

Murag - Windfall

- This short story was published on The Scotsman Gaelic page
- It was described by the page editor, Ronnie Black, as a 'splendid "Twilight Zone" sort of story
- Murag means 'windfall', although one that comes from the sea (coming from the word muir)¹

Murag

Ged bha an litir air tighinn 'sa mhadainn, cha robh Dughall aig an dragh a fosgladh gus an deidh an tràth feasgair.

Although the letter had arrived in the morning, Dougal hadn't bothered to open it until after the evening meal.

An uair sin shuidh e cho fada ga sgrùdadh is gun duirt Sìne, car seirbh, 'Dè an naidheachd a th' agad a tha cho inntinneach is nach toir thu feart?'

Then he sat for so long scrutinising it that Jean said, somewhat sharply: 'What news have you got that's so interesting you're not paying attention?'

Rinn Dughall gàire ach thuirt e, 'Naidheachd inntinneach, annasach gu leòr. Tha cunntas a' bhanca sealltainn gum bheil seachd ceud not agam a bharrachd na bha duil a'm'.

Dougal laughed, but said, 'News that's interesting, and unusual, enough. The bank account shows that I've got £700 more than I was expecting.'

'A chiall,' arsa Sìne, 'nach tusa a tha mi-shuimeil de do chuid airgid. Chan fhairich thu bhuat e nuair chosgais mis' e. Is iomadh rud air am bheil sinn feumach.' Thug i sùil mun cuairt.

¹It's probably not as significant a benefit as a windfall implies - its other meanings are beach litter, flotsam, jetsam; or clothes of bad quality

'Good grief', said Jean, 'you're very careless with your money. You'll not notice the loss of it then when I spend it then. There's plenty of things that we're needing.' She looked round about.

'Cha chosg thus sgillinn seach an àbhaist or chan ann leinn a tha 'n t-airgead.'

'You'll not spend a penny more than normal because the money doesn't belong to us.'

'Tha fios nach eil thu cur mearachd as leth a' chomputer?'

'You're surely not saying that the computer made a mistake?'

'Is am bheil thusa an dùil gun deach agamsa air seachd ceud a chur sìos gun fhios dhomh?'

'And do you think that I'd manage to deposit £700 without knowing about it?'

'Mur do chreach thu banca,' ars' ise, ach a' gàireachdaich.

'Not unless you'd robbed a bank', she said, but laughing.

Ged ghàir Dughall e-fhèin bha e suidhichte gu leòr nuair bhac e dhi sgillinn seach an àbhaist a chosg gus am faigheadh e cothrom solas a chur air a' mhuraig seo.

Although Dougal laughed too, he was absolutely determined when he forbade her to spend a penny more than usual until he got the chance to shed some light on the windfall.

Ged bha Sìne ga bhrodanachadh ruith beagan ùine mun deach Dughall do'n bhanca. An sin bha fear-stiùraidh a' bhanca aoidheil gu leòr gus an do thuig e gun robhas a' cur mearachd as leth an luchd-cunntais. Thuirt e facal neo dhà ri fear-cuideachaidh ach ri Dughall cha duirt e ach, 'Is ann fìor ainneamh a chuirear an leithid seo as ar leth ach chan eil sin a' ciallachadh nach fhaod e tachairt.'

Although Jean prodded him about it, a little while went past before Dougal went to the bank. The bank manager was pleasant enough until he realised that the tellers were being accused of making a mistake. He said a word or two to an assistant, but all he said

to Dougal was: 'It's very rare that this kind of allegation is made, though that's not to say it couldn't happen.'

Bha plìon thoilichte air aodann mun dh'fhàg Dughall air nach robh ach meinn an iongnaidh.

There was a smirk on the manager's face by the time Dougal left - while Dougal himself was still looking bewildered.

Thainig duine caol, cròn, a thug sùil gheur air Dughall os cionn na leth-ghlainnichean a bha e a' cleachdadh, mun do chuir e pàipearan sìos m'a choinneamh. 'An e siud an t-ainm is do làmh-sgrìobhadh?' ars esan mar nach robh teagamh aige as an fhreagairt a thigeadh.

A thin, wizened man came over, and took a close look at Dougal over his half-glasses, before he put some papers down in front of him. 'Is this your name, and your signature?' he said, as though he had no doubt about the answer that would come back.

'Is e', arsa Dughall, 'Is mise Dughall MacEachrain is theirinn gum b'e sin mo sgrìobhadh mur b'e nach aithne dhomh dohm ciamar a b' urrainn da bhith.'

'It is', said Dougal. 'I am am Dougal MacEachern and I would say that this is my handwriting, although I don't know how this could be.'

Thog am fear eile na pàipearan ri uchd mun duirt e, 'Chan aithne dhomhsa fear eile dhe t'ainm a tha deanamh gnothach ris a' bhanca seo. An diugh dh'aithnich mi thu cho luath is a leag mi sùil ort. Ach gum bheil do làmh air leigheas - bha band agad oirre - tha thu gun atharrachadh. Bha nì eile ann a thug orm beachd a ghabhail ort. Shìn thu dhomh seachd cuairsgeanan le ceud not as gach fear. Am bheil sin a' dùsgadh do chuimhne?'

