

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 1,012 (which corresponds to Litir 1,316). Ruairidh can be contacted at fios@learngaelic.scot.

I'm going to tell you a tale of the seal people. It comes from the book 'Tales of the Seal People' by Duncan Williamson. It was told to him by an Angus MacNeil. Angus was working as a rabbit trapper in Argyll. He got the story in Gaelic from his grandmother.

There is a cemetery in a village in the western Highlands. There is a gravestone in the cemetery. It's in the shape of a heart. There are four words written on it: 'To Malcolm and Mary'. To Malcolm and Mary. That's all. Here is the story.

A family was living by the shore near the village. They were involved in crofting and fishing. They had two children – twins. They were called Malcolm and Mary.

The two of them were getting on well. They were obliging. They were helpful to their parents. Just one thing came between them. Mary would be teasing Malcolm for the appearance of his big toe on his right foot. It was enormous.

Now, Malcolm was a really good swimmer. Sometimes he was swimming among the seals. 'It won't be long before you are a seal,' Mary would say to him.

Tha mi a' dol a dh'innse sgeul dhuibh mu mhuintir nan ròn. Tha e a' tighinn bhon leabhar 'Tales of the Seal People' le Donnchadh MacUilleim. Chaidh innse dha le fear Aonghas MacNèill. Bha Aonghas ag obair mar ribear choineanach ann an Earra-Ghàidheal. Fhuair e an sgeul ann an Gàidhlig bho a sheanmhair.

Tha cladh ann am baile beag air taobh an iar na Gàidhealtachd. Tha clach-uaghach anns a' chladh. Tha i ann an cumadh cridhe. Tha ceithir faclan sgrìobhte oirre: 'To Malcolm and Mary'. Gu Calum agus Màiri. Sin uile. Seo an sgeul.

Bha teaghlach a' fuireach taobh a' chladaich faisg air a' bhaile. Bha iad ri croitearachd agus iasgach. Bha dithis chloinne aca – càraid. Bha Calum agus Màiri orra mar ainmean.

Bha an dithis a' faighinn air adhart gu math. Bha iad èasgaidh. Bha iad taiceil dom pàrantan. Thàinig dìreach aon rud eatarra. Bhiodh Màiri a' tarraing à Calum airson coltas òrdaig-coise air a chois dheis. Bha i air leth mòr.

Nise, bha Calum fìor mhath air snàmh. Uaireannan bha e a' snàmh am measg nan ròn. 'Chan fhada gus am bi thu fhèin nad ròn!' chanadh Màiri ris.

The children left school at the age of fourteen. Malcolm went fishing with his father.

One evening, they were at sea. A storm arose. The boat was overturned. 'Swim to land!' shouted Malcolm's father. He reached the shore but there was no sign of his son. People were thinking that Malcolm was lost at sea. The local people went looking for him or at least for his body. But they found nothing.

A changed came over Mary. She wouldn't speak to anyone. She wouldn't eat her food. She lost weight. She wasn't doing anything but walking on the beach. Her heart was broken.

Her father found his boat on the shore. It was still in one piece. The man returned to fishing. But Mary was devastated. She didn't want to speak to anyone. One day, however, things changed. I'll tell you about it in the next Litir.

Dh'fhàg a' chlann an sgoil aig aois ceithir-deug. Chaidh Calum a dh'iasgach còmhla ri athair.

Feasgar a bha seo, bha iad aig muir. Dh'èirich stoirm. Chaidh an t-eathar a chur thairis. 'Snàmh gu tìr!' dh'èigh athair Chalum. Ràinig esan an cladach ach cha robh sgeul air a mhac. Bha daoine an dùil gun robh Calum cailte aig muir. Chaidh muinntir an àite a choimhead air a shon no co-dhiù airson a chuirp. Ach cha do lorg iad dad.

Thàinig atharrachadh air Màiri. Cha bhruidhneadh i ri duine. Chan itheadh i a biadh. Chaill i cuideam. Cha robh i a' dèanamh càil ach coiseachd air an tràigh. Bha a cridhe briste.

Lorg a h-athair an t-eathar aige air a' chladach. Bha e fhathast slàn. Thill an duine a dh'iasgach. Ach bha Màiri beò ann am mulad. Cha robh i ag iarraidh bruidhinn ri duine. Latha a bha seo, ge-tà, dh'atharraich cùisean. Innsidh mi dhuibh mu dheidhinn anns an ath Litir.