



## Loch Àirigh na h-Aon Oidhche - The Loch of the One-night Sheiling

### Loch Àirigh na h-Aon Oidhche

Seachas mar a chuala an t-Urramach Alastair Macpharlain à Marbhaig e nuair a bha e na bhalach:

Bha fear an Cromor ris an canadh iad 'Fearchar Dubh', agus bha dà nighean aige, Sibealag agus Gormal. Nis, bha na clann-nighean ag iarraidh mach chun an àirigh, agus bha iad ag iarraidh àirigh thogail dhaibh fein far nach robh duine riamh air àirigh thogail. Smaoinich Fearchar gu ro àite freagarrach muigh air a mhointeach eadar Calabost agus Grabhair.

Tha loch ann an sin tha anabarrach oillteil agus dorch. Saolaidh tu gu bheil e uadhalta far a bheil e air a shuidheachadh.

Nis, dh'fhalbh Fearchar, agus thog e àirigh ann an siud ri bruaich an loch. Dh'fhalbh na clann-nighean mach chun an àirigh leis na cro a' s t-seamhradh. Air a cheud oidhche, an deidh dhaibh an cro a bhleoghan, lit a thogail air a chlàr lochrannach air mullach an àirigh airson fuarachadh, agus a ghrian dìreach dol fodha, chaidh iad sìos gu oir an loch airson an casan a nighe.

Bha'n oidhche tighinn, oidhche breagha ciùin, na bric a dawns air a loch, agus na h-eoin a seinn nuas air slìos Dhuntatha.

Agus, chual iad staplaich thall air taobh thall an loch. Ach chunnaic iad gu robh rud a bh'ann a tighinn nas fhaisg, agus nas fhaisg. Thug iad aire. 'Se bh'ann ach seann bhoireannach. Bha i crom agus, O, bha i a coimhead anabarrach sgith. Thainig i null, is thainig i null, air bruaich an loch far an robh iad. Agus dh'fhoighnich na clann-nighean dhi, 'Càite bho ghrian a tha thu dol mu'n tìde 's an oidhche, 's tu coimhead cho sgith?'

'Oh, tha mi sgith' ars ise. 'Thainig mi à Loch Claidh, agus tha mi dol sìos gu 'n a Ghò ann an Calabost.'

Ghabh na clann-nighean iognadh, ach thug iad oirre thighinn steach gu 'n a bhòrd airson rud-eigin a dh 'ithe. Thainig i steach, agus ghabh iad iognadh rithist, oir cha mhor nach do dh 'ithe i a h-uile càil a bh'ann, dha neo trì greimeanan agus cha ro sgial air fhàgail dhaibhsan.

"S fhearr dhoibh fuireach còmhla ruinn shin a nochd. Tha e ro anmoch dhuit tuilleadh airson falbh', thuirt na clann-nighean rithe. Thuirt an cailleach gu 'm bitheadh sin ceart gu leor.

Thainig am dol a chadal. Bha leabaidh deiseal agus dh'fhoighnich Sibealag, 'Càit' a bheil cailleachag dol a chadal a nochd?' Thuirt Gormal gu 'm bu chòir an cailleach cadal ris a bhalla, oir bhitheadh i nas blàith. Ach bha an cailleach airson cadal eadar an dà nighean, agus sin mar a bha. Chaidh iad a chadal, Gormal ri taobh a bhalla, an cailleach anns a mheadhan, agus Sibealag air an taobh muigh.

Ach, uair-eigin mus tàinig an latha, dhùisg Sibealag le goiriseachadh, agus i faireachdain neonach. Dh' fhairich i a cliathaich agus bha e fluich. Thug i lamh an àrd, agus bha e dearg. Thug i sùil a null air a chailleach ri taobh, ach cha 'n e cailleach a bh 'ann. Bha a cruth air atharrachadh. Ri taobh Sibealag bha uile- bheist le aodan granda, gràineal, fiaclan mora, agus corp làn calg. Bha an uile-bheist na chadal.

