

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 769 (which corresponds to Litir 1,073). Ruairidh can be contacted at rodny.maclean@bbc.co.uk.

I want to tell you the old story The Raven's Stone. In the fourteenth century, there was a young man, Fair John, living in Balnacraig next to Loch Insh in Badenoch. He was a big, strong man.

One day, John was hunting in the forest. He saw a falcon pursuing a heron. John went to where the two birds were. There was a woman on horseback, and a ghillie attending to her. They were arguing with two of the landlord's foresters.

The woman saw John. 'Come here,' she asked of him. 'I own the falcon. These men are refusing to hand it over.'

'The falcon killed the heron on my master's land,' said one of the foresters. 'According to the law, it belongs to her.'

'The heron was on my aunt's land on the far side of the River Spey when the pursuit began,' said the woman. 'According to the law, my aunt owns the two birds.'

'Give her the falcon back,' said John to the foresters.

'Keep your nose out of the business,' said one of them.

Tha mi airson an seann stòiridh *Clach an Fhithich* innse dhuibh.. Anns a' cheathramh linn deug, bha fear òg, Iain Bàn, a' fuireach ann am Baile na Creige ri taobh Loch Innse ann am Bàideanach. 'S e fear mòr, làidir a bha ann.

Latha a bha seo, bha Iain a' sealg anns a' choille. Chunnaic e seabhag an tòir air corra-ghrithreach. Mharbh an t-seabhag a' chorra-ghrithreach. Chaidh Iain gu far an robh an dà eun. Bha boireannach air muin eich, agus gille ga frithealadh. Bha iad ag argamaid le dithis fhorsairean aig an uachdaran.

Chunnaic am boireannach Iain. 'Trohad an seo,' ghuidh i air. 'S ann leamsa a tha an t-seabhag. Tha na fir seo a' diùltadh a toirt seachad.'

'Mharbh an t-seabhag corra-ghrithreach air fearann mo mhaighstir,' thuirt fear de na forsairan. 'A rèir an lagh, 's ann leis-san a tha i.'

'Bha a' chorra-ghrithreach air fearann m' antaidh air taobh thall Uisge Spè nuair a thòisich an ruaig,' ars am boireannach. 'A rèir an lagh, 's ann le m' antaidh a tha an dà eun.'

'Thoiribh an t-seabhag air ais dhi,' thuirt Iain ris na forsairan.

'Cùm do shròn a-mach às a' ghnothach,' thuirt fear dhiubh.

The matter went to fisticuffs. Fair John defeated the foresters. They fled, and the woman turned to John. 'Many thanks to you,' she said. 'Won't you tell me your name?'

'Fair John,' he said.

'I am Helen Mackintosh,' said the woman. 'I live with my aunt, the Lady of Dunachton.'

'Oh,' said John. 'I wish you didn't belong to the landed classes. I'd like to see you again.'

'Alright,' said Helen. 'I take an excursion on horseback every day in that meadow. Nobody will be with me except my retainer, Ruairidh. He is loyal to me.'

'But the river will be between us,' said John.

'Be quiet,' replied Helen. 'It's easy to get across and back at the ford.'

The pair farewelled each other. After a day or two, John went across the River Spey at the ford, to meet with Helen. But how did they develop their love between them? I'll tell you next week.

Chaidh a' chùis gu sabaid-dhòrn. Rinn Iain Bàn an gnothach air na forsairean. Theich iad, agus thionndaidh am boireannach gu Iain. 'Taing mhòr dhut,' ars ise. 'Nach inns thu dhomh d' ainm?'

'Iain Bàn,' fhreagair e.

'Is mise Eilidh Nic an Tòisich,' thuirt am boireannach. 'Tha mi a' fuireach aig m' antaidh, Bean-uasal Dhùn Neachdain.'

'O,' arsa Iain. 'B' fheàrr leam nach buineadh tu do na h-uaislean. Bu toigh leam d' fhaicinn a-rithist.'

'Ceart gu leòr,' ars Eilidh. 'Bidh mi a' gabhail cuairt air muin eich gach latha air a' chluain ud. Cha bhi còmhla rium ach an gille frithealaidh agam, Ruairidh. Tha esan dìleas dhomh.'

'Ach bidh an abhainn eadarainn,' ars Iain.

'Ist,' fhreagair Eilidh. 'Tha e furasta faighinn a-null 's a-nall aig an àth.'

Leig an dithis soraidh le chèile. An ceann latha no dhà, chaidh Iain tarsainn Uisge Spè aig an àth, airson coinneachadh ri Eilidh. Ach ciamar a leasaich iad an gaol eatarra? Innsidh mi dhuibh an-ath-sheachdain.