

Litir do Luchd-Ionnsachaidh

le Ruairidh MacIlleathain

*Each week the **West Highland Free Press** publishes the text for Roddy Maclean's "Letter to Gaelic Learners" which is broadcast at approximately 1150 every Friday morning on **BBC Radio nan Gaidheal (103-105 FM)****

Bha an oidhche dubh dorch. Bha i stoirmeil agus bha mi nam leabaidh, ag èisteachd ri fuaim na gaoithe taobh a-muigh na h-uinneig. Gu h-obann, chuala mi fuaim annasach. Bha cuideigin a' coiseachd taobh a-muigh an taighe. Cha chuala mi rud sam bith ach cnacail. Bha dà bhròig a' gabhail ceum air an rathad. Bha iad a' tighinn a dh'ionnsaigh an dorais mhòir. Agus ghabh mi eagal mo bheatha.

Bha an taigh agam air cliathaich chnuic, pìos beag air falbh o na taighean eile. A' coimhead a-mach air an uinneig, air oidhche mar sin, chan fhaicinn ach dorchadas. Dorchadas a' mhonaidh. Ach cha deach mi faisg air an uinneig. Bha an t-eagal mòr orm agus bha mo chridhe a' frith-bhualadh mar chudaig ann am mias.

'S e baile croitearachd a bh'ann, agus bho sheachdainn gu seachdainn is bho bhliadhna gu bliadhna cha do thachair mòran a chuireadh eagal air duine sam bith. Agus, mar bu trice, nan robh fear a' coiseachd anns an dorchadas taobh a-muigh an taighe, bhithinn air a dhol a-mach airson bruidhinn ris. Ach bha an oidhche seo eadar-dhealaichte.

'S e leabhar a bu choireach airson sin. Bha mi a' leughadh leabhar. Bha mo bhean air a dhol a-mach a dh'obair agus bhiodh e greis fhathast mus biodh i air ais, anns a' chàr. Bha mi nam aonar anns a' leabaidh, a' leughadh leabhar – mu dheidhinn taibhs. 'S e mearachd mhòr a bha sin!

B'e cuspair an leabhair an taibhs ainmeil ris an canar "Am Fear Liath Mòr", taibhs a bha a' fuireach air a' bheinn as àirde anns a' Mhonadh Ruadh, an darna beinn as àirde ann an Alba – Beinn Mac Duibh. B'e an sreapadair Tormod Collie a thug am Fear Liath Mòr gu aire a' mhòr-shluaigh an toiseach. Bha Collie na phroifeasair ann an Oilthigh Lunnainn agus bha e cuideachd na shreapadair uabhasach math. Aig coinneamh de Chlub a' Mhonaidh Ruaidh ann an Obair Dheathain ann an naoi ceud deug is coig ar fhichead (1925), dh'aidich e gun do ghabh e eagal a bheatha air Beinn Mac Duibh bliadhnaichean roimhe sin, ann an ochd ceud deug, ceithir fichead 's a h-aon deug (1891).

Bha e na aonar a' tilleadh bho mhullach na beinne air latha ceòthach nuair a chuala e fuaim annasach. Airson gach trì neo ceithir ceumannan a ghabhadh esan, bhiodh aona bhrag mhòr ann air a' chùlaibh, mar gu robh cas mhòr mhòr a' bualadh na talmhainn. Bha Collie a' smaoinichadh gur e famhair a bh'ann. Choimhead e, ach chan fhaic' e rud sam bith. Ach chum am fuaim a dol. Mu dheireadh, ghabh e eagal cho mòr 's gun do ruith e sìos a' bheinn airson ceithir neo còig mìle gun stad gus an do ràinig e a' choille.

Tha mòran eile ann a bharrachd air Collie, a tha ag ràdh gum fac' iad, neo gun cuala iad, am Fear Liath Mòr. Thuirt aona bhoireannach gun do bhruidhinn e rithe – ann an Gàidhlig. Gu mi-fhortanach cha robh Gàidhlig aice, is cha do thuig i e!

Bha beachd aig muinntir an àite cò bh'ann anns an Fhear Liath Mhòr – agus innsidh mi sin dhuibh ann an litir eile. Ach – co-dhiù – 's e sin an stuth a bha mi a' leughadh nuair a chuala mi duine a' coiseachd taobh a-muigh na h-uinneig air an oidhche dhorch stoirmeil a bha sin. An uairsin chuala mi an doras mòr a' fosgladh agus thuig mi nach e taibhs a bh'ann idir, ach mo bhean. Bha i air tilleadh dhachaigh trath, ach as aonais a' chàir. Tè dhonn bheag an àite Fear Liath Mòr, agus bha mi gu math taingeil!

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Faclan na seachdainne: cnacail: *a crackling sound*; dorchadas: *darkness*; taibhs: *ghost*; mearachd: *mistake*; am Monadh Ruadh: *the Cairngorms*; sreapadair (*also streapadair*): *climber*; ceòthach: *misty*; brag: *sharp sound*; famhair: *giant*; taingeil: *grateful*.

Abairtean na seachdainne: a dh'ionnsaigh an dorais mhòir: *towards the front door*; cliathaich chnuic: *the side of a hill*; eagal mo bheatha: *great fear, the fright of my life*; a bu choireach airson: *responsible for (past tense)*; nam aonar, na aonar: *by myself, by himself*; ris an canar: *who is called*; gu aire a' mhòr-shluaigh: *to the attention of the populace*; tè dhonn bheag: *a small brown-haired female*.

Puing ghràmair na seachdainne: Bha dà bhròig a' gabhail ceum air an rathad (*two shoes were taking steps on the road*). Dà changes the following noun in two ways – it lenites it, and it also puts it into the dative singular case (*cf English which pluralises the noun*). The dative case, by the way, is the one used with simple prepositions such as aig and air. This is simple with masculine words eg dà bhòrd, dà chù. But feminine words are *slenderised* in the dative singular, so we get air an uinneig, (*not air an uinneag*), ris a' ghealach (*not ris a' ghealach*) and air an làimh (*not air an làmh*). Thus two shoes is dà bhròig (*not dà bhròg*). Similarly, mo dhà làimh (*my two hands*). Learners should note, however, that the dative case in Gaelic has suffered over the last few decades and that many speakers today no longer follow this “rule”. The dative plural has disappeared entirely and is only encountered in song and poetry; we shall consider this at a later date. Perhaps the salient lesson in this exercise is that you need to know the gender of nouns!

Gnàths-cainnt na seachdainne: Bha mo chridhe a' frith-bhualadh mar chudaig ann am mias (*my heart was palpitating like a cuddy in a basin*). Think of a tiny, newly caught fish (*a cuddy, which is a young saithe*) flapping around in a basin which has little or no water in it, and you get a picture of the rapid but ineffectual palpitations of the author's heart! Cridhe is lenited because it is preceded by mo. You may have come across cudaig in the Runrig song “Rubh' nan Cudaigean” (*Cuddy Point*) – “S goilidh sinn na bairnich 's an taigh air Rubh' nan Cudaigean” – we (will) boil the limpets in the house at Cuddy Point. It sounds distinctly better in Gaelic!

If you have any opinions on “Litir do Luchd-Ionnsachaidh”, Roddy would like to hear from you. Please write to him at BBC, 7 Culduthel Road, Inverness IV2 4AD or at roddy.maclean@bbc.co.uk

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