Thug i sùil a null air a piuthar, agus bha Gormal coimhead bàn. Sheall i a rithist, agus bha i marbh. Chuir Sibealag oirr' a còta bàn gu faicilleach agus chaidh i mach an dorus. Thug i air na beinn. Cha robh e fada mus do dhùisg an uile-bheist, agus ionndrainn e Sibealag. 'S e bh' anns an uile-bheist ach each-uisge. Agus, mar a tha fios agaibh, gheibh an each-uisge an cruth atharrachadh gu uile-bheist, neo bean, neo duine, neo ainmhidh, neo rud sam bith airson cùisean a fhreagairt.

Co dhiùbh, cha robh e fada mus do dhùisg esan, agus mach as a deidh. 'N uair a ràinig Sibealag àite ann an siud air cùl Loch nan Eilean eadar Marbhaig agus Cromor, thug i sùil as a deidh, agus chunnaic i an each-uisge a nochdadh air bruaich Loch a Bhuidhe. Chuir i mach plom mor fola. As deidh sin gus an latha 'n diugh thug iad 'Blar na Fola' air an àite tha sin.

Rinn i à sin, agus chum i oirre, 's bha e toirt a steach oirre, 's a toirt a steach oirre, 's a toirt a steach oirre. Nuair a ruig i Cromor, bha a ghrian air eirigh. Direach mus do ruig i gàradh a bhaile leig i mach eithe uabhasach a chual a h-athair 's e suidh a gabhail a bhracaist. Canaidh iad 'Mol na h-Eigheachd' air an àite ud gus an latha 'n diugh.

Ghabh e eagal 's leum e 'n àrd ag radh, 'Tha mo chreachsa deanta!'

Fhuair e bhogha agus saighdean, agus chum e mach gu far an tàinig an eigheachd. Bha Sibealag air rìghinn cùl gàradh a bhaile, agus air a bha i feuchainn ri leum gàradh a bhaile, fhuair an each greim air a còta bàn. Thuit ise air cùl a ghàradh, marbh, 's a cridhe air a sgaradh.

Nuair a chunnaic an each Fearchar a tighinn, theich e. Chaidh Fearchar as a dheidh, ach cha robh e toirt ceum air. Dh' fhiach e saighde neo dhà air ach cha do chur e strad ann. Ràinig an each Loch an Ròsan. Nis, tha loch sin eadar Calabost agus Marbhaig. Bith 'Loch a Ghruagaich' air cuideachd. Tha, cuideachd Cnoc an Ròsan ann an sin, dìreach air taobh muigh Calaboist. Thug Fearchar an earball bho' n each aig an loch sin.

Chum iad a dol, Fearchar a feuchainn saighdean gus an ràinig iad cùl Cnoc a Ghuaile ann an Calabost. 'S ann an a shin a fhuair Fearchar cuir as dha'n eich.

Chì thu fhathast làrach na h-àirigh aig Loch Àirigh na h-Aon Oidhche. Cha deach duine riamh chun an àirigh ud tuilleadh gus an latha 'n diugh. Chaill Fearchar an dà nighean. Tha na h-àitichean ann an siud fhathast mar chuimhneachan.

### **The Loch of the One Night Sheiling**

Folktale as heard by the Reverend Alastair Macfarlane from Marvig when he was a boy:

There was a man who lived in Cromore whom they called 'Fearchar Dubh' (Black Farquhar). He had two daughters, Sybil and Gormelia. Now, the two girls wanted a sheiling built for them somewhere that no one had built one before. Farquhar thought that there was somewhere very suitable out on the moor between Calbost and Gravir.

There is a loch out there that looks rather dark and creepy. You would think that the surrounding area was like a graveyard.

This fact made the girls even keener to have their sheiling there, and so Farquhar went and built them their sheiling right beside the loch. In the summer the girls took the cows out to the sheiling. On their first night there, they milked the cows, lifted the porridge off the fire, and put it out to cool on the ledge above the door. The sun was just setting, and they went down to the edge of the loch to bathe their feet.

Night was falling, a beautiful calm night with trout dancing on the loch, and birds singing down the slopes of 'Duntatha' (hill beside the loch).

Suddenly there was a disturbance on the other side of the loch, which sounded like something splashing. But it seemed that the splashing and splashing was drawing close to them. Whatever it was was definitely getting closer. Suddenly, they realised it was an elderly woman struggling to walk, and, oh, she looked awfully tired. Well, over she came, slowly but surely by the edge of the loch. When she reached the girls, they asked her, 'Where on Earth are you going at this time of night? You look exhausted'.

