

Stories in the Doric from the Monastery of Fable

By *Sanners Gow*

The Carbide Lamp.

“Tell’s a story uncle Sanners!” I’d been haein a forty winks aifter supper in jist yon fine state atween asleep an awake lulled nae doot by the heat fae weel stackit peat fire.

“Go on uncle Sanners a ghosty yin!”

A hand shoogled ma shooder. I opened an ee an lookit intae the illtricket broon een o ma gran nephew Wullty. The rest o the faimily an workers came in an githered about the cheek o the fireside gettin themsels settled so nae tae be oot in the feary bits far the shadas dance wi the peatfire flame. The kitchie deemie came in wi a tray loaded wi buttered scones, corters o breid an big lumps o her speciality fairmhoose cheese. She hung the kettle ontae the swye abeen the flames but tae ae side for she didna want the water tae bile ower fast afore the storie’s end. Clearin ma thrapple I says tae Wullty,

“Dird a puckle mair peats on the fire min an turn doon the lampy a bit!” Abody laughed for they kent fine I liket dark corners afore I tellt a ghost story.

“Weel noo far div I start?” I left a wee pause jist tae get abody’s attention but a quick glance tellt ma I hid that weel eneuch for a half dizen pair o een were rivited on ma. Scratin ma pow tae gie masel a wee bittie time tae think.

“Weel! Fit I’m aboot tae tell ye happened aboot saxty years ago fin I wisna muckle aaler than Wullty here!” I rubbed his curly heed an got a flash o his laughin broon een.

“My alest bridder hid been teen on for cattlie at the Mains o Backchynes up atween Huntly an the Cabrach. He’d moved fae the Hame fairm o Iden jist doon the road here at the November Term. Oor fadder hid flitted him wi the cairt and hid left me tae gie him a hand settlin in. My fadder hid left me wi his bike tae wun ma wye hame so I bade a fyowe days an gid Jockie a caa tee. Onyhoo it came time for me tae hud hame the wye so Jockie teen oot fadder’s bike fae the neepshed far it hid been keepit oot o ma wye in case I connached his pride an joy by rinnin aboot on’t fin I shouldn’ave been.”

I leaned ower and gave the fire a powke wi the poker makin the peats tae lowe. I could see abody beginin tae wun nearer the fire as they got mair intae my story.

“Michty but I wiz fair excited at the thocht on gettin a hurl on the aal man’s bike. Jockie gid ma some spunks tae licht the carbide lamp because it wid be dark o’clock or I wun my wye back here tae Iden.

“Fit’s a ‘carbide lamp’? This wiz fae Wullty he’d a puzzled expression ontae his face an I realised eence mair aboot the generation gap.

“Hiv neen o ye seen a carbide lamp?” I speired. Only Maggie the kitchie kent aboot them for she mind her ain fadder usin een, abody elsed shook their heeds.

“Weel noo, lang afore battery lights came on the go fowk used wee ile or carbide lights ontae their bikes. Carbide wiz the best by far but affa dangerous. It wiz aboot the size o a half pint milk bottle wi a roon reflector oot at the front and a spring clip tae the hinmaist far ye hung the lamp ontae the wee bracket afore the handlebars o the bike. The bottom o the lamp hid a wee cup ye screwed aff an fulled wi carbide pooder. Ye got it fae the smiddy and

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wiz jist a grey coloured pooder. The tap o the lamp hid a wee tank fullid wi water. On this tank there wis a tap ye turned that aloood wee drappies o water tae faa doon intae the carbide. Noo fin the twa o them mix a gas comes aff an ye licht yer lamp and close the reflector an fit a fine bight licht it gees oot. So that's yer carbide licht. I rubbed Wullty's curls again, "Got it noo min?"

"Onyhoo! Back tae the story. Jocky says tae ma that I could cut aff a lot o miles if I teen the aal Drover's road doon the glen till it eventually comes ontae the main road. The Smiddy hid been tellin him about it that very mornin. Weel tae cut a lang story short I sets sail doon the aal Drover's road!"

The kettle began tae hotter so the kitchie teen the poker an pushed the chyne hingin fae the ranntle-tree takin the kettle weel aff the heat. Tae widna be served till the end o the story an nae afore. I did notice though in the flickerin o the fire that a twa or three scones hid already disappeared fae the tray.

