

## DICTIONARY

The dog came up to Andy's table and licked a small piece of chicken off the side of his plate. Instead of shouting at the dog or asking for a new plate, Andy took out a notebook and wrote:

"Dog. An animal that thinks it likes curry."

The dog looked puzzled for a moment by the taste in its mouth and was then gripped by a powerful sneezing fit. Andy pushed his plate aside in sympathy – it had been a very spicy curry – and waved at a passing waiter, who ignored him. Andy picked up his pen again and wrote:

"Ignore. What a waiter does."

He left some money on the table and walked out.

The dog, which had wandered in unnoticed from the street, looked at Andy's half-eaten plate of food. Then she followed Andy through the open door.

Andy had walked several yards down the road before he noticed the dog was following him.

"Shoo," he said. "Go away, dog."

He was mildly irritable after his bad lunch and not in the mood for company, canine or otherwise. All he wanted to do was find a quiet corner and get on with writing his dictionary.

Andy had had the idea for the dictionary a couple of weeks ago. It hadn't been an idea so much as an inspiration triggered by Laura walking out on him.

"You never say anything," she told him. "You just stare at me like a dog."

"I don't think you're a dog," he said.

"Like *you're* a dog I meant," she said. "Like you're doing now."

He stared at her. A thought came into his head.

"Relationship," he said, "The longest distance between two humans."

"There's no need to be such a smart alec," said Laura.

She took his hands.

"I love you," she said. "I really do. But these days, it's like..."

She let go his hands.

"It's like you're looking at me from inside a phone box."

"Am I still a dog," asked Andy, "when I'm looking at you from inside the phone box?"

"There's the cab," said Laura, but Andy didn't hear anything.

She picked up her suitcase, bumped open the door, and went downstairs.

Andy looked at the closing door and listened to it click.

"Love," he said. "An open and shut case."

After that the *definitions*, as he called them, started coming thick and fast.

"Tears. The usual method for emptying the cloud in your head."

"Renting. A way of ensuring that you never own a place that you don't want to live in."

"Tinned food. Its motto is, 'Don't say I didn't warn you.'"

The last one wasn't really a definition, but he liked it, so he wrote it down anyway. Then he wrote:

"Dictionary. A diary set to shuffle."

“You’re not allowed pets,” said Andy’s landlord that evening.  
Andy looked at the dog.  
“She’s not a pet,” he said.  
“Don’t split hairs,” said the landlord. “Either she goes or you go.”  
“If I go,” said Andy, “does that mean she can stay?”  
“Right,” said the landlord. “I’ve had enough of you and your dog. You can get out, the pair of you.”  
The dog looked at Andy.  
“All right,” Andy said.

The bench was hard, and the dog made it worse by trying to use Andy as a pillow.

“You’re the soft and furry one,” Andy told it, but he stroked her head anyway.

There was an old KFC bucket on the ground in front of them, which Andy only noticed when an old woman threw some coins into it.

“Generosity,” Andy wrote in his notebook, “The most unexpected of qualities.”

Andy slept on the bench. He didn’t know it, but during the night the dog snarled at two men and bit a third. The next day, when he woke, the dog was drinking from a small plastic box of water and there were more coins in the KFC bucket.

Andy took the dog to the café and they had coffee and a ham sandwich.

“Ham,” wrote Andy, “A glossy meat made from a muddy animal.”

“Andy?” said Laura.

Andy looked up at her. He had been searching the dog for fleas (“Flea. An acrobat who will work for food”) and had not seen Laura approach.

“What are you doing here?”

Andy shrugged. “It’s a long story,” he said.

She looked at him.

“No it isn’t,” she said. “Is that your dog?”

“I suppose so,” said Andy. “Her name is Laura.”

Laura looked at him.

“You named your dog after me?” she said, half-amused.

“No,” said Andy. He showed her the dog’s collar. LAURA, it said.

“OK,” said Laura. She did the thing where she thrust out a hip in one direction and looked off in the other. Then she said:

“You can come home with me if you like.”

“But what about,” Andy began. “Everything,” he finished.

This time Laura shrugged. “What can I say?” she answered. “I like your dog.”

They walked home together, the dog between them.

“Love,” thought the dog, “A state of perpetual emotion.”

© David Quantick 2019