixth verse:	Tha bàrdachd mhath anns an dàn. Ach bha i eadar-dhealaichte bho na sgrìobhadh a bhràthair, Niall! Cha robh càil romansach mu a bheatha air druim a' chuain, a rèir Iain. Fàgaidh mi sibh leis an t-siathamh rann:
When a storm suddenly arises *With the sea swelling in its troughs,* *The green waves will alarm you,* *As they break upon your back,* *To high yards you'll be put* *Even though you are seasick,* *And often you will say to yourself* *'I'd rather be on land.'*	*Nuair dh'èireas stoirm le cabhaig ort,* *'S an fhairg' ag at na glinn,* *Na tonnan uaine chlisgeas tu,* *A' bristeadh mu do dhruim,* *Gu slatan àrda cuirear thu,* *Ged bhitheadh tu car tinn,* *Gur tric riut fhèin a chanas tu* *'Bu mhath a bhith air tìr.'*