

Litir do Luchd-ionnsachaidh

le Ruairidh MacIlleathain

A special programme, in the form of a “letter”, designed for 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, Ruairidh can be contacted at rodny.macleon@bbc.co.uk. This is Litir 447. Note that there is also a simplified version called An Litir Bheag which is likewise available on the BBC website. Litir Bheag 143 corresponds to Litir 447.

Bha mi aig taisbeanadh an latha eile. Taisbeanadh ùr-nodha. Chaidh mi a-steach. Bha mi aig an fhìor thoiseach dhen taisbeanadh. Bha am fear a bh' air cùl a' ghnòthaich ag iarraidh mo bheachd fhaighinn air. Thuig mi sin ceart gu leòr, oir bha e air obair mhòr a dhèanamh. Ach cha robh mi deiseil airson mo bheachd a thoirt oir bha mi dìreach aig toiseach an taisbeanaidh. **“Mol an latha mu oidhche,”** shaoil mi rium fhìn.

'S e seanfhacal feumail a tha sin. Mol an latha mu oidhche. *Praise the day around nightfall.* Bidh fios agad le cinnt – aig deireadh an latha – dè an seòrsa molaidh a nì thu air. Dh'fhaodadh tu an aon rud a ràdh ri duine ma dh'iarras e ort do bheachd a thoirt air leabhar, agus tu fhathast faisg air an toiseach. Mol an latha mu oidhche.

Bha mi a' leughadh o chionn ghoirid mu fheadhainn a bha ri sealg nam mucan-mara anns a' Chuan Sèimh anns an naoidheamh linn deug. Bha iad an tòir air na mucan *sperm* – an seòrsa a rinn Herman Melville ainmeil anns an nobhail aige *Moby Dick*. Agus mar a thachair ann am Moby Dick cha deach an tachartas seo buileach leis na sealgairean.

Bha an soitheach, an *Ann Alexander*, fo chommand a' Chaiptein John DeBlois. Cha chreid mi nach e Ameireaganach a bh' ann. Chunnaic iad muc-mhara mhòr. Bhiodh ola gu leòr innte! Chuireadh dà bhàta bheag gu muir, le mòr-ghath, no *harpoon*, anns gach tè. Ach gun rabhadh thug a' mhuc-mhara ionnsaigh chruaidh le a beul air a' chiad bhàta agus chaidh am bàta fodha. Chaidh cobhair a dhèanamh air na daoine. Bha na sealgairean deiseil anns an dàrna bàta. Ach thill a' mhuc-mhara agus chuir i an dàrna bàta fodha cuideachd.

An robh an Caipitean DeBlois deiseil airson an t-sealg a leigeil seachad? Cha robh. Bha e cho feargach 's a bha a' mhuc fhèin. Bha e airson a glacadh! Chaidh e gu toiseach an t-soithich mhòir le mòr-ghath na làimh. Ach chùm a' mhuc-mhara fada gu leòr air falbh airson a bhith sàbhailte.

Gu h-obann, chaidh a' mhuc fodha. Nuair a nochd i a-rithist, bha i a' dèanamh air toiseach na luinge aig astar. Bhuail i an long gu cruaidh. Bha na daoine a-nise a' gabhail eagal. Dh'fhalbh a' mhuc-mhara a-rithist. A-rithist shnàimh i a dh'ionnsaigh an t-soithich. Bhuail i fiodh cliathaich na luinge cho cruaidh 's gun do bhris i toll mòr innte. Bha an t-uisge a' dòrtadh a-steach. Bha an long a' dol fodha. Theich an criutha do na bàtaichean aca. Nuair a thàinig dol fodha na grèine, dè an seòrsa molaidh a rinn iad air latha a bha cho gealltainneach aig an toiseach?

An ath mhadainn cha robh càil aca ach falbh air a' chuan mhòr ann am bàtaichean beaga. Cha robh biadh no uisge gu leòr aca airson faighinn gu tìr. Chuir iad romhpa dhol gu tuath, feuch long eile a lorg. Thòisich na daoine air meòrachadh air dè thachradh dhaibh. Am biodh aca ris na companaich aca ithe? Dè an seòrsa molaidh a dhèanadh iad air an latha sin?

