



[Mairead Nì' Dhonnchaidh - Margaret, Duncan's Daughter]

le Calum Macmhaoin / by Malcolm Macmillan

Mairead Nì' Dhunnachaidh

Ann an teis meadhan baile Chromor ann an sgìre na Pàirc ann an Leodhas, tha cnoc ris an abrar 'Cnoc an Taigh Mhòir'. Tha grunnan de thaighean snasail air a' chnoc seo anns an latha a th'ann, ach is ann a thàinig an t-ainm bho thaigh mòr a bh'air a' chnoc anns na linntean a dh'fhalbh - taigh mòr anns an robh a' fuireach uachdaran fearainn aig an robh fo a chùram sgòid mhath de sgìre na Pàirce.

Bha aig aon àm a' fuireach anns an 'Taigh Mòr' fear do'm b' ainm Dunnachadh - duine treun, foghainteach, agus ged a bha e sin, bha e socair agus stòlda agus bu rian beatha dha, 'An rud nach buin dhuit, na buin dhà'.

Bha nighean bhoidheach aig Dunnachadh do'm b' ainm Màiread - nighean mu sheachd bliadhna deug de dh'aois, air an robh cuailleàn òr-bhuidhe sìos mu a ghuaillan. Bha tòrr aig Dunnachadh mu a deidhinn, agus bheireadh e dhi nì sam bith a bha 'na chomas.

Bha Peigi mun aon aois ri Màiread, agus bha i a' fuireach ann an taigh beag faisg air an 'Taigh Mhòr' - taigh a bha air a chumail airson luchd obraich Dhunnachaidh. Bha i 'na nighean thlachdmhor, ghasda, agus bu chompanach dileas do Mhàiread i.

Air oidhcheannan fada a' gheamhraidh cha robh aig na caileagan de chur-seachad ach a bhith a' figheadh agus ag eisdeachd ri na sgeulachdan a bhiodh na bodaich ag innseadh fhads a bhiodh iad a' càradh na lìn agus gach inneal iasgaich eile; ach an uair a thigeadh an samhradh bhiodh iad a' siubhal air feadh na sgìre, a' buachailleachd a' chruidh.

Aon latha, thuir Màiread ri a h-athair, 'Nach biodh e glé mhath nan togadh sibh bothan beag ri taobh Loch Crois Ailein. Dh'fhuirinn-sa ann airson greis mhath den t-samhradh, agus dh'fhuireadh Peigi còmhla rium. Bhiodh e glé mhath dha na h-aighean a bhith ag ionaltradh mu bhruachan an locha'.

'Ma ta,' fhreagair a h-athair, 'Nach cuala tu riamh mu "Sheilch Loch Crois Ailein". Cha bhiodh e sàbhailt do chaileagan òga mar a tha sibh-se a bhith am fianuis Loch Crois Ailein ann an tuiteam na h-oidhche. Chan eil fios gu dè an cron a dheanadh an uilebheist oirbh nan tigeadh e an taobh a bha sibh. Ach nam biodh sibh deònach air fuireach mu mhìle na b'fhaisg air an taigh, tha lochan beag taitneach ann, far am bhithinn-sa deònach air bothan a thogail dhuibh'.

Rinn Dunnachadh mar a gheall e agus thog e bothan ri taobh an lochan thaitnich, a bha fhathast gun ainm fhaighinn. Bha Màiread ri a faicinn gu tric mu bhruachan an lochain, agus an ùine ghoirid is e 'Loch Nighean Dhunnachaidh' a chanadh moran ris an loch, agus bha sgorr os cionn an locha a fhuair an t-ainm 'Sgorr Nì' Dhunnachaidh'.

Chuir Màiread agus Peigi, agus cuid de na companaich eile aca, seachad iomadh latha sona anns a' bhothan, ag iasgach nan lochan agus a' siubhal nam blàr a bha mun cuairt orra. Bha am breac glé phailt ann an Loch Crois Ailein air an dara taobh agus air Loch Caitseal air an taobh eile, agus an drasda 's a rithist bheireadh iad bradan à abhainn Thorosdaidh. Bha na h-aighean a bha iad a' buachailleachd air an deagh bheathachadh agus bha a h-uile nì a' dol gu maith dhaibh.

'Tha mi toilichte,' arsa Màiread ri Peigi aon fheasgar ciùin, 'gur ann an seo a thog m' athair am bothan, agus nach b' ann far an robh mis' ag iarraidh'. 'Tha gun teagamh,' fhreagair Peigi, 'agus chan eil eagal oirnn gun cuir seilch no uilebheist air bith dragh oirnn a seo.'

Ach cha robh cùisean cho math 's a bha Peigi an dùil. Latha bha siud, chaidh Màiread agus Peigi sìos chun an loch le slatan ann an dùil gun glacadh iad breac no dhà a dh' itheadh iad gu an suipeir. Cha robh e fada gus an robh deagh shuiper fo an comhair, agus bha iad a' pasgadh an slatan an uair a chual' iad fuaim air an cùlaibh agus dh' eirich uilebheist an àird às an loch. Bha ceann dubh air mar ceann eich, agus druim glas le earball fada coltach ri beathach snàigeach. Bha coltas oillteil air agus bha Màiread 's Peigi air chrith le eagal ach chaidh aig Màiread air deanamh air a bhothan cho luath 's a bheireadh a casan i.

