

# **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 1,090 (which corresponds to Litir 1,394). Ruairidh can be contacted at [fios@learngaelic.scot](mailto:fios@learngaelic.scot).

*I was telling you about Mary MacKellar, the Lochaber poetess. She was living on board her husband's vessel for ten years. She was sailing to many places. She spent two years without one night on land. She began to write in Gaelic and English. She was extremely competent as a writer of prose and poetry.*

*Before she decided to go and live on board, Mary was based on the mainland while John, her husband, was at sea. Perhaps it was that that moved her to write a well-known poem – 'The Mariner and his Sweetheart'. In the first verse, it is the sailor that is speaking. He is taking leave on land. But the sea is calling him back.*

*It's dismal today to be in rough terrain  
And wandering among heather,  
With golden shafts of sunlight  
Spilling all around;  
Better to be on the crests of the waves  
On the slim-masted ship,  
And seeing the new sails  
Making merry in the wind.*

*In the second verse, his sweetheart*

Bha mi ag innse dhuibh mu Mhàiri NicEalair, a bhana-bhàrd Abrach. Bha i a' fuireach air bòrd soitheach an duine aice airson deich bliadhna. Bha i a' seòladh fad is farsaing. Chuir i seachad dà bhliadhna, gun aon oidhche air tìr. Thòisich i air sgrìobhadh ann an Gàidhlig agus Beurla. Bha i fìor chomasach mar sgrìobhadair de rosag agus bàrdachd.

Mus do cho-dhùin i dhol a dh'fhuireach air bòrd, bha Màiri stèidhichte air tìr-mòr fhad 's a bha Iain, an duine aice, aig muir. Math dh'fhaodte gur e sin a ghluais i gu dàn ainmeil a sgrìobhadh – *Am Maraiche 's a Leannan*. Anns a' chiad rann, 's e an seòladair a tha a' bruidhinn. Tha e a' gabhail fòrladh air tìr. Ach tha a' mhuir ga tharraing air ais:

*O 's mairg tha 'n-diugh feadh garbhlaich  
'S ri falbhan am measg fraoich,  
Is gathan grèin gu h-òr-bhuidh  
A' dòrtadh air gach taobh;  
Gum b' fheàrr a bhith air bàrr nan tonn  
Air long nan cranna caol,  
'S a' faicinn nan seòl ùra  
Ri sùgradh anns a' ghaoith.*

Anns an dàrna rann, tha a leannan ga fhreagairt. Chan eil ise toilichte gum bi

*replies to him. She is not pleased that he will be away among the waves.*

*Oh, young man, foolish to me  
Is your talk at this time,  
Comparing the green heathery  
mountain  
To the grey troughs of the ocean;  
It is often a reason for me to weep  
That the one I love,  
Is out of my sight, far away  
On the rough crests of the waves.*

*Mary loved the Highlands, but she was also keen on Edinburgh. Her mother-in-law was running a guest house in the city. When she was on leave on land, Mary would go to Edinburgh. There, she got to know speakers and supporters of Gaelic.*

*When her mother-in-law died, Mary took over the guest house. She left the life of the mariner behind her. And she left her life as John's wife behind her also. Her marriage was not pleasing her. She decided to live in Edinburgh and make a living as a writer and poet.*

esan air falbh am measg nan stuagh:

*O, fhleasgaich òig, gur gòrach  
leam  
Do chòmhradh anns an uair,  
An fhraoch-bheinn ghorm ga  
samhlachadh  
Ri gleanntan glas a' chuain;  
'S gur tric is adhbhar caoinidh  
leam  
A h-aon dhan tug mi luaidh,  
Bhith às mo shealladh fad air falbh  
Air bharraibh garbh nan stuagh*

Bha gràdh aig Màiri air a' Ghàidhealtachd, ach bha i cuideachd measail air Dùn Èideann. Bha a màthair-chèile a' ruith taigh-aogheachd anns a bhaile. Nuair a bha i air fòrladh air tìr, bhiodh Màiri a' dol a Dhùn Èideann. An sin, fhuair i eòlas air luchd-labhairt agus luchd-taice na Gàidhlig.

Nuair a chaochail a màthair-chèile, ghabh Màiri thairis an taigh-aogheachd. Dh'fhàg i beatha a' mharaidhe air a cùlaibh. Agus dh'fhàg i a beatha mar bhean do dh'Iain air a cùlaibh cuideachd. Cha robh a pòsadh ga toileachadh. Chuir i roimhe fuireach ann an Dùn Èideann agus bith-beò a dhèanamh mar sgrìobhadair is bàrd.