

A Mhairead Òg

Young Margaret

**A Mhairead òg, 's tu rinn mo leòn,
's e caileag bhòidheach, lurach thu,**
Young Margaret, it is you who makes me grieve,
it is a beautiful, exquisite girl you are,

**Gur guirme do shùil sa mhadainn chiùin
na an dearc air chùl nan duilleagan.**
Bluer are your eyes on a calm morning
than a berry behind the foliage.

**Gur gile thu, ghràidh, na an sneachda bàn
tha cuir air àird na monaidhean.**
Whiter you are, love, than the white snow
that falls high on the moors.

**Gur h-i mo mhàthair rinn a' chearb
nuair chuir i shealg nan tunnag mi,**
It was she, my mother, was at fault
when she put me to hunt for duck,

**Nuair ràinig mis' an linne chaol
's ann a bha mo ghaol a' srùladh innt'.**
When I arrived at the narrow pool
it was my love was bathing in it.

**An tè rinn dhomsa an lèine chaol
cha dèan thu, ghaoil, gun tuilleadh dhom.**
She who made for me the fine shirt,
you will not, love, ever make another for me.

**An leabaidh làir, chan fhaigh mi tàmh,
san leabaidh àrd cha chuir iad mi,**
The bed in the ground will not give me rest,
on the high bed they would not put me,

**Mi an-diugh 's an-dè air cnoc leam fhìn
a' sileadh dheur 's a' turraman.**
Me today and yesterday on a hill alone
crying tears in grief.

**O Rìgh nan Dul, cum rium mo chaill,
cha robh mi riamh sa chunnart seo,**
O King of the Elements, keep with me my senses,
I was not ever in such danger as this,

**'S a Mhairead òg, 's tu rinn mo leòn,
's tu dh'fhàg fo bhròn, fo mhulad mi.**
Young Margaret, it is you who makes me grieve,
it is you who left me in mourning, in sadness.

Rinn - made; **leòn** - wound, grief; **caileag** - girl;
bhòidheach - beautiful; **lurach** - lovely,
exquisite;

Guirme - bluer; **shùil** - eyes; **mhadainn** -
morning; **chiùin** - calm; **dearc** - berry; **chùl** -
behind; **duilleagan** - leaves, foliage;

Gile - whiter; **ghràidh** - dear, love; **sneachda** -
snow; **bàn** - white; **cuir** - place, put; **àird** - high;
monaidhean - moors;

Mhàthair - mother; **chearb** - fault; **nuair** - when;
chuir - put; **shealg** - hunt; **tunnag** - duck;

Ràinig - arrived; **linne** - pool; **chaol** - narrow;
ghaol - love; **srùladh** - rinsing, washing, bathing;
innt' - in it;

Tè - she; **dhomsa** - to me; **lèine** - shirt; **chaol** -
fine; **dèan** - make; **ghaoil** - love; **tuilleadh** -
anymore; **dhom** - for me;

Leabaidh - bed; **làir** - ground; **fhaigh** - get;
tàmh - dwell, rest; **àrd** - high; **chuir** - place, put;
iad them, they;

an-diugh - today; **an-dè** - yesterday; **cnoc** - small
hill; **leam** - with me; **fhìn** - myself; **sileadh** -
raing, crying; **dheur** - tears; **turraman** - rocking
(in grief);

cum - keep; **rium** - with me; **chaill** - senses;
riamh - ever; **chunnart** - danger; **seo** - this;

dh'fhàg - left; **bhròn** - mourning; **mhulad** -
sadness;

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There are several variations to this traditional song but in all of them, when we read between the lines, we find a young man living in his widowed mother's household. He is not yet of age to inherit **an leabaidh àrd**, the high bed (a metaphor for his father's estate).

He has fallen in love with a servant girl. This is the girl who made a fine shirt for him. We can imagine the care that went in to the making of that shirt. We can imagine it being handed over to him, the touching of the fingers, the meeting of the eyes.

This affair, however, is not to the liking of his mother who perhaps would be looking for someone of a higher social standing for him. She hatches a plan.

The girl goes to a certain pool to bathe (**srùladh** can also mean rinse or wash clothes but bathe seems more romantic). The mother sends her son out to hunt for duck, knowing that he was bound to go by that pool. As he passes he sees a flash of white and fires at it thinking it is a duck. To his horror he finds that he has killed young Margaret, his love.

This song is often sung as a **òran fichte** or a "woven song" where line 1 is sung to the first part of the tune, line 2 to the second part then line 2 is sung again to the first part followed by line 3 to the second part. This is carried on right through the tune so that each line is played twice, once to the first part and once to the second part.

The effect of this can be quite dramatic. In the first three lines he praises Margaret, her beauty, her blue eyes, her whiteness (in those days pale was good, sun tan bad). Each attribute is voiced twice and the different parts of the tune allow them to be emphasised in different ways.

Then he tells Margaret that it was all his mother's fault. When this line is repeated he realises that his love for his mother is ended due to her treachery. There is pathos here when one considers the special relationship that often exists between a young man and his mother.

He is in despair. Alive or dead there is no peace for him. He goes to the top of a hill to grieve. A **cnoc** or a small hill has significance in Gaelic folklore as a place of judgement. Cnoc a' Mhòid is a very common place-name meaning Court Hill. He asks to be spared from going mad.