

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 445 (which corresponds to Litir 749). Ruairidh can be contacted at rodny.maclean@bbc.co.uk.

We're on the west side of the Isle of Lewis this week. On the moor south of Bragar, there is a loch called 'the loch of the shieling of the one night'. How did the shieling get a name like that? Well, according to oral tradition, here's how it happened...

A long time ago, two families constructed a bothy at that shieling. They weren't from Bragar, but from Shawbost, near Bragar. On a beautiful summer's afternoon, two young women went there. They were cousins. They were called Màiri Bhàn and Màiri Dhubh.

They did the milking. They were ready to go to bed. They were watching the sunset. They saw a woman coming towards them. She was tall and good-looking.

The young women welcomed her. The new woman said she was tired and that her feet were sore. The two young woman gave her a night's hospitality. The three of them had food together. They went to bed. The stranger was on the rear portion of the bed. Màiri Bhàn was next to her. Màiri Dhubh was on the front portion of the bed.

Around dawn, Màiri awoke

Tha sinn ann an taobh siar Eilean Leòdhais an t-seachdain seo. Air a' mhòintich deas air Bràgar, tha loch ann air a bheil Loch Àirigh na h-Aon Oidhche. Ciamar a fhuair an àirigh ainm mar sin? Uill, a rèir beul-aithris, seo mar a thachair...

Fad' air ais, thog dà theaghlach bothan air an àirigh sin. Chan ann à Bràgar a bha iad, ach à Siabost, faisg air Bràgar. Air feasgar brèagha samhraidh, chaidh dithis boireannach òg ann. 'S e co-oghaichean a bha annta. 'S e Màiri Bhàn agus Màiri Dhubh na h-ainmean a bha orra.

Rinn iad a' bhleoghann. Bha iad deiseil a dhol a leabaidh. Bha iad a' coimhead air dol-fodha na grèine. Chunnaic iad boireannach a' tighinn dhan ionnsaigh. Bha i àrd is dreachmhor.

Chuir na boireannaich òga fàilte oirre. Thuirt am boireannach ùr gun robh i sgèth agus gun robh a casan goirt. Thug an dithis boireannach òga cuid na h-oidhche dhi. Ghabh an triùir biadh còmhla. Chaidh iad gu leabaidh. Bha an srainnsear air earrainn chùil na leapa. Bha Màiri Bhàn ri a taobh. Bha Màiri Dhubh air earrainn aghaidh na leapa.

Mu àm na camhanaich, dhùisg

with a start. She felt a warm liquid running under her. She jumped out of bed. There was no sign of the woman who had come the night before. Màiri pulled the clothes from the bed. She was utterly horrified. Màiri Bhàn was dead. Blood was flowing from her breast.

The bothy's door was open. Màiri Dhubh saw a grey horse making for the moor. She understood that it was not a woman who had been living with them, but a water-horse. The water-horse was living in a loch on the moor. He took on the form of a woman the previous night.

Màiri Bhàn's remains were buried near the shieling bothy. Because of what happened, nobody else spent a night in that bothy. That's the reason it's called 'the shieling of the one night'. And what happened to the water-horse? I don't know.

Màiri Dhubh le clisgeadh. Dh'fhairich i sruth de lionn blàth fòidhpe. Leum i às an leabaidh. Cha robh sgeul air a' bhoireannach a thàinig an oidhche roimhe. Tharraing Màiri an t-aodach far na leapa. Ghabh i oillt is uabhas. Bha Màiri Bhàn marbh. Bha fuil a' sruthadh às a' bhroilleach aice.

Bha doras a' bhothain fosgailte. Chunnaic Màiri Dhubh each glas a' dèanamh air a' mhòintich. Thuig i nach e boireannach a bha air a bhith a' fuireach aca, ach each-uisge. Bha an t-each-uisge a' fuireach ann an loch air a' mhòintich. Ghabh e riochd boireannaich air fhèin an oidhche roimhe.

Bha dust Màiri Bhàn air a thiodhlacadh faisg air a' bhothan-àirigh. Air sàillibh na thachair, cha do chuir duine sam bith eile seachad oidhche anns a' bhothan sin. 'S e sin as coireach gur e ainm an àite 'Àirigh na h-Aon Oidhche'. Agus dè thachair don each-uisge? Chan eil fhios a'm.