

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 1,055 (which corresponds to Litir 1,359). Ruairidh can be contacted at fios@learngaelic.scot.

I was telling you about Cailleach Bheag nam Bòcan – Ada Goodrich-Freer. She used oral tradition that the Eriskay priest, Father Allan, collected. Among [the material] he collected was this story from South Uist. Its title is 'Lachlann mac Mhaighstir Alasdair and the Shinty Match'.

Lachlann mac Mhaighstir Alasdair was living in Drimsdale. His brother was the famous bard Alasdair mac Mhaighstir Alasdair. At one time, Lachlann was a Catholic. But he rejected the religion.

When he was at death's door, he sent for a priest. But others did not allow the priest to go to him. He died without the death-rites of the Church. His ghost was then wandering.

Years later, boys from Daliburgh were playing shinty on the beach. Among them was Iain mac Dhòmhaill Òig 'ic Nill. There was uproar about a goal – was it scored or not. Iain was angry. He was using extremely bad language.

While the uproar was happening, a really large man appeared on the shore. All the boys took fright and they fled.

Years later, Iain was a servant/lackey for the minister in

Bha mi innse dhuibh mu Chailleach Bheag nam Bòcan – Ada Goodrich-Freer. Chleachd i beul-aithris a chruinnich an Sagart Èirisgeach, Mgr Ailein. Am measg na chruinnich e, bha an sgeul seo à Uibhist a Deas. 'S e an tiotal a tha air 'Lachlann mac Mhaighstir Alasdair agus an Geama Iomain'.

Bha Lachlann mac Mhaighstir Alasdair a' fuireach ann an Dreumasdal. B' e a bhràthair am bàrd ainmeil Alasdair mac Mhaighstir Alasdair. Aig aon àm, bha Lachlann na Chaitligeach. Ach chuir e a chùl ris a' chreideamh.

Nuair a bha e uchd bàis, chuir e fios gu sagart. Ach cha do leig feadhainn eile leis an t-sagart a dhol thuige. Chaochail e às aonais deas-ghnàth bàis na h-Eaglaise. Bha a thaibhs an uair sin air seachran.

Bliadhnaichean an dèidh sin, bha balaich à Dalabrog a' cluich iomain air an tràigh. Nam measg bha Iain mac Dhòmhaill Òig 'ic Nill. Bha ùpraid ann mu thadhal – an deach a chur gus nach deach. Bha Iain feargach. Bha e ri fìor dhroch chainnt.

Fhad 's a bha an ùpraid ann, nochd fear iongantach mòr air a' chladach. Ghabh a h-uile balach eagal agus theich iad.

Bliadhnaichean an dèidh sin, bha Iain na sgalaig aig a' mhinistear ann an

Drimsdale. His work was to keep cattle from the [growing] corn at night.

Well, one particular night, the minister's son came to where Iain was. He told Iain that cattle were eating the hay. Iain went out. He didn't see the cattle. But there was a large man there. Iain turned and took a different route, but the big man was in front of him. Iain turned again. Again, the big man was in his way.

Iain was afraid. He shouted, 'God and Mary, preserve my soul.'

The big man replied, 'That's all very well, but that wasn't the language you used when I last heard you.'

The big man admitted that it was himself that frightened the boys on the beach. He came again, and he said that he was the ghost of Lachlann mac Mhaighstir Alasdair.

Dreumasdal. B' e an obair aige crodh a chumail air falbh bhon arbhar air an oidhche.

Uill, oidhche a bha seo, thàinig mac a' mhinisteir far an robh Iain. Dh'inns e do dh'Iain gun robh an crodh ag ithe an fheòir. Dh'fhalbh Iain a-mach. Chan fhac' e an crodh. Ach bha fear mòr ann. Thionndaidh Iain agus ghabh e rathad eile, ach bha am fear mòr air a bheulaibh. Thionndaidh Iain a-rithist. A-rithist, bha am fear mòr na rathad.

Bha an t-eagal air Iain. Dh'èigh e, 'A Dhia 's a Mhoire, glacaibh m' anam.'

Fhreagair am fear mòr, 'Tha sin glè mhath, ach cha b' iesin a' chainnt a bh' agad nuair a chuala mise mu dheireadh thu'.

Dh'aidich am fear mòr gur e e fhèin a chuir eagal air na balaich air an tràigh. Thàinig e a-rithist, agus thuirt e gum b' esan taibhs Lachlainn mhic Mhaighstir Alasdair.