The Drove road wiz gye roch in bits but if ye watched fit ye were deein ye could fair knipe on. The forenicht wiz drawin in an it got a bittie owercastr and it bein in a glen it wisna lang or I'd tae licht the carbide lamp. In a fyowe seconds I hid her gyan. The sough o the lamp wi the fine bricht licht cheered ma up a bittie for it wiz a gye lonely bit o the country, nae a hoose or waasteens hid I so far cast ee upon. As I said the road wiz gye roch and the dirll o't put the lamp oot so I'd tae stop an licht it again. Nae a spunk could I find, the box must've fell oot o ma pooch somewye back along the road and nae wye wid I find them noo and it sae dark. Well I'd jist hid tae walk wi the bike until sic times as I came tae a hoose an speired for a licht. Aifter a gye traichle I reached a wee steen brigg an fae there on the track seemed tae be in better repair but I wiz still feart tae use fadder's bike in case I damaged it in ony potholes I'd nae see. Fitiver I cairried on for anither half mile or so walkin wi the bike fin I came upon a hoose and could see lights throwe the windae. I wiz glaid o that I can tell ye. Wullty came a bit closer tae my seat an some o the ithers shoochles a bittie nearer tae the fire, "The hoosie wiz a wee bit but-na-ben wi a sod reef tae keep oot the weather. I chappit at the door and aifter a minty or twa an aal woman opened the door huddin a lamp. She lookit as if she's been greetin. I tellt her my problem an speired at her if she might hae a match so I could licht my lamp. She tellt ma tae wyte a meenit an she put the door tee ahin her but the latch niver teen so the door swung slowly open. In the middle o the fleer I could see the body o an aal man in a coffin set ontae twa trestles I understood noo why the aal woman hid been greetin. She came back and handed me a box o matches. I apologised for botherin her at sic a time. The saat tears were rinnin doon her cheeks as she tellt ma it wiz her man in the coffin and that he wiz tae be beeriet this comin Feersday. I thanked her for the matches and asked o her if she needed ony help but she shook her heed an said "Na laddie there's naebody can help ma noo but thank ye aa the same. Jist gyang you an live a lang lang happy life for that is fit's been ordained for ye." Wi that she shut the door. I feltt Wullty drawin inaboot tae ma legs and could see the ithers expressions gettin a wee bit spoked.

I walked on the road a bit afore I made tae licht the lamp but fin I tried tae scrat the match neen o them wid strike ivery yin hid been spent.. The peer aal woman must've been confused. I couldna gyang back so I jist walked on till at lang last I reached the main road. I

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got a licht fae a man on a bike and made it hame here at about half twal. I wint tae ma bed athoot waking abody up but I couldna stop fae thinkin about the peer aal woman. In the mornin I tellt my mither about fit happened the nicht afore. Ae me but she wiz affa put oot thinkin o the aal woman alone at sic a bad time so she'd nithing else adee but tae get fadder tae yoke the gig. She put in tatties, meal, cheese and eggs and the three o us set sail back the wye tae her hoosie. It wiz a fine bricht November mornin so the hurl didna tak affa lang. We reached the heed o the road that I'd came doon the nicht afore an turned up it. Alang the road we went but nae sign o habitation did we fin apart fae an aal waasteens wi brambles and a big rowan tree that grew fae the inside. We went back up the road a couple o times but nae sign o the hoosie could be seen ava. Since we were so near far oor Jocky vrocht fadder decided tae visit and maybe speir at him I there wiz anither road. Fin we arrived by gweed luck the aal fairmer cheil wiz there so fadder speired at him about a hoose far the aal man hid deet an wiz tae be beeriet this comin Feersday. The fairmer didna ken an said there wisna a hoose on that road apart fae the ruins wi the rowan tree growin fae its intimmers. Fadder got me tae tell him fit happened yestreen and as I tellt the fairmer I could see his face change colour a wee bittie. Eence I feenished he tellt us that fin he wiz a laddie there wiz an aal woman faa's man hid died but the nicht afore the funeral the hoosie hid been brunt tae the grun and the aal woman hid died in the fire. That wiz the ruins we'd passed wi the tree inside.

Abody liked the story and mair than one o them lookit ower their shooders intae the shadas. "Anither een uncle Sanners!" Wully wid hae me tellin stories aa day. "Well!" says I "et ma hae a cup o tea and a buttered scone for ma mooth is wersh wi the speakin." I looked at the kitchie and said "An I micht get a wee bittie o yer fine hame made cheese!" Maggie gasped fin she saw that the cheese and mair than half the scones hid been pilfered while I'd been tellin the story.