

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 705 (which corresponds to Litir 1,009). Ruairidh can be contacted at rodgy.maclean@bbc.co.uk.

At the beginning of the autumn I was on the isle of Lismore in Argyll. I really like Lismore. I was there for a reason – to guide people to the seashore to look at seaweed. We went to a bay that was beside an old castle.

There is a story connected to the castle, Castle Coiffin. Coiffin was a Scandinavian. He was a prince. The castle was a home to him. He had a sister called Beothail. She was beautiful in her appearance and kind in her demeanour. She built a reputation among the islanders.

Beothail was in love with a young Scandinavian man. But her sweetheart left for a war in Scandinavia. The months elapsed and there was no sight or sound of the hero. Eventually, news came. He was killed in a bloody battle.

Beothail suffered a broken heart. She went to bed and never got out of it. She died ['changed'] or, as they say in Lismore, she died ['travelled']. She was buried near the castle.

Beothail was at rest but her ghost was not. People would hear it

Aig toiseach an fhoghair bha mi air Eilean Lios Mòr ann an Earra-Ghàidheal. 'S fìor thoigh leam Lios Mòr. Bha mi ann air adhbhar – airson daoine a stiùireadh don chladach a choimhead air feamainn. Chaidh sinn gu camas a bha ri taobh seann chaisteal.

Tha sgeulachd co-cheangailte ris a' chaisteal, Caisteal Chaifinn. 'S e Lochlannach a bha ann an Caifinn. 'S e prionnsa a bha ann. Bha an caisteal na dhachaigh dha. Bha piuthar aige air an robh Beothail mar ainm. Bha i àlainn na coltas is coibhneil na dol a-mach. Choisinn i cliù am measg muinntir an eilein.

Bha Beothail ann an gaol le fear òg Lochlannach. Ach dh'fhalbh a leannan a chogadh ann an Lochlann. Chaidh na mìosan seachad agus cha robh sgeul no guth air a' ghaisgeach. Mu dheireadh, thàinig fios. Chaidh a mharbhadh ann am blàr fuilteach.

Dh'fhuiling Beothail bristeadh-cridhe. Chaidh i a laighe na leabaidh agus cha do dh'èirich i aiste. Chaochail i no, mar a chanas iad ann an Lios Mòr, shiubhail i. Chaidh a tiodhlacadh faisg air a' chaisteal.

Bha Beothail aig fois ach cha robh a taibhs. Bhiodh daoine ga cluinntinn air

on stormy nights, saying, 'My brother is going past. I hope he'll listen to me and hear my plea.' It was her plea that her earthly remains would be taken to Scandinavia to be next to her sweetheart.

Coiffin heard her. He removed her bones from the grave. He cleaned them in a well called 'the well of the bones'. He sailed to Scandinavia and he put Beothail's bones in her sweetheart's grave.

However, shortly after Coiffin returned to Lismore, his sister's ghost started to call again. It had the same plea. People searched where she had been buried before. And they found one extra bone – a finger bone. They sailed back to Scandinavia again, with the wee bone. They put the bone in her grave. And, since then, her ghost has not been heard on Lismore.

oidhcheannan stoirmeil, ag ràdh, 'Tha mo bhràthair a' dol seachad. Tha mi 'n dùil gun èist e rium agus gun cluinn e m' iarrtas.' B' e an t-iarrtas aice gum biodh an dust aice air a thoirt a Lochlann airson a bhith ri taobh a leannain.

Chuala Caifinn i. Thog e na cnàmhan aice às an uaigh. Ghlan e iad ann an tobar ris an canar Tobar nan Cnàmh. Sheòl e gu ruige Lochlann agus chuir e cnàmhan Beothail ann an uaigh a leannain.

Ge-tà, goirid an dèidh do Chaifinn tilleadh a Lios Mòr, thòisich taibhs a' pheathar air èigheachd a-rithist. Bha an aon iarrtas aice. Rùraich daoine far an robh i air a tiodhlacadh roimhe. Agus lorg iad aon chnàimh a bharrachd – cnàimh meòir. Sheòl iad air ais a Lochlann turas eile, leis a' chnàimh bheag. Chuir iad an cnàimh don uaigh aice. Agus, bhon uair sin, cha chualas a taibhs a-rithist ann an Lios Mòr.