

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 678 (which corresponds to Litir 982). Ruairidh can be contacted at rodgy.maclean@bbc.co.uk.

What was the name of Fionn Mac Cumhail's dog? Do you know? Bran. But what were Bran's colours? Well, he had yellow legs. He was black on each side. His belly was white, his back was green and his ears were red.

He was entirely black when he was a puppy. But his colours changed when he was in the land of the Lochlannaich. Here's how it happened.

Fionn was in Lochlann. He met the daughter of the king. She was sad. 'What is upsetting you?' asked Fionn.

'A loch monster is killing a person every day,' she said. 'Today it's my brother's turn.'

'Your brother won't go to the loch today,' said Fionn.

'He will – he must,' replied the girl.

'No he won't,' said Fionn. 'I'll go in his place.' Fionn tied Bran to a tree with three chains. He went to the bank of the loch. The monster came. The monster opened its mouth and it gripped Fionn. Bran saw what was happening. He broke his chains.

Dè an t-ainm a bha air a' chù aig Fionn Mac Cumhail? A bheil fios agaibh? Bran. Ach dè na dathan a bha air Bran? Uill, bha casan buidhe aige. Bha e dubh air gach cliathaich. Bha a bhrù geal, bha a dhruim uaine agus bha a chluasan dearg.

Bha e dubh air fad nuair a bha e na chuilean. Ach dh'atharraich a dhathan nuair a bha e ann an dùthaich nan Lochlannach. Seo mar a thachair e.

Bha Fionn ann an Lochlann. Thachair e ri nighean an rìgh. Bha i brònach. 'Dè tha a' cur ort?' dh'fhaighnich Fionn.

'Tha uilebheist locha a' marbhadh duine gach latha,' thuirt i. 'An-diugh, 's e turas mo bhràthar.'

'Cha tèid do bhràthair chun an locha an-diugh,' arsa Fionn.

'Thèid – feumaidh e,' fhreagair an nighean.

'Cha tèid,' thuirt Fionn. 'Thèid mise ann na àite.' Cheangail Fionn Bran ri craobh le trì slabhraidhean. Chaidh e gu bruach an locha. Thàinig an t-uilebheist. Dh'fhosgail an t-uilebheist a bheul agus ghabh e grèim air Fionn. Chunnaic Bran na bha a' tachairt. Bhris e na slabhraidhean aige. Leum e a-steach a bheul an uilebheist dìreach an dèidh cas Fhinn.

He jumped into the mouth of the monster straight after Fionn's leg.

The monster submerged. He swam at speed. The locals were gathered on the bank of the loch. They saw Fionn and Bran coming out through the monster's side. Fionn was naked and Bran was bald.

Fionn was taken to the king's castle. He got new clothes. Fionn was concerned about Bran. 'I'm OK,' he said, 'but put a proper coat on the dog.'

After a wee while, the doctors returned with a shaggy white dog. 'Oh dear,' said Fionn. 'That's not the colour I was wanting.'

'What were you wanting?' asked the doctors.

And here's what Fionn said: 'Yellow legs for Bran, two black sides and a white belly, a green back for the hunt and two erect crimson ears.' The doctors took Bran away. When they returned with him, that's how he was – with yellow legs, two black sides, a white belly, a green back and red ears. And he was easy to recognise!

Chaidh an t-uilebheist fodha. Shnàimh e aig astar. Bha muinntir an àite cruinn còmhla air bruach an locha. Chunnaic iad Fionn agus Bran a' tighinn a-mach tro chliathaich an uilebheist. Bha Fionn rùisgte agus bha Bran maol.

Chaidh Fionn a thoirt gu caisteal an rìgh. Fhuair e aodach ùr. Bha Fionn a' gabhail cùram mu Bhran. 'Tha mise ceart gu leòr,' thuirt e, 'ach cuiribh bian ceart air a' chù.'

An ceann greis, thill na dotairean le cù bàn molach. 'Obh obh,' thuirt Fionn. 'Chan e sin an dath a bha mi ag iarraidh.'

'Dè tha sibh ag iarraidh?' dh'fhaighnich na dotairean.

Agus seo na thuirt Fionn: 'Casan buidhe aig Bran, dà thaobh dhubh agus tarr geal, druim uaine chon na seilge agus dà chluais chorrach chrò-dhearg.' Thug na dotairean Bran air falbh. Nuair a thill iad leis, 's ann mar sin a bha e – le casan buidhe, dà thaobh dhubh, brù gheal, druim uaine agus cluasan dearga. Agus bha e furasta aithneachadh!