Ach! Mo Chreach! Thug i sùil gus am faiceadh i càite an robh Peigi, agus chunnaic i an t-seilch, le aon sgal dha earball, a' sguabadh Peigi don loch. Bha Peigi a' deanamh oidhirp air fhaighinn gu tìr, ach bha an t-seilch roimpe gach uair. Bha Màiread air tìr ach cha robh nì ann a b' urrainn dhi a dheanamh gus a companach a chuideachadh ach clachan a fhuair i am bòrd an loch a thilgeadh air an uilebheist. Bhuail i e uair no dhà ach cha do chuir sin dragh sam bith air. Chunnaic i gu robh Peigi a' lagachadh agus fhuair i clachan na bu mhotha, ach cha do leig e air gu robh i ann, gus mu dheireadh thug Peigi suas, agus bhàthadh i.

Thionndaidh an t-seilch an uair sin gu dhol an deidh Màiread. Bha deagh fhios aice nach seasadh am bothan beag aice fada ris, agus nach robh tèaruinteachd dhi ann. Rinn i às sios Gleann Eoirsiadair, ach ma rinn, bha esan às deidh aig deagh astar. Chunnaic Màiread, ged a bha an t-eagal gu ìre bhig ga dalladh, gu robh am beathach air a chruth atharrachadh an uair a thàinig e gu tìr. Bha e nis na bu choltaiche ri each agus thuig i gur e each-uisge a bha ann.

Rinn i suas a h-intinn gur e deanamh air an taigh agus air a h-athair a b' fheàrr, ged a bha astar fada aice ri ruith. Thug i sùil air a cùlaibh agus chunnaic i gu robh an t-each-uisg' a' tighinn fhathast, agus ged a bha i a' dol na bu luaithe na bha i a riamh, bha an uilebheist a' toirt a-steach oirre. Ged a bha e nis na bu choltaiche ri each, cha robh an t-earball aige air fàs càil na bu lugha agus, leis a mhaill a bha seo a' cuir air, cha robh e idir comasach air a dhol cho luath ri each a' dian ruith. Nuair a thuig Màiread seo thug e spionnadh às ùr dhi, agus chaidh aice air a dhol cho luath agus nach robh an t-each-uisg' a' tighinn na b'fhaisg oirre. Bha i a' fannachadh ach bha fhios aic gu robh a beatha an crochadh air cumail a' dol gus a ruigeadh i cobhair nach robh ri fhaighinn na b'fhaisg oirre na fadhail Loch Chromoir.

An uair a thoisich i a' dìreadh a-mach às a' ghleann, bha i a' fàs cho fann agus gu robh i a' faireachadh gu feumadh i toirt suas. B'fheudar dhi stad, agus chuir i a-mach na bha i air itheadh, agus a measg seo bha cnap mor fala. Ach chaidh aice air a' dhol air adhart agus thug e beagan misnich dhi an uair a chunnaic i an uilebheist a' stad gus an fhuil a bha i air a chur a-mach òl.

Lean i air a h-adhart gus ma dheireadh dhirich i suas gualainn cruic agus chunnaic i taigh a h-athair. Thàinig glaoth às a beul a bha cho cruaidh agus gun cuala a h-athair i, an uair a bha e a' toirt sùil a-mach mun deigheadh e a chadal.

Chrioslaich e a chlaidheamh mu a mheadhan gun dàil agus rinn e air an èigh oilteil. Nuair a nochd e ris an fhadhail chunnaic e Màiread a' tighinn, 'na ruith, a nuas am bealach os cionn an loch, agus uilebheist air choreigin às a deidh. Choinnich e iad aig an fhadhail, agus rinn e air a bheathach le chlaidheamh rùisgte. Bha am beathach sgith às deidh a bhith ruith an tòir air Màiread, agus cha do sheas an t-sabaid fada gus an d'fhuair Dunnachadh làmh an uachdair air an uilebheist agus mharbh e e.

Bha Màiread air tuiteam ann an laigse, agus b'fheudar do Dhunnachadh a cur tarsuinn air a ghuailean airson a toirt dhachaidh, ach cha robh e fada gus an robh na thachair air an oidhche oilteil ud air a dhol às a cuimhne.

Ach tha cuimhne air na tachartasan seo fhathast anns na h-àiteachan don tug an sgeula seo ainm - 'Sgorr Nì' Dhunnachaidh', 'Blàr na Fala', agus 'Meall na h-Eighe'.

Duncan's Daughter Margaret

Right in the middle of the village of Cromore in Park on the Island of Lewis, there is a hill called 'Hill of The Big House'. There are a few lovely houses on that hill nowadays, but the name came from a big house that was there many years ago - a big house where a tacksman who had under his name a large portion of the district of Park.

