

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 * This is Litir 257.*

Dh’fhàg sinn Naochadair Chlach na Cùdainn an t-seachdain sa chaidh, agus e ag innse dhuinn mun t-seann drochaid thar Abhainn Nis. An t-seachdain seo, tha mi airson naidheachd eile aige innse dhuibh. Tha i mu dheidhinn fear a bha iomraiteach o shean ann an Inbhir Nis – an Siorra’ Dubh. Aig an àm ud bha cumhachd aig siorraman binn bàis a thoirt air eucoireach, agus cha robh an Siorra’ Dubh leisg ann a bhith a’ dèanamh sin. Ach chaidh a’ chùis a dhèanamh air turas le eucoireach, agus seo mar a thachair e.

Bha fear ann, Somhairle Camshron, a bhiodh ri creach. Air an oidhche, nuair nach biodh ann mar sholas ach “lòchran nam bochd”, bhiodh an Camshronach a-muigh a’ goid sprèidh. Airson ùine mhòr cha tàinig e fo smachd an lagha. Ach, mu dheireadh, thàinig, agus thug an Siorra’ Dubh binn bàis air.

An oidhche mus robh e gu bhith air a chur gu bàs, chaidh aig a’ Chamshronach air faighinn a-mach às a’ phrìosan ann an Inbhir Nis. Rinn e air a’ mhonadh gu tuath air Loch Nis.

Bhiodh Somhairle a’ falbh bho àite gu àite fad an t-siubhail gus nach fhaigheadh duine greim air, ach bhiodh e a’ tilleadh a-rithist is a-rithist do dh’ aon àite faisg air ceann a tuath Loch Nis. B’ e sin uamh faisg air talamh cas creagach, ris an canar a’ Chreag Dhearg, os cionn bruach an locha. Bha deagh adhbhar aige a bhith ann a sin, oir chitheadh e duine sam bith a bh’ air an rathad eadar Inbhir Nis agus Druim na Drochaid.

Là bha seo, cò chunnaic e air an rathad fodha, ach an nàmhaid a bu mhò a bh’ aige – an Siorra’ Dubh. Bha an siorram air muin eich, ach bha e a’ siubhal na aonar. Dh’ fhan Somhairle am falach gus an robh an siorram ri thaobh, is leum e a-mach air. Na dhàrna làimh bha gunna, a bha ag amas air broilleach an t-siorraim. Na làimh eile, bha amhaich an fhir-lagha.

Seo an còmhradh mar a tha Iain MacIlleathain ga aithris. Uill, feumaidh nach e còmhradh a bh’ ann, oir cha bhiodh comas aig an t-siorram dad a ràdh, agus cròg an eucoirich a’ greimeachadh amhaich! Seo na thuirt an Camshronach ris: “A Shiorra’ Dhuibh, tha thu agam a-nise fo mo chumhachd. Thathar an tòir orm mar bhiast na talmhainn; ma dh’ fheuchas mi ri coinneachadh ris an teaghlach agam, bidh mi ann an cunnart gun loisg duine sam bith a thogras orm. Cha b’ urrainn dhomh a bhith na bu mhiosa dheth agus a-nise, mura bòidich thu gu sòlaimte a’

bhinn a th' orm a chur an dàrna taobh, agus gun innis thu gu poblach gur e duine saor a th' annam aig crois Inbhir Nis Dihaoine sa tighinn, loisgidh mi ort sa bhad.”

Bha an siorram cruaidh ach cha robh e gòrach. Dh'aontaich e ri iarrtas an eucoirich. Agus Dihaoine, mu choinneimh bàillidhean a' bhaile agus mòran eile, oir 's e là margaidh a bh' ann, thuit an Siorra' Dubh gu poblach gu robh Somhairle Camshron saor is nach robh binn bàis air tuilleadh.

'S dòcha, ged is e “an Siorra' Dubh” a chanadh iad ris, gu robh taobh dubh is taobh geal aige, mar a bh' aig bàta Mhic Iain Gheàrr – agus mar a bh' aig Somhairle Camshron. Oir bho sin a-mach cha do bhris an Camshronach lagh sam bith. Dh'fhuirich e gu sìtheil is gu h-onarach faisg air Inbhir Nis gus an tàinig a shaoghal gu crìch.

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Faclan na seachdaine: naochadair: *nonagenarian*; iomraiteach: *renowned*; An Siorra' Dubh: *The Shirra Dhu* (“*black sheriff*”); Somhairle Camshron: *Samuel Cameron*; lòchran nam bochd: *the moon (lantern of the poor)*; sprèidh: *livestock*; Druim na Drochaid: *Drumnadrochit*; nàmhaid: *enemy*; crois Inbhir Nis: *the [market] cross of Inverness*.

Abairtean na seachdaine: mun t-seann drochaid thar Abhainn Nis: *about the old bridge across the River Ness*; bha cumhachd aig siorraman binn bàis a thoirt air eucoirich: *sheriffs had [the] power to give criminals death sentences*; cha robh e leisg ann a bhith a' dèanamh sin: *he wasn't slow [lazy] to do that*; chaidh aig X air faighinn a-mach: *X managed to get out*; rinn e air a' mhonadh: *he made for the high country*; fad an t-siubhail: *all the time*; chitheadh e duine sam bith: *he would see any person*; cò chunnaic e air an rathad fodha: *whom did he see on the road below him*; bha X air muin eich: *X was on horseback*; gun loisg duine sam bith a thogras orm: *that anyone who pleases may shoot me*; mura bòidich thu gu sòlaimte: *unless you solemnly swear*; gu sìtheil is gu h-onarach: *peacefully and honestly*; gus an tàinig a shaoghal gu crìch: *until his life ended*.

Puing-ghràmar na seachdaine: Na dhàrna làimh bha gunna, a bha ag amas air broilleach an t-siorraim. Na làimh eile, bha amhaich an fhir-lagha: *in his first hand was a gun which was aimed at the sheriff's chest. In his other hand was the neck of the law-man. Three points here. Remember that we say dàrna (second) where in English “first” is used. Also note that làimh here is in the dative singular (in his hand), slenderised because it is a feminine noun. Dàrna is lenited because the word is commanded by the masculine possessive article, a. The article is hidden because it is combined with the preposition ann an in na.*

Seanfhacal na seachdaine: gu robh taobh dubh is taobh geal aige, mar a bh' aig bàta Mhic Iain Gheàrr: *that he had a black side and a white side, like Mac Iain Gheàrr's boat. The meaning of the proverb is presumably that we all have a good and bad side to our natures. But it comes from the story of Mac Iain Gheàrr who was a noted pirate on the west coast. His galley was painted white on one side and black on the other so that, having a different appearance on its return journey from how it appeared when on its way to plunder a particular locality, it was left*

unmolested by those seeking revenge. But is there a deeper meaning to the proverb and, notwithstanding the happy ending to the story of the Siorra' Dubh and Samuel Cameron, does a dual nature still camouflage an inherent dishonesty in the heart of man? I'll leave you to ponder it.

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