

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 620 (which corresponds to Litir 924). Ruairidh can be contacted at rodgy.maclean@bbc.co.uk.

I was telling you about the famous whirlpool, Corryvreckan. Here's how it got its name. There was a Scandinavian prince. He was called Breckan. Breckan fell in love with a daughter of the Lord of the Isles. But her father was not pleased. He said that the prince would have to prove that he was a good sailor.

'What do I need to do?' asked the prince.

'Well,' replied the Lord of the Isles, 'you must keep your birlinn at anchor in the whirlpool for three days and nights. Breckan agreed to the test. He went home to Scandinavia to get his birlinn organised.

He asked old advisers of his father's for advice. They gave him advice as follows. He would have to take three ropes with him. The first rope would be made of wool from sheep. The second rope would be made of hemp that was growing in a cemetery. The third rope would be of hair from the heads of virgins. Their virginity would have to be beyond doubt.

Breckan sailed to the whirlpool. He anchored his birlinn in it, tied to

Bha mi ag innse dhuibh mun chuairt-shruth ainmeil, Coire Bhreacain. Seo mar a fhuair e ainm. Bha prionnsa Lochlannach ann. 'S e Breacan an t-ainm a bha air. Ghabh Breacan gaol air nighean aig Tighearna nan Eilean. Ach cha robh a h-athair toilichte. Thuir e gu feumadh am prionnsa a dhearbhadh gun robh e na sheòladair math.

'Dè dh'fheumas mi a dhèanamh?' dh'fhaighnich am prionnsa.

'Uill,' fhreagair Tighearna nan Eilean, 'feumaidh tu do bhirlinn a chumail air acair anns a' chuairt-shruth airson trì latha is trì oidhcheannan. Dh'aontaich Breacan ris an deuchainn. Chaidh e dhachaigh a Lochlann airson a bhirlinn a chur air dòigh.

Dh'iarr e comhairle bho sheann chomhairlich aig athair. Thug iad comhairle dha mar a leanas. Dh'fheumadh e trì ròpan a thoirt leis. Bhiodh a' chiad ròp air a dhèanamh de chlàimh à caoraich. Bhiodh an dàrna ròp de chainb a bha a' fàs ann an cladh. Bhiodh an treas ròp de dh'fhalt à cinn òighean. Dh'fheumadh an òigheachd a bhith gun cheist no teagamh.

Sheòl Breacan chun a' chuairt-shruth. Chuir e a bhirlinn air acair ann,

the three ropes. After a day and night, the first rope broke – the one that was made of sheep wool. On the second day, the second rope broke – the one that was made of hemp. Breckan was hoping the third rope would withstand the current. But, on the third day, it broke. That was because one of the ‘virgins’ was untruthful about her virginity.

The vessel was swallowed by the whirlpool. None came out of it alive except Breckan’s dog – the grey dog. He swam around until he found his master’s body. He pulled his body to land.

The dog returned to the sea. He was looking for the bodies of other people. He was swept [away] by the current. He was drowned in another whirlpool between Scarba and Lunga. That strait is called ‘the gap of the grey dog’. And the whirlpool that swallowed Breckan was named Corryvreckan. Cheerio.

ceangailte ris na trì ròpan. An dèidh latha is oidhche, bhris a’ chiad ròp – am fear a chaidh a dhèanamh de chlàimh chaorach. Air an dàrna latha, bhris an dàrna ròp – am fear a bha air a dhèanamh de chainb. Bha Breacan an dòchas gun seasadh an treas ròp ris an t-sruth. Ach, air an treas latha, bhris e. Bha sin a chionn ’s gun robh tè de na ‘h-òighean’ breugach mu a h-òigheachd.

Chaidh an soitheach a shlugadh leis a’ chuairt-shruth. Cha tàinig beò às ach an cù aig Breacan – an cù glas. Shnàmh esan timcheall gus an do lorg e corp a mhaighstir. Shlaod e a chorp gu tìr.

Thill an cù don mhuir. Bha e a’ coimhead airson cuirp aig daoine eile. Chaidh a sguabadh leis an t-sruth. Chaidh a bhàthadh ann an cuairt-shruth eile eadar Sgarba agus Lunga. ’S e Bealach a’ Choin Ghlais a chanas daoine ris a’ chaolas sin. Agus chaidh a’ chuairt-shruth a shluig Breacan ainmeachadh mar Coire Bhreacain. Beannachd leibh.