The other man picked the papers up and held them to his chest before he said 'I do not know another man with your name who does business with this bank. I recognised you today the minute I looked at you. You look exactly the same, apart from the fact that your hand has healed - you had a bandage on. There was another thing that I noticed about you. You passed through to me seven wrappers with £100 in each one. Does this ring a bell now?'

'Chan eil sian a chuimhn' a'm air,' arsa Dughall a' blaomadh.

'I have no recollection of this', said Dougal, staring with astonishment.

'Is coma,' ars esan is a falbh. Thionndaidh e aig an doras ag ràdh, 'Dòcha gun d'fhuair thu airgead ri linn milleadh do làimhe. Dòcha gun d'fhuair thu buille sa cheann aig an aon àm.'

'Never mind', he said, on his way out. He turned at the door and said, 'Maybe you got some money as a result of the damage to your hand. Maybe you got a blow on the head at the same time.'

Ma bha plòn air cha do nochd e sin gus an robh e taobh eile an dorais. Airson an fhirstiùraidh, ged nach do chleith e a thoileachas, ghabh e beannachd leis gu cùirteil ag ath-ùrachadh a bheachd gum faodadh a làn earbsa a bhith aige anns an luchd cunntais.

If he was smirking he didn't show it until he got to the other side of the door. As for the bank manager, although he didn't hide his pleasure, he said his farewell quite cordially and repeated his opinion that Dougal could have complete confidence in the bank staff.

Cha b' ann riaraichte le cùisean a bha Dughall ged bha Sìne ag ràdh, 'Tha mi 'n dòchas gur tric a bhitheas tu ris a' chleas. Creididh mi nis ann an 'Jekyll and Hyde'.

Dougal wasn't satisfied with matters at all. Jean however said: 'I hope you'll play this trick often. I believe now in Jekyll and Hyde.'

Ach ann cùl inntinn Dhughail bha eagal, is bhac e do Shìne not de na seachd ceud a chosg. Aon latha, is deanamh a rathaid le èigin air sràid far an robh domhlachd dhaoine, chaidh duine òg seachad air, duine air an d'rinn e aithne-gun-chuimhne.

But at the back of Dougal's mind was fear, and he forbade Jean to spend a pound of the £700. One day, when he was struggling to get across a busy road that was heaving with people, a young man went past him, a man that he recognised without remembering² who it was.

²Gaelic has a word for this phenomenon - aithne-gun-chuimhne

Ach a' dol seachad sràid thrang eile sheas e gu rag na bhùinn³ gun ghluasad gus an do tharraing fear air adhart e ag ràdh gu cròsda 'Tagh àit' eile gus cur as dhut fhèin.'

But when he was going across another busy road he suddenly stopped, stock-still, and didn't budge until another man dragged him on and said to him crossly, 'Choose another place to do away with yourself.'

Bha e air bualadh le cinnt air inntinn Dhughail gum b'e a mhac samhla fhèin a chunnaic e. Ba e nis toilichte gum b'e duine nàdarra a chunnaic e ged dh'fhaodadh gun cailleadh e seachd ceud not. Bha e mar fhiachaibh air an duine a lorg.

Dougal had realised with absolute certainty that it was an exact likeness of himself that he had seen. He was happy now that he had seen the other person⁴ although it would mean he would lose £700. It was his obligation now to find the man.

Mun d' rinn e a lorg dhùisg e air oidhche as trom laighe eagallach. 'Dè tha cearr?' dh'fhaighnich Sìne.

Before he managed to find him he woke one night from a terrifying nightmare. 'What's wrong?' asked Jean.

'Dh'aisling me gun robh mi marbh is air seacharan,' thuirt e.

'I dreamed that I was dead', he said, 'and wandering the world.'

'Dad a dh'eagal dhut,' arsa Sìne. 'Caidil'

'Don't be afraid', said Jean. 'Go back to sleep.'

Air an ath fheasgar sgrùd i aodann fhad 's a bha e a' leughadh a' phàipeir a bha i air a shìneadh dha, pàipear a bha deanamh aithris air bàs aithghearr a fhuair fear da 'm b' ainm Dughall MacEachrain, fear a bha 'n aon aois ris an Dughall a bha leughadh.

³bhùinn - stock still, literally like a statue or image, which is an interesting other level of meaning given the context

⁴in the Gaelic: that he had seen a 'natural person', that is, a living person rather than a supernatural being

The next evening she watched his face closely while he read the paper that she had passed over to him, a paper that reported the sudden death of a man called Dougal MacEachern, who was the same age as the Dougal who was reading the story.

An do sheas fear eile 'na bhùinn air sràid gun neach ga putadh gu tèarainteachd is e 'm beachd gum fac' e a mhac samhla?

Had another man stood stock still without someone to push him to safety when he thought he had seen his double?

'Faodaidh tu an t-airgead a chosg', thuirt e gu dubhach.

'You can spend the money', he said, sadly.