

## 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 242 (which corresponds to Litir 546). Ruairidh can be contacted at [roddy.maclean@bbc.co.uk](mailto:roddy.maclean@bbc.co.uk).

*I have a story from Caithness for you this week. It's from the Dunbeath area. It's called The Three Knots. It starts in Liabost – that's the Gaelic for Lybster – a village in the south-eastern part of Caithness.*

*In the middle of the nineteenth century the herring fishing was on the go. The boat from Lybster went to Portmahomack in Ross-shire. The fishermen were going to buy staves for barrels. On the way between Lybster and Port-mahomack, the weather was good. I don't mean it was calm. The boats needed [the] wind. They were sailing. They did not have engines.*

*They put the cargo on board the boat in Portmahomack. They made ready to leave the next day. But the wind died. In the morning it was dead calm. The skipper – a man called James – was unhappy. He was talking the matter over with a friend. His friend said to him that he should speak to a witch in the village. James went to speak to the witch.*

*The witch gave him a piece of*

Tha sgeulachd agam dhuibh a Gallaibh an t-seachdain seo. Tha i à sgìre Dhùn Bheithe. 'S e an t-ainm a tha oirre Na Trì Snaidhmeannan. The Three Knots. Tha i a' tòiseachadh ann an Liabost – 's e sin a' Ghàidhlig air Lybster – baile beag ann an taobh an earra-dheas Ghallaibh.

Ann am meadhan an naoidheamh linn deug bha iasgach an sgadain a' dol. Chaidh bàta à Liabost gu ruige Port Mo Cholmaig ann an Siorrachd Rois. Bha na h-iasgairean a' dol a cheannach chlàran-baraille. Air an t-slighe eadar Liabost agus Port Mo Cholmaig, bha an aimsir math. Chan eil mi a' ciallachadh gun robh i ciùin. Bha na bàtaichean feumach air a' ghaoith. Bha iad a' seòladh. Cha robh einnseanan aca.

Chuir iad an cargu air bòrd a' bhàta ann am Port Mo Cholmaig. Rinn iad deiseil airson falbh an ath latha. Ach shocraich a' ghaoth. Anns a' mhadainn bha fèath ann. Bha an sgiobair – fear Seumas – mì-thoilichte. Bha e a' bruidhinn mun chùis ri caraid. Thuir a charaid ris gum bu chòir dha bruidhinn ri bana-bhuidseach anns a' bhaile. Chaidh Seumas a chèilidh air a' bhana-bhuidsich.

*thread. There were three knots in it. “When you are leaving,” she said to James, “undo the first knot. A light wind will come. When you are at sea, loosen the second knot. More wind will come. You’ll go home quickly. But do not undo the third knot.”*

*James left for the harbour. He made the boat ready. He undid the first knot. The wind arose a little. They sailed out of Portmahomack harbour.*

*When they were at sea, James loosened the second knot. The wind got stronger. The boat sailed well. When they were near Lybster, a lad in [of] the crew asked James to undo the third knot. James undid the third knot. As soon as he did that, the wind changed direction. It rose to gale force. The boat was driven out to sea. They had to return to Portmahomack. Oh dear!*

Thug a’ bhana-bhuidseach dha pìos snàithlein. Bha trì snaidhmeannan ann. “Nuair a tha sibh a’ falbh,” thuirt i ri Seumas, “fuasgail a chiad shnaidhm. Thig beagan gaoithe. Nuair a tha sibh aig muir, fuasgail an dàrna snaidhm. Thig barrachd gaoithe. Thèid sibh dhachaigh gu luath. Ach na fuasgail an treas snaidhm.”

Dh’fhalbh Seumas don chala. Rinn e am bàta deiseil. Dh’fhuasgail e a’ chiad shnaidhm. Dh’èirich a’ ghaoth beagan. Sheòl iad a-mach à cala Phort Mo Cholmaig.

Nuair a bha iad aig muir, dh’fhuasgail Seumas an dàrna snaidhm. Dh’fhàs a’ ghaoth na bu làidire. Sheòl am bàta gu math. Nuair a bha iad faisg air Liabost, dh’iarr gille dhen chriutha air Seumas an treas snaidhm fhuasgladh. Dh’fhuasgail Seumas an treas snaidhm. Cho luath ’s a rinn e sin, thionndaidh a’ ghaoth. Dh’èirich i gu ìre gèile. Chaidh am bàta a sguabadh a-mach gu muir. B’ fheudar dhaibh tilleadh gu Port Mo Cholmaig! Òbh òbh!