

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 213 (which corresponds to Litir 517). Ruairidh can be contacted at rodny.maclean@bbc.co.uk.

In Raasay there is a loch called Loch na Mnà. That means "the loch of the woman". It is said that she was a young woman. She was killed by a water-horse.

It's an old story. It was told to Boswell and Johnson in 1773. Boswell and Johnson went to the loch on the way to Dun Caan. Dun Caan is the highest mountain on Raasay.

The story goes something like this. There was once a blacksmith on Raasay. His daughter was on the hill this particular day. She was shepherding. That night, she didn't return home. The next day the smith went out looking for her. On the shore of the loch, he found a heart and lungs. They were the heart and lungs of his own daughter.

The smith was distressed. He was angry. He wanted revenge. He wanted to kill the water-horse. The smith and his son built a smithy next to the loch. The door of the smithy was looking out onto the loch.

Ann an Ratharsair tha loch air a bheil Loch na Mnà. Tha sin a' ciallachadh "the loch of the woman" – Loch na Mnà. Thathar ag ràdh gur e boireannach òg a bha innte. Chaidh a marbhadh le each-uisge.

'S e seann sgeul a tha ann. Chaidh innse do Bhoswell is Johnson ann an seachd ceud deug, seachdad 's a trì (1773). Chaidh Boswell is Johnson don loch air an rathad gu Dùn Cana. 'S e Dùn Cana a' bheinn as àirde ann an Ratharsair.

Tha an stòiridh a' dol rudeigin mar seo. Bha uaireigin gobha ann an Ratharsair. Bha a nighean sa mhonadh an latha a bha seo. Bha i ri cìobaireachd. Air an oidhche sin, cha do thill i dhachaigh. Air an làrna-mhàireach, chaidh an gobha a-mach a choimhead air a son. Air cladach an locha, lorg e cridhe is sgamhan. B' iad sin an cridhe is an sgamhan aig a nighinn fhèin.

Bha an gobha troimh-a-chèile. Bha e feargach. Bha e ag iarraidh dìoghaltas. Bha e ag iarraidh an t-each-uisge a mharbhadh. Thog an gobha is a mhac ceàrdach ri taobh an locha. Bha doras na ceàrdaich a' coimhead a-mach air an loch.

The smith and his son went there this particular night. Above the fireplace they built a roasting spit. They put a wedder [wether] on the roasting spit. The smell was going to attract the water-horse.

In the fire were large hooks. They were ready to thrust into the beast. A creature came in through the door. It had the appearance of a horse. But it was ugly.

The smith and his son thrust two hot hooks into the creature. The water-horse began to scream.

The smith asked his son to take a large hook from the fire and to thrust it into the water-horse. The lad did that. And they kept hold of the horse until it was dead.

But – here's an interesting thing. When [the] morning came, there was no horse's carcass. There was nothing there but a pile of slime. The old people said that slime of that type came from the heavens.

Chaidh an gobha is a mhac ann oidhche a bha seo. Os cionn an àite-teine, thog iad bior-ròstaidh. Chuir iad molt air a' bhior-ròstaidh. Bha am fàileadh a' dol a tharraing an eich-uisge.

Anns an teine bha dubhain mhòra. Bha iad deiseil airson stobadh anns a' bhèist. Thàinig creutair a-steach air an doras. Bha coltas eich air. Ach bha e grànda.

Stob an gobha is an gille aige dà dhubhan teth anns a' chreutair. Thòisich an t-each-uisge air sgreuchail.

Dh'iarr an gobha air a mhac dubhan mòr a thoirt a-mach às an teine, agus a stobadh a-steach don each-uisge. Rinn an gille sin. Agus chùm iad grèim air an each gus an robh e marbh.

Ach – seo rud iongantach. Nuair a thàinig a' mhadainn, cha robh closach eich ann idir. Cha robh ann ach poidhle slaim. Bha na seann daoine ag ràdh gun robh slam dhen t-seòrsa sin a' tighinn bho na speuran.