

Litir do Luchd-Ionnsachaidh **le Ruairidh MacIlleathain**

*A special programme, in the form of a “letter”, written and compiled by Roddy Maclean, and specifically aimed at Gaelic learners who already have some knowledge of the language. A short vocabulary and comments on points of grammar and figures of speech are included with the text. If you have comments, Roddy can be contacted by e-mail at rodny.maclean@bbc.co.uk **

Bidh sibh eòlach air an fhacal “cailleach”. Mar is trice an-diugh, ’s e seann bhoireannach a tha sinn a’ ciallachadh, ach tha ciall neo dhà eile air, a bharrachd air a sin. ’S e “cailleach-oidhche”, mar eisimpleir, seòrsa de dh’eun a thig a-mach anns an dorchadas. Agus dè mu dheidhinn “cailleach dhubh”? Chan e seann bhoireannach a bhuineas do chinneadh dubh a tha sin a’ ciallachadh, ach boireannach sam bith a tha ann an comann sònraichte anns an Eaglais Chaitligich. “Nun” ann am Beurla. Agus cha leig i leas a bhith aosta.

Tha seann làrach fhathast ri fhaicinn ann an Sgìre Uige ann an Eilean Leòdhais ris an canar “Taigh nan Cailleachan Dubha”. Sin àite far an robh cailleachan dubha a’ fuireach o shean, nuair a bha sluagh an eilein fhathast Caitligeach. Agus tha baile ann am Beinn a’ Bhaoghla air a bheil “Baile nan Cailleach” far an robh cailleachan dubha a’ fuireach uaireigin. Ann am Beurla ’s e “Nunton” a th’air.

Ach tha “cailleach” cuideachd a’ ciallachadh nàdar de dhroch spiorad, neo bòcan, ann an cruth sheann bhoireannaich, a bha a’ fuireach anns a’ mhonadh ann an àite uaigneach agus a bha a’ toirt ionnsaigh air luchd-siubhail. Bha tè aca anns a’ mhonadh eadar Gleann Urchardain agus Gleann Moireasdan, gu siar air Loch Nis, ann an àite a tha fhathast gun rathad. ’S e “An Cràthach” a th’air an àite agus choisinn a’ chailleach cliù – droch chliù – dhi fhèin mar “Chailleach a’ Chràthaich”.

A-rèir beul-aithris na sgìre, bha i a’ fuireach ri taobh Loch a’ Chràthaich agus airson bliadhnaichean bhiodh i a’ toirt droch ionnsaigh air daoine a thug an rathad sin eadar an dà ghleann. Ach ’s e an rud a bha annasach mu deidhinn an dòigh ’s a bhiodh i a’ muirt dhaoine. Chan ann le sgian neo gunna a bheireadh i ionnsaigh orra idir. Bhiodh i a’ goid am bonaidean. An uairsin bhiodh i a’ dannsadh air a’ bhonaid gus an nochdadh toll ann. Goirid as dèidh sin, gheibheadh an duine, a bh’air a bhonaid a chall, bàs.

Thachair sin iomadh turas gu h-àraidh do fheadhainn a bhuineadh do Chloinn ’ic a’ Mhaoilein, neo do Chloinn ’ic Dhòmhnail. Tha e coltach gu robh gràin aig a’ chaillich air an dà chinneadh sin, ged nach eil fhios an-diugh carson. Tha seann òran, a rinn Dòmhnallach air choireigin, a’ toirt iomradh oirre.

*Cha tèid mi an rathad
A dh’oidhche neo latha.
Chan eil deagh bhean an taighe
'S a Chràthach.*

*Tha i trom air mo chinneadh,
Gam marbhadh 's gam milleadh.
'S gun cuireadh Dia spiorad
Nas fheàrr ann.*

Ach, mu dheireadh, rinn fear tapaidh a' chuis air a' chaillich, agus 's e Dòmhnallach a bh'ann. Bha e a' coiseachd seachad air a' Chràthach, nuair a leum a' chailleach air le droch rùn. Bha iad am bad a chèile greis mus do ruith a' chailleach air falbh le a bhonaid.