At one time there was a man living in the 'Big House' called Duncan - a strong, mighty man, but even though, he was a quiet, calm man who lived by the philosophy, 'If it doesn't concern you, don't concern yourself with it.'

Duncan had a lovely daughter called Margaret - a girl of about seventeen years of age, with long golden hair down over her shoulders. Duncan thought a lot of her, and would give her anything he could.

Peggy was about the same age as Margaret, and lived in a small house near the 'big house' - a house that was kept for Duncan's workers. She was a nice, pleasant girl, and a faithful friend to Margaret.

On the long winter evenings the girls' only pastime was knitting while listening to the stories the old men related while mending their nets and other fishing equipment; but when summer came they would wander the hills shepherding the cows.

One day, Margaret said to her father, 'Wouldn't it be great if you would build a small bothy beside Loch Crois Ailein. I could stay there most of the summer, and Peggy could keep me company. It would be good for the heifers to be grazing near the loch.'

'Well,' her father answered, 'Have you never heard of the Loch Crois Ailein Monster. It would not be safe for young girls like you to be seen near Loch Crois Ailein at nightfall. Who knows what harm the beast would do to

you if it got near you. But if are willing to come about a mile in nearer the house, there is a nice wee loch there, where I would be happy to build you a bothy’.

Duncan kept his promise and built a bothy near that nice loch, which was at that time un-named. Margaret was often seen at the edge of the loch, and it was not long before the loch was known as ‘Duncan’s Daughter’s Loch’, and there was a sharp rock above the loch that acquired the name ‘Duncan’s Daughter’s Rock’.

Margaret and Peggy, and some of their friends, spent many a carefree day in the bothy, fishing on the loch and wandering the fields round about. There were plenty trout on Loch Crois Ailein on one side and on Loch Caitseal on the other, and now and again they would get a salmon out of the Torostay river. The heifers they were shepherding were well nourished and everything was going well for them.

I am glad’, said Margaret to Peggy one calm evening, ‘that my father built the bothy here, and not where I wanted’. ‘Without a doubt’, replied Peggy, ‘And we have no fear of either a monster or a beast will bother us here’.

But things were not as good as Peggy thought. One day, Margaret and Peggy went down to the loch with rods to catch one or two trout to eat for supper. It wasn’t long before they got enough for a good supper, and as they were tidying up their rods they heard a noise behind them and a beast rose up out of the loch. It had a black head like a horse’s head, and a grey back with a long tail like a creepy crawly. It looked horrible and Margaret and Peggy were shaking with fear and Margaret headed for the bothy as fast as her legs could carry her.

But! My Goodness! She looked to see where Peggy was, and she saw the monster, with one swipe of its tail, sweeping Peggy into the loch. Peggy was trying to get ashore, but the monster kept her back every time. Margaret was ashore but there was nothing she could do to help her friend but throw stones she found by the loch at the beast. She hit it once or twice but that didn’t have any effect on it. She saw that Peggy was weakening and so she got bigger stones, but it didn’t even let on that she was there, until in the end Peggy gave up, and she drowned.

The monster then turned to go after Margaret. She knew that her wee bothy couldn’t protect her from it, and that she wasn’t safe there. She made off down Glen Eoirsiadair, but as she did, it went after her at good speed. Margaret saw, although she was almost blinded by fear, that the beast had transformed its shape as it got ashore. It was now more like a horse and she realised that it was now a sea horse.

She made up her mind that the best thing to do was to head for the house and her father, although it meant that she would have to run a long way. She looked behind and saw that the sea horse was still chasing, and though she was running as fast as she ever did, the beast was getting closer. Although it now looked more like a horse, its tail had not shrunk and, with the delay that was causing it, there was no way it could run as fast as a horse could. When Margaret realised this it gave her encouragement, and she made off so fast that the sea horse couldn’t catch up on her. She was exhausted but she knew that her life depended on her reaching help, which was as far away as the edge of Loch Cromore.

As she was climbing up out of the glen, she felt so weak that she thought she would have to give up. She had to stop, and brought up all her food, and amongst this there was a large clot of blood. But she had to carry on and it gave her a little hope when she saw the beast stop to drink the blood she had put up.

She carried on until in the end she climbed up a hill and saw her father’s house. She let out a scream that was so loud her father heard it, as he was taking a look outside before going to bed.

He tied his sword about his middle without delay and made for where the awful scream came from. When he reached the edge of the loch he saw Margaret coming, running, down the brae above the loch, and some beast chasing after her. He met them at the edge and, and he went for the beast with his bare sword. The beast was tired from chasing Margaret, and the fight did not last long before Duncan got the better of the beast and killed it.

Margaret had collapsed with exhaustion, and Duncan had to carry her home over his shoulder, but it wasn’t long before she forgot about what happened on that dreadful night.

But these events are still remembered in the places that bear the names - ‘Duncan’s Daughter’s Rock’, ‘Field of Blood’, and ‘Hill of the Scream’.

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