

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 806 (which corresponds to Litir 1,110). Ruairidh can be contacted at rodny.macleam@bbc.co.uk.

Did you ever hear about the evil man – Mac an t-Srònaich? If you're from Lewis, you will know the man's bad reputation. Parents would be saying to their children, 'If you are bad-mannered, Mac an t-Srònaich will come for you.' He was a murderer, according to oral tradition. Here's what is said about him.

Mac an t-Srònaich's father was an innkeeper in Garve in Ross-shire early in the 19th century. In English his name was Stronach. That surname is common enough in the Eastern Highlands and in Aberdeenshire.

Mac an t-Srònaich went to Lewis to avoid justice because he murdered his sister. Here's how it happened. His sister had a female friend. She was living in the house with them. As was common in those days, the lasses would sleep together in the same bed.

Now, this girl had a gold necklace. Mac an t-Srònaich was wanting it. It must have been valuable. However, on the night of the theft, the girls were involved in silliness and merriment. The lad's sister put the necklace around her

An cuala sibh riamh mun fhear olc – Mac an t-Srònaich? Mas ann à Leòdhas a tha sibh, bidh sibh eòlach air droch chliù an duine. Bhiodh pàrantan ag ràdh ris a' chloinn aca, 'Ma bhios sibh mì-mhodhail, thig Mac an t-Srònaich air ur son.' Bha e na mhurtair, a rèir beul-aithris. Seo na thathar ag ràdh mu dheidhinn.

Bha athair Mhic an t-Srònaich na òstair ann an Gairbh ann an Siorrachd Rois tràth anns an naoidheamh linn deug. Ann am Beurla, 's e Stronach an t-ainm a bha air. Tha an cinneadh sin cumanta gu leòr air taobh an ear na Gàidhealtachd agus ann an Siorrachd Obar Dheathain.

Chaidh Mac an t-Srònaich a Leòdhas airson ceartas a sheachnadh, oir mhuir e a phiuthar. Seo mar a thachair e. Bha bana-charaid aig a phiuthar. Bha i a' fuireach anns an taigh còmhla riutha. Mar a bha cumanta aig an àm sin, bhiodh na caileagan a' cadail còmhla anns an aon leabaidh.

Nise, bha seud-muineil òir aig an nighinn a bha seo. Bha Mac an t-Srònaich ga iarraidh. Feumaidh gun robh e luachmhor. Ge-tà, air oidhche na mèirle, bha a' chlann-nighean ri gòraiche is dibhearsain. Chuir piuthar a' ghille an seud-muineil timcheall a muineil fhèin.

own neck. That's how the girls were when Mac an t-Srònaich went into the bedroom at night. He was aiming to steal the necklace.

When Mac an t-Srònaich pulled on the necklace, the lass awoke and called out. Mac an t-Srònaich killed her to keep her quiet. He was thinking it was his sister's friend. But he realised he had killed his own sister. He fled and went to the Isle of Lewis where relations of his were living.

He went into hiding. He was living in remote places. Then he started, according to tradition, a life of crime in Lewis. And the stories and anecdotes about him started. We'll look at Mac an t-Srònaich again next week.

'S ann mar sin a bha na caileagan nuair a chaidh Mac an t-Srònaich a-steach don t-seòmar-chadail air an oidhche. Bha e ag amas air an seud-muineil a ghoid.

Nuair a tharraing Mac an t-Srònaich air an t-seud, dhùisg a' chaileag agus dh'èigh i a-mach. Mharbh Mac an t-Srònaich i airson a cumail sàmhach. Bha e a' smaoinichadh gur e caraid a pheathar a bha innte. Ach mhothaich gun robh e air a phiuthar fhèin a mharbhadh. Theich e, agus dh'fhalbh e a dh'Eilean Leòdhais far an robh càirdean aige a' fuireach.

Chaidh e am falach. Bha e a' fuireach ann an àiteachan uaigneach. Thòisich e an uair sin, a rèir beul-aithris, air gnothaichean eucoireach ann an Leòdhas. Agus thòisich na sgeulachdan is naidheachdan mu dheidhinn. Bheir sinn sùil air Mac an t-Srònaich a-rithist an-ath-sheachdain.