

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 635 (which corresponds to Litir 939). Ruairidh can be contacted at rodny.maclean@bbc.co.uk.

I'd like to tell you a famous story from Lochaber. It's called Gormshuil Mhòr na Maighe. Or, in English, 'Great Gormshuil of Moy'. The name Gormshuil comes from gorm and sùil. It was at one time common as a female name in Lochaber.

Gormshuil was married to a Cameron from Moy, over Laggan way. She had supernatural powers. Fishermen and hunters were coming past her house. They were stopping to get her blessing.

One day, Lochiel, the chief of the Camerons, came past. His piper was with him. Gormshuil was at her front door. 'Where are you going?' she asked.

'What difference is it to you where I'm going?' replied Lochiel.

Gormshuil wasn't pleased. She said that fishermen and hunters were wanting her blessing. Why was her clan chief not wanting her blessing?

Lochiel stopped. He told her he was going to a meeting with the Earl of Atholl. They were going to come to an agreement about the border between Lochaber and Atholl.

'Who will be with you?' asked Gormshuil.

Bu mhath leam stòiridh ainmeil à Loch Abar innse dhuibh. 'S e an tiotal oirre 'Gormshuil Mhòr na Maighe'. No, ann am Beurla 'Great Gormshuil of Moy'. Tha an t-ainm Gormshuil a' tighinn à gorm agus sùil. Bha e uaireigin cumanta mar ainm boireann ann an Loch Abar.

Bha Gormshuil pòsta aig fear Camshronach à Maigh, taobh an Lagain. Bha comasan os-nàdarrach aice. Bha iasgairean is sealgairean a' tighinn seachad air an taigh aice. Bha iad a' stad airson a beannachd fhaighinn.

Latha a bha seo, thàinig Loch Iall, ceann-cinnidh nan Camshronach, seachad. Bha a phìobaire còmhla ris. Bha Gormshuil aig a doras aghaidh. 'Cà'l sibh a' dol?' dh'fhaighnich i.

'Dè an diofar a tha ann dhutsa cà'l mi a' dol?' fhreagair Loch Iall.

Cha robh Gormshuil toilichte. Thuirte i gun robh iasgairean agus sealgairean ag iarraidh a beannachd. Carson nach robh a ceann-cinnidh ag iarraidh a beannachd?

Stad Loch Iall. Dh'inns e dhi gun robh e a' dol gu coinneamh le Iarla Athall. Bha iad a' dol a thighinn gu aonta mun chrìch eadar Loch Abar agus Athall.

'Cò bhios còmhla ribh?' dh'fhaighnich Gormshuil.

'Nobody but my piper – as was agreed,' said the chief.

'Take with you an armed force,' said Gormshuil. 'Keep them hidden. If there is danger, put on your cloak inside out and they'll come to help you.' Lochiel took her advice. He took a force with him.

The Earl of Atholl was unreasonable about the borders. He thought that Lochiel only had his piper. He blew a whistle. A force of Athollmen arose from the heather.

'Who are they?' asked Lochiel.

'Atholl sheep who'll eat Lochaber grass,' the Earl replied.

Lochiel turned his cloak inside out. The Lochaber heroes appeared from their hiding places. 'These are the Lochaber dogs that will chase away the Atholl sheep,' he said.

On the way home, Lochiel went to visit Gormshuil to thank her. 'Despite your words of kindness,' she said, 'you will hang my son some day.'

The clan chief denied that strongly, but we'll see what happened next week.

'Cha bhi ach mo phìobaire – mar a chaidh aontachadh,' ars an ceann-cinnidh.

'Thoiribh leibh feachd armaichte,' thuir Gormshuil. 'Cumaibh am falach iad. Ma tha cunnart ann, cuiribh ur cleòc oirbh caoin air ascaoin agus thig iad airson ur cuideachadh.' Ghabh Loch Iall a comhairle. Thug e feachd leis.

Bha Iarla Athall mì-reusanta mu na crìochan. Bha e dhen bheachd nach robh aig Loch Iall ach a phìobaire. Shèid e fìdeag. Dh'èirich feachd Athallach às an fhraoch.

'Cò iad?' dh'fhaighnich Loch Iall.

'Caoraich Athallach a dh'itheas fear Abrach,' fhreagair an t-Iarla.

Thionndaidh Loch Iall taobh caoin a chleòca don taobh ascaoin. Nochd na gaisgich Abrach às na h-àiteachan falaich aca. 'Seo na coin Abrach a chuireas ruaig air na caoraich Athallach,' thuir e.

Air an rathad dhachaigh, chaidh Loch Iall a chèilidh air Gormshuil airson taing a thoirt dhi. 'A dh'aindeoin ur faclan coibhneis,' thuir i, 'crochaidh sibh mo mhac latha air choreigin.'

Chaidh an ceann-cinnidh às àicheadh sin gu làidir, ach chì sinn dè thachair an-ath-sheachdain.