Ach bha fios aig an Dòmhnallach gu robh e ann an cunnart a bheatha agus ruith e an dèidh na caillich mar a' pheilear. Thug e greim oirre agus bha sabaid uabhasach ann eadar an dithis gus an do shàth e le sgian i. Gu fortanach dha cha robh toll anns a' bhonaid. Agus leis gu robh a' chailleach marbh, bha muinntir an àite saor gus a dhol seachad air a' Chràthach a-rithist.

Mar a bhios feadhainn a' deanamh chun an latha an-diugh. Agus ma chuireas iad am bonaidean dheth nuair a tha iad faisg air a' Chràthach, an ann saobh-chràbhach neo dìreach glic a tha iad? Faodaidh bonaid sam bith a bhith air a sguabadh air falbh leis a' ghaoith shuas anns a' mhonadh sin.

Mar a chanadh muinntir an àite sin, 's dòcha – guma fada beò sibh is bonaid air ur ceann!

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Faclan na seachdainne: cailleach-oidhche: *owl*; cailleach dhubh: *nun*; cinneadh: *clan, race*; làrach: *site of building*; Eilean Leòdhais: *Isle of Lewis*; Beinn a' Bhaoghla: *Benbecula*; bòcan: *evil spirit, goblin*; uaigneach: *deserted, lonely, remote*; Gleann Urchardain: *Glenurquhart*; Gleann Moireasdan: *Glenmoriston*; beul-aithris: *oral tradition*; bonaid, bonaidean: *bonnet, bonnets (headwear of men and women)*; annasach: *unusual*; gràin: *hatred*; tapaidh: *capable, brave*; shàth: *stabbed*; saobh-chràbhach: *superstitious*; glic: *wise*.

Abairtean na seachdainne: cha leig i leas a bhith aosta: *she doesn't need to be old*; ann an cruth sheann bhoireannaich: *in the shape of an old woman*; a' toirt ionnsaigh air luchd-siubhail: *attacking travellers*; gu siar air Loch Nis: *west of Loch Ness*; fhathast gun rathad: *still roadless*; choisinn X cliù dhi fhèin: *X won a reputation for herself*; thachair sin iomadh turas: *that happened many times*; Dòmhnallach air choireigin: *some MacDonald or other*; tha i trom air mo chinneadh: *she is tough on my clan*; 's gun cuireadh Dia spiorad nas fheàrr ann: *O that God would replace her with a better spirit*; nuair a leum a' chailleach air le droch rùn: *when the hag leaped on him with evil intent*; bha iad am bad a chèile: *they were fighting (specifically by grabbing each other by the hair)*; bha e ann an cunnart a bheatha: *he was in mortal danger*; mar a' pheilear: *like a (the) bullet*; thug e greim oirre: *he took hold of her*; gus an do shàth e le sgian i: *until he stabbed her with a knife*; air a sguabadh air falbh: *swept away*; guma fada beò sibh is bonaid air ur ceann!: *long may you live with a bonnet on your head!*

Puing ghràmair na seachdainne: ruith e an dèidh na caillich: *he ran after the hag*. Cailleach is a feminine word, as might be expected, and is here in the genitive case following the compound preposition an dèidh. It is a' chailleach in the nominative, and the genitive form loses the initial lenition and develops a slenderised ending. This is

quite regular cf a' chuthag (the cuckoo) which becomes na cuthaig(e) in the genitive (of the cuckoo), and a' chaileag (the girl) which becomes na caileig(e) in the genitive. The terminal "e", once universal in such cases, has become virtually optional today and is often omitted. Thus we get Beinn na Caillich in Skye, rather than Beinn na Cailliche. Similarly, a' Ghàidhlig becomes na Gàidhlig(e) in the genitive and we have Comunn na Gàidhlig rather than Comunn na Gàidhlig(e). Note also that because cailleach is feminine, it becomes slenderised in the dative case (the one used with simple prepositions) where there is an article present. Thus we get aig a' chaillich, not aig a' chailleach.

Gnàths-cainnt na seachdaine: gheibheadh e bàs: *he would die. Using the verb "faigh", get, with the noun "bàs" is one of several ways to indicate that death is occurring eg fhuair i bàs (she died), gheibh iad bàs (they will die), bha iad a' faighinn bàs (they were dying). In this case the verb, gheibheadh, is in the subjunctive mood. This is often used to indicated continued or habitual action and is employed in this letter to describe the continued actions of the hag on passers-by over a period of time. We will look at this again in a later letter. If you have any doubts about its use, consult your Gaelic teacher.*

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