

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 1,013 (which corresponds to Litir 1,317). Ruairidh can be contacted at fios@learngaelic.scot.

I was telling you a story about a boy and girl – a brother and sister. The boy – Malcolm – was lost at sea. His sister – Mary – was devastated.

One evening, Mary was walking on the beach. She went to a cave. She saw a strange thing. There were footprints – or flipper prints – there that a seal had left in the sand. In front of the cave, the flipper prints changed to human footprints.

They were strange. On the left foot were five toes. But, on the right foot, there were only four.

Mary went into a cave. Sitting there was her brother, Malcolm. They put their arms around each other. Mary was so pleased to see her brother. 'Oh, Malcolm,' she said, 'you returned!'

'Yes,' agreed Malcolm. 'But I won't be here long. When the boat turned turtle,' he explained, 'a seal took me to the bottom of the sea. There was a big cave full of seal people there. I belong to them now.'

Mary looked at Malcolm's hands. There was skin between his fingers. It was as if he had webbed feet. She looked at his feet. On his right foot, there was no big toe.

'Oh, Malcolm,' said Mary, 'what happened to your big toe?'

Bha mi ag innse sgeulachd mu ghille agus nighean – bràthair is piuthar. Chaidh an gille – Calum – a chall aig muir. Bha a phiuthar – Màiri – fo mhulad.

Feasgar a bha seo, bha Màiri a' gabhail cuairt air an tràigh. Chaidh i gu uamh. Chunnaic i rud annasach. Bha lorgan-coise – no lorgan-phiuta – ann, a dh'fhàg ròn anns a' ghainmhich. Air beulaibh na h-uamha, dh'atharraich na lorgan-phiuta gu lorgan-coise duine.

Bha iad annasach. Air a' chois chli bha còig òrdagan. Ach, air a' chois dheis, cha robh ann ach ceithir.

Chaidh Màiri a-steach don uaimh. Na shuidhe ann, bha a bràthair, Calum. Chuir iad an gairdeanan timcheall a chèile. Bha Màiri cho toilichte a bràthair fhaicinn. 'Ò, a Chalum,' thuirt i, 'thill thu!

'Thill,' dh'aontaich Calum. 'Ach cha bhi mi ann fada. Nuair a chaidh an t-eathar bun-os-cionn,' mhìnich em, 'thug ròn mi gu grund na mara. An sin, bha uamh mhòr làn de mhuinntir nan ròn. Buinidh mi dhaibh a-nise.'

Thug Màiri sùil air làmhan Chalum. Bha craiceann eadar a mheuran. Bha e mar gur e spògan lacha a bha aige. Thug i sùil air a chasan. Air a chois dheis, cha robh òrdag-mhòr.

'Ò, a Chalum,' arsa Màiri, 'dè thachair don òrdaig-mhòir agad?'

'The seal people were wanting something from me,' he said. 'I had nothing to give them but my big toe. And I wasn't wanting it anyway.'

'Come home, Malcolm,' said his sister. Mum and Dad have been really upset.'

'No,' said her brother. 'And don't tell them you saw me.' Mary agreed she would say nothing to her parents. Malcolm told her that she herself could come and visit him in the cave any time.

When Mary returned home, she was different. She was happy. She was pleased to chat with her parents. She went out of the house often of her own volition.

Nobody knew that Mary was meeting her brother in the cave. But she was writing about it in a wee red book – as we'll hear when I conclude the story next week.

'Bha muinntir nan ròn ag iarraidh rudeigin bhuam,' thuirt e. 'Cha robh dad agam ri thoirt dhaibh ach m' òrdag-mhòr. Agus cha robh mi ga h-iarraidh co-dhiù.'

'Thig dhachaigh, a Chaluum,' thuirt a phiuthar. Tha Mam is Dad air a bhith troimhe-chèile.'

'Cha tig,' ars a bràthair. 'Agus na inns dhaibh gum faca tu mi.' Dh'aontaich Màiri nach canadh i guth ri a pàrantan. Dh'inns Calum dhi gum faodadh i fhèin tighinn a chèilidh air anns an uaimh uair sam bith.

Nuair a thill Màiri dhachaigh, bha i eadar-dhealaichte. Bha i sona. Bha i toilichte cabadaich le a pàrantan. Chaidh i a-mach às an taigh gu tric le a toil fhèin.

Cha robh fios aig duine gun robh Màiri a' coinneachadh ri a bràthair anns an uaimh. Ach bha i a' sgrìobhadh mu dheidhinn ann an leabhar beag dearg – mar a chluinneas sinn nuair a chuireas mi crìoch air an stòiridh an-ath-sheachdain.