'Oh, I am exhausted', she replied. 'I have come from Loch Claidh, and I'm making my way to the shore in Calbost'.

The girls were amazed, but anyway, they invited her in, and encouraged her to the table for something to eat. They got another shock when they watched the old woman devour all their porridge. Two or three mouthfuls and it was all gone. There was not a drop left for them.

'You'd better stay here with us for the night. It is far too late for you to go on now', the girls beckoned her, and she took their kind offer of a bed.

Well, bedtime came. The box-bed was ready, and Sybil asked Gormelia, 'Where will the old dear sleep tonight?' Gormelia suggested that the old dear would be safer and cosier on the inside of the bed, next to the wall. But the old woman insisted on sleeping in the middle between the two girls. So, that was settled. Gormelia slept next to the wall, the old woman in the middle, and Sybil on the outside.

Sometime before sunrise Sybil awoke shivering, and feeling strange. When she felt her side, it was soaking wet. She looked at her hand, and it was covered in red. She looked at the old woman beside her, but it was not the old woman that lay. The woman's body had transformed. Beside Sybil lay a beast with a horrible, fearsome face, huge fangs and a hairy body. The beast was sleeping.

She looked over at her sister, and Gormelia looked pale. A closer look showed that she lay dead. Sybil quietly put on her petticoat, and sneaked out the door. She made for the hills as fast as she could, but it wasn't long until the beast stirred, and missed Sybil. The beast was actually a water kelpie and, as you all know, the water kelpie can transform itself into a beast or an old woman, or a man, or an animal, or really anything, as the need requires. On this occasion an old woman was the image the water kelpie had chosen for its intended dreadful purpose.

Anyway, it wasn't long before the beast was chasing Sybil. When Sybil reached a spot behind Loch nan Eilean between Marvig and Cromore, she looked behind, and saw the beast appearing over Loch a Bhuidhe. With the fright, Sybil passed blood. To this day that spot is known as 'Blar Na Fola' (Field of Blood).

She carried on running, but the beast was getting closer and closer and closer. As she finally got near to Cromore, it was daylight. Just before the village boundary she let out an almighty scream which her father heard and recognised as he was sitting at his breakfast. To this day that spot is known as 'Mol Na h-Eigheachd' (Place of The Scream).

He got a fright, and jumped up shouting, 'I'm ruined!'

He fetched his bow and arrows, and headed for where he thought the screams came from. By this time, Sybil had reached the village boundary, and while trying to jump the boundary wall, the beast caught hold of her petticoat. She collapsed in a heap behind the boundary, dead, with her heart ripped out.

But the beast saw Farquhar coming and retreated. Farquhar chased the beast firing the occasional arrow when he got a chance, but he couldn't hit the beast. The beast then reached Loch a Ròsan (Loch of the Tail). This loch is between Calbost and Marvig, actually nearer Calbost. The loch is also known as 'Loch a Ghrugaich' (Loch of the kelpies or sea-horses). There is also a hill there called Cnoc an Ròsan, just outside Calbost.

Just as the beast was passing the loch, Farquhar managed to knock its tail off with an arrow, but the beast carried on running, avoiding Farquhar's arrows, towards Cnoc na Ghuaile (Hill of the Shoulder) in Calbost. It was there that Farquhar finally managed to kill it.

Now, if you take a look up at Loch Àirigh Na h-Aon Oidhche (Loch of the One Night Sheiling), you can still see the remains of the sheiling. And nobody ever went near that sheiling again. Farquhar had lost his two girls there. The place names are there as a reminder to us.

A noted Gaelic scholar drew our attention to the fact that 'grugaich' in folktales also refers to fairy-women. Some people mistakenly call the loch 'Loch na Gruagaich' which translates as 'Loch of the brown-haired girls'.

[ends]

**AN ARCHIVE RECORD FROM THE ANGUS MACLEOD ARCHIVE [www.angusmacleodarchive.org.uk](http://www.angusmacleodarchive.org.uk)**

Author: Angus Macleod

Date:

Original document title: Loch Àirigh na h-Aon Oidhche - The Loch of the One Night Sheiling

Location in physical archive: Series K, File 3, Section 55

NRAS reference: NRAS 4336/1/9/3

© Angus Macleod Archive