

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 874 (which corresponds to Litir 1,178). Ruairidh can be contacted at fios@learnghaelic.scot.

I'm going to tell you a short story from Ardnamurchan. It's very old. It belongs to the end of the 16th century. The story is called 'The Death of Big Angus'. It's connected with Aonghas Mòr mac 'ic Eòin.

Angus was living near Strontian. He had a bad wife. At least, that's what the storytellers maintain. She would be asking Angus to establish himself as the clan leader of the MacDonalds of Ardnamurchan.

They heard that a nephew of his – Donald – was going to marry a daughter of the powerful clan chief, Cameron of Lochiel. Angus would no longer have an opportunity to be clan leader. His wife asked him to murder Donald.

Angus knew that Donald would be taking a route to the wedding through Kentra. He had to jump a sea-ford there. Angus and followers of his were waiting for Donald. When Donald was jumping, one of Angus's followers fired an arrow towards his face.

When his feet touched the ground on the other side, Donald staggered. It was as if he were dancing. Then he fell. Angus said to

Tha mi a' dol a dh'innse dhuibh sgeul goirid à Àird nam Murchan. Tha e gu math sean. Buinidh e do dheireadh an t-siathamh linn deug. 'S e ainm an sgeòil Bàs Aonghais Mhòir. Tha e co-cheangailte ri Aonghas Mòr mac 'ic Eòin.

Bha Aonghas a' fuireach faisg air Sròn an t-Sìthein. Bha droch bhean aige. Co-dhiù, 's e sin a tha na sgeulaichean a' cumail a-mach. Bhiodh i ag iarraidh air Aonghas e fhèin a shuidheachadh mar cheannard na fine – Dòmhnallaich Àird nam Murchan.

Chuala iad gun robh nephew aige – Dòmhnall – gu bhith a' pòsadh nighean aig a' cheann-chinnidh chumhachdach, Camshron Loch Iall. Cha bhiodh cothrom aig Aonghas tuilleadh a bhith na cheannard fine. Dh'iarr a bhean air Dòmhnall a mhurt.

Bha fios aig Aonghas gum biodh Dòmhnall a' gabhail slighe a dh'ionnsaigh na bainnse tro Cheann Trà. Bha aige ri leum tarsainn fadhail an sin. Bha Aonghas agus luchd-leantainn aige a' feitheamh ri Dòmhnall. Nuair a bha Dòmhnall a' leum, loisg fear de luchd-leantainn Aonghais saighead air aodann.

Nuair a bhuail a chasan air an talamh air an taobh thall, shiaraich Dòmhnall. Bha e mar gun robh e a' dannsadh. An uair sin thuit e. Thuirt

him before he died, 'Do you reckon you'll dance as merrily as that at the wedding of Cameron's daughter?'

Things went totally haywire when Donald didn't appear at the wedding. A group of people went in pursuit of Angus. He fled. The men fired arrows on the thatched roof of his house. Burning tinder was attached to the arrows. The house was burned to the ground.

Angus went to Morvern. But the others followed him. In the morning, the sun was rising. Angus lifted his helmet to look. A hand of his was shading his eyes from the sunlight.

One of his enemies said, 'Isn't this a good opportunity to kill him?' Another replied, 'Your hand won't do the job.'

'However,' said the first man, 'An arrow will.' He fired the arrow. It struck Angus in the forehead and it killed him. And that is the story of the Death of Big Angus.

Aonghais ris mus d' fhuair e bàs, 'Saoil an danns thu cho cridheil sin aig banais nighean a' Chamshronaich?'

Chaidh an ceòl air feadh na fìdhle nuair nach do nochd Dòmhnall aig a' bhanais. Chaidh buidheann de dhaoine air thòir Aonghais. Theich e. Loisg na daoine saighdean air mullach-tughaidh an taigh aige. Bha spong a bha a' losgadh ceangailte ris na saighdean. Chaidh an taigh na smàl.

Dh'fhalbh Aonghas a Mhorbhairne. Ach lean an fheadhainn eile e. Anns a' mhadainn, bha a' ghrian ag èirigh. Thog Aonghas a chlogaid airson coimhead. Bha làmh aige a' cumail solas na grèine bho a shùilean.

Thuirtear fear de a nàimhdean, 'Nach e deagh chothrom a tha seo a mharbhadh?' Fhreagair fear eile, 'Cha dèan do làmh a' chùis.'

'Ge-tà,' thuirtear a' chiad fhear, 'Nì saighead i.' Loisg e an t-saighead. Bhuail i Aonghas na bhathais, agus mharbh i e. Agus sin agaibh sgeul Bàs Aonghais Mhòir.