

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 roddy.maclean@bbc.co.uk **

‘Ugh, ialtagan!’ thuir bana-charaid rium an là eile, ‘tha gràin agam orra.’ Chan eil i leatha fhèin. Agus ann an Alba tha daoine nas teagmhaiche mun deidhinn leis gun do chaochail fear à Machair Aonghais o chionn ghoirid, as dèidh gun deach a bhiteadh le tè. Ghabh e an fhìbin, galar dha nach eil leigheas ma thèid e ro fhada. ’S dòcha gum bi sibh eòlach air mar *rabies*.

Mura robh sibh cinnteach an toiseach gu dè bh’ ann an ialtag, bidh fios agaibh a-nise – mamail beag a bhios a’ sgèith air an oidhche. Gu dearbh, ’s e *ialtag-oidhche* a th’ aig feadhainn orra. Is canaidh cuid *dialtag* an àite ialtag. Ma tha an lobht agaibh làn dhiubh, dh’fhaodadh sibh a ràdh gur e ‘taigh ialtagach’ a th’ agaibh. Seadh, nach biodh sin math – nan canadh cuideigin riut, ‘agus dè an seòrsa taigh a th’ agadsa?’ Is gum freagradh tu, ‘tha taigh ialtagach!’ Cha chreid mi gun tigeadh iad a chèilidh ort!

Dhomh fhìn, chan eil càil ceàrr air ialtagan. Tuigidh mi gu bheil iad a’ cur eagal air cuid leis gur e creutairean na h-oidhche a th’ annta. Chan eil sinne ann an Alba cleachdte ri bhith a’ faicinn ainmhidhean a-mach air an oidhche, agus tha an dorchadas a’ cur eagal air feadhainn co-dhiù. Chuir mi seachad ùine turas ann am bothan anns an robh aon ialtag bheag a’ fuireach leatha fhèin. Tron là bhiodh i na cadal os cionn mo leaba agus bhiodh i fhathast ann nuair a rachainn innte.

Ach as dèidh greis, agus i dubh dorch fuar, bhiodh an ialtag a’ falbh is a’ dol air sgèith – seachad air m’ aodann. Bhithinn a’ faireachdainn oiteag bheag agus cha bhiodh dad eile ann. Cha chuireadh an ialtag dragh sam bith orm. Bha sin thall ann an Astràilia, ge-tà, agus bidh a’ chuid mhòr de mhamailean a’ tighinn a-mach air an oidhche anns an dùthaich sin. Chan e rud neo-àbhaisteach a th’ ann idir.

Agus chan e rud buileach neo-àbhaisteach a th’ ann a-bhos ann an Alba – ialtagan a bhith a’ fuireach ann an lobht. Bha mi a’ bruidhinn ri tè eile a dh’innis dhomh gu robh na ficheadan dhiubh aicese agus gu robh iad air an dìon fo òrdan sònraichte. Chan eil cead aig duine cron sam bith a dhèanamh orra. Bha am boireannach seo toilichte gu leòr agus cha robh i idir dhen bheachd gu bheil na beathaichean sin mì-dhreachail.

‘Ach am faca tu a-riamh an fheadhainn mhòra?’ dh’fhaighnich mi. ‘Na sionnaich sgiathach, mar a chanas cuid riutha?’ Tha iad cho mòr ri cait bheaga le sgiathan orra, is tha sùilean mòra aca – eucoltach ris an fheadhainn bheaga a tha rudeigin dall. Chunnaic mi iad cuideachd ann an Astràilia ach chan ann sa cheann a deas, far an robh an tè bheag os cionn mo leaba, ach anns a’ cheann a tuath. Bidh iad a’ falbh air an oidhche nam mìltean mòra, a’ coimhead airson biadh – measan gu h-àraidh. ’S toigh leotha rudan milis is, gu dearbh, chan òl iad fuil idir!

‘Chan fhaca mi iad,’ thuir mo bhana-charaid, ‘ach a bheil fios agad ciamar a nì iad na fiolmaichean oillteil eagalach a tha sin, anns a bheil na h-uimhir de dh’ialtagan a’ nochdadh ann an cladh?’ B’ fheudar dhomh aideachadh nach robh fios agam. ‘Uill,’ dh’innis i dhomh, ‘tha e gu math sìmplidh. Mus tig ciaradh na h-oidhche, bithear a’ cur

silidh air na leacan-uaighe. Agus nuair a thig an dorchadas, bidh na h-ialtagan a' tighinn nan dròbhan airson an silidh ithe.' Nach iongantach mar a tha sinn ag ionnsachadh rudan ùra gach là.

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Faclan na seachdaine: ialtag: *bat*; bana-charaid: *female friend*; Machair Aonghais: *Angus (the lowland part thereof)*; leigheas: *cure, treatment*; ialtagach: *abounding in bats, batty*; bothan: *bothy*; oiteag bheag: *slight breeze, draught*; a-bhos: *over here*; mì-dhreachail: *ugly, unpleasant to look at*; cladh: *cemetery*.

Abairtean na seachdaine: an là eile: *the other day*; tha gràin agam orra: *I hate them*; chan eil i leatha fhèin: *she is not alone*; as dèidh gun deach a bhìtheadh le tè: *after he got bitten by one*; ghabh e an fhibin: *he contracted rabies*; ma tha an lobht agaibh làn dhiubh: *if your loft is full of them*; cha chreid mi gun tigeadh iad a chèilidh ort: *I don't reckon they'd come and visit you*; leis gur e creutairean na h-oidhche a th' annta: *because they are creatures of the night*; chan eil sinn cleachdte ri bhith a' faicinn X: *we are not used to seeing X*; bhiodh i na cadal os cionn mo leaba: *she would sleep above my bed*; nuair a rachainn innte: *when I would go to bed*; na sionnach sgiathach mar a chanas cuid riutha: *the flying (winged) foxes as some call them*; eucoltach ris an fheadhainn bheaga: *unlike the small ones*; nam mìltean mòra: *in their (many) thousands*; fiolmaichean oillteil eagalach: *horror movies (horrible and frightening films)*; bithear a' cur silidh air na leacan-uaighe: *they put jam on the gravestones*; bidh iad a' tighinn nan dròbhan: *they come in droves*.

Puing-ghràimair na seachdaine: Ach as dèidh greis, agus i dubh dorch fuar, bhiodh an ialtag a' falbh is a' dol air sgèith: *but after a while, when it was pitch black and cold, the bat would leave and fly (go on the wing)*. Critics of Gaelic often seem to take delight in pointing out that words and sentences are longer than in English and that conveying the same information takes more space on the page. This is by no means universally true and some concepts and expressions are dealt with more succinctly in Gaelic. Here is an example. With agus i dubh dorch fuar, we express in five words an equivalent to the seven-worded English phrase 'when it was pitch black and cold'. The savings are made in two ways. Firstly, because of the use of this wonderful word agus which has many more meanings than just 'and'; used here at the start of what in English is a subordinate clause, it obviates the use of a verb (which is simply understood). In English the clause, starting with (in this instance) 'when' requires a verb ('was'). The other saving is on the conjunction 'and' placed between two adjacent adjectives. It's not required in Gaelic.

Gnàths-cainnt na seachdaine: Mus tig ciaradh na h-oidhche: *before dusk comes*. Ciar is a dark grey-brown and carries with it a sense of gloominess. Ciaradh therefore means a growing gloominess or darkness and is a perfect description of the arrival of dusk. An equivalent expression is ciaradh an fheasgair or, less commonly, ciaradh an anmoich.

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