Chaidh iad gu tuath, dusan duine anns an aon bhàta, 's trì duine deug anns an tèile. Aig ciaradh an fheasgair, chunnaic DeBlois rudeigin. Seòl! Bha soitheach seòlaidh faisg orra! An ceann greis, bha iad air bòrd an t-soithich *Nantucket* a bha cuideachd a' lorg mhucan-mara. Bha iad uile slàn sàbhailte, ged a chaill iad an long **ann am meadhan a' Chuain Sèimh**. Mol an latha mu oidhche.

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Faclan na Litreach: taisbeanadh: *exhibition*; ùr-nodha: *brand new*; mòr-ghath: *harpoon*; an tèile: *the other one [an tè eile]*.

Abairtean na Litreach: fìor thoiseach: *the very beginning*; bha am fear a bh' air cùl a' ghnòthaich ag iarraidh mo bheachd fhaighinn air: *the guy who organised [was behind] the matter wanted my opinion on it*; thuig mi sin: *I understood that*; bha e air obair mhòr a dhèanamh: *he had done a lot of work*; dè an seòrsa molaidh a nì thu air: *what sort of praise you will give it*; ri sealg nam mucan-mara: *hunting the whales*; cha deach an tachartas seo buileach leis na sealgairean: *this happening wasn't completely successful for the whalers*; fo chommand a' Chaiptein X: *under the command of Captain X*; cha chreid mi nach e Ameireaganach a bh' ann: *I think he was an American*; bhiodh ola gu leòr innte: *there was plenty of oil in her*; chuireadh dà bhàta bheag gu muir: *two small boats were put to sea*; gun rabhadh thug a' mhucmhara ionnsaigh chruaidh: *without warning the whale attacked*; chaidh cobhair a dhèanamh air na daoine: *the men were rescued*; chuir i an dàrna bàta fodha: *she sank the second boat*; deiseil airson an t-sealg a leigeil seachad: *ready to give up the hunt*; bha e airson a glacadh: *he wanted to catch her*; a' dèanamh air toiseach na luinge aig astar: *making for the bow of the ship at speed*; shnàimh i a dh'ionnsaigh an t-soithich: *she swam towards the vessel*; bhual i fiodh cliathaich na luinge cho cruaidh 's gun do bhris i toll mòr innte: *she hit the wood of the ship's side so hard that she made a big hole in her*; latha a bha cho gealltainneach aig an toiseach: *a day that was so promising at the beginning*; cha robh càil aca ach falbh: *there wasn't nothing for them but to leave*; airson faighinn gu tìr: *to get to land*; chuir iad romhpa dhol gu tuath: *they decided to go north*; meòrachadh air dè thachradh dhaibh: *contemplating what would happen to them*; am biodh aca ris na companaich aca ithe?: *would they have to eat their companions?*; ciaradh an fheasgair: *dusk*; an ceann greis: *a little while later*.

Puing-chànain na Litreach: **ann am meadhan a' Chuain Sèimh:** *in the middle of the Pacific Ocean. Why did I not say meadhan a' Chuain Shèimh (as you will hear in some parts of the Gàidhealtachd) – because the grammatical rules tell us that the adjective in the genitive singular (where the article is present) should be lenited in the same way the noun is lenited). But there's another grammatical rule that traditionally takes precedence – the terminal “n” in Chuain prevents the lenition of the “s” in Sèimh. It would also prevent lenition of “d” or “t” (it's why we say Beinn Dearg rather than Beinn Dhearg). Thus: meadhan a' Chuain Mhealltaich but meadhan a' Chuain Dìoghaltaich.*

Seanfhacal na Litreach: **Mol an latha mu oidhche:** *praise the day around nightfall ie don't be too quick to make a judgement on something – wait until you have experienced it properly.*

* Tha “Litir do Luchd-ionnsachaidh” air a maoineachadh le Seirbheis nam Meadhanan Gàidhlig.