

**IF YOU GIVE A DOG  
A DICTIONARY**

**BRYAN DAVIS**

**NOT SO FAMOUS DOG TALES - BOOK #3**

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*If You Give a Dog a Dictionary*

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# CHAPTER I

## Webster is Our Friend

On a cold winter morning, Steve stood behind the 7-Eleven cash-register counter and watched a woman at the gas pumps filling her car's tank. In the 5 a.m. darkness, she shivered as the icy wind whipped against her coat, forcing her to try to bundle it close and pump the gas at the same time.

When the wind blew the woman's coat open, Steve winced. If only he could run out there and help her, but the general manager's rules said he couldn't leave the store if no other employees were present. And on this frigid night, only Sherlock the border collie kept him company as he read a magazine spread open on the floor in front of the dairy case.

Steve touched the microphone button at the control console. "Ma'am, if you lock the dispensing nozzle, you can sit in your car while

the tank fills. It's normally not advised, but in this weather, I think it's a good idea."

"I wish I could." She swiveled her head as she searched for where Steve's voice came from. "But the lock thingy isn't working."

"I apologize for that." Steve turned toward Sherlock and waved a hand. "Sherlock, I'm appointing you as my temporary assistant because I have to go out for a minute, and I can't leave the store without an employee here."

Sherlock looked at him as he barked a reply that Steve mentally translated from the *dog* language. "Your request is acceptable, Mr. Barkley," he said with an accent that sounded British, "and your motives are unimpeachable."

"Uh ... yeah. Thanks." Steve hustled to the door and opened it, letting a chilly blast into the store that swept Sherlock's magazine against the dairy case's glass. Outside, the woman drove her car away, apparently deciding not to finish filling her tank.

Sighing, Steve closed the door and sauntered toward the dairy case, his hands in his pockets. Using his nose, Sherlock pushed the magazine

back in place on the floor, opened it, and began reading again.

Steve walked to him and looked at the article—a report about animals on a local farm. “Is the article the reason you wanted the magazine open in front of the dairy case? Because the store’s dairy products come from a local farm?”

Sherlock looked at him. “No. Because the luminance is superior here.”

Steve grinned. “Oh. I thought maybe you wanted to *milk* more value out of the article.”

Sherlock tilted his head. “Was that an attempt at a witticism?”

“Yes. It was a pun.”

“A pun?” Sherlock let out an odd yip that sounded like, “Webster.”

A small box on his collar, almost completely hidden by his long coat, barked in return. “Speak the word you wish defined.”

“Pun,” Sherlock said.

The box responded with, “Pun, noun, a play on words, sometimes using one definition of a word in place of another and sometimes using a similar sense or sound of different words. A





pun is a form of humor, though some consider it to be the lowest form.”

Sherlock bobbed his head. “Thank you, Webster.”

“That is so cool!” Steve crouched and touched the box on Sherlock’s collar. “Where did you get this amazing dictionary?”

“From my human. She is an inventor who understands *dog* as well as you do. Perhaps even better. It can also translate speech from other species, such as crows, cats, and camels, though I haven’t come across any camels to give that a try.”

“She’s an inventor? What’s her name?”

“Humans call her Chloe MacDonald.”

Steve gasped. “Your human is Dr. Chloe MacDonald? *The* Chloe MacDonald?”

“That’s what I said, though I did not include an emphasized *The*.”

“But isn’t she ... well ... kind of old now? I mean she has to be at least eighty, maybe ninety. Is she still inventing?”

“She is eighty-six in human years. But her mind is still quite sharp, and she invented my dog dictionary several weeks ago. Unfortunately,

she fell and injured her hip, and she is now rehabilitating in a convalescence facility.”

“Oak Meadows?” Steve asked.

“Yes.”

“Strange coincidence. I’ll tell you why in a minute. But first, how’s she doing?”

“I am concerned about the care she is receiving. You see, I am allowed to visit her on certain days of the week for one hour, and she is getting more and more agitated.”

Steve furrowed his brow. “Agitated? What’s upsetting her?”

“She says she is not being treated well but won’t give me any details. I offered to hide under the bed to watch for anyone who is troubling her, but she said she would handle it herself. I am concerned that she will not be able to do that.”

“Who is taking care of you while she’s gone?”

“She invented an automatic feeder and waterer that has a two-month supply. A neighbor checks on it once each week, though she doesn’t know how to read the meter that checks for poison in the food and water.”

Steve blinked hard. "Poison? Who would want to poison you?"

"No one that I know of, but my human is ..." Sherlock thought for a moment before saying, "Webster, what's the word for being overly concerned about someone trying to bring harm?"

The box on his collar replied with, "Paranoid. Adjective. The noun form is paranoia. Extreme fear or distrust of others."

"Yes," Sherlock said with a nod. "My human is paranoid."

"Then is it possible that she isn't being mistreated at all?"

"That is possible, but I would like to learn the truth one way or another."

"Maybe I can help," Steve said.

"How?"

"The strange coincidence I mentioned. I recently finished a nurse assistant training class. Since it's Tuesday, it's my day to try out a new job. I'm supposed to go to Oak Meadows to follow a nurse around to learn more about their facility and a nurse assistant's duties there."

"Ah. That is most fortuitous."

“Fortuitous? Doesn’t that mean lucky or fortunate?”

“Yes. Tuesday is the day I am allowed to visit her, and it’s a special Tuesday. It’s family day. You and I could go together.”

“Even more fortuitous. I could probably bring *my* family along.” Steve rose and looked at his watch—5:58 a.m. “Holy tuna fish! Marla will be here at any second!”

Sherlock looked at the entrance door. “How odd that Chance didn’t come this morning to warn us about the time. Maybe it’s too cold today. He is a rather old fellow.”

“Maybe.” Steve patted Sherlock’s head. “Go out the back way. You know how to unlatch the door, right?”

“Yes. It’s a simple device.”

“Perfect. I’ll meet you outside in a couple of minutes, and we’ll go to my house together, and then to see Dr. MacDonald.”

Sherlock ran to the back door while Steve hurried to the counter to grab his coat and a dog leash. The moment he put the coat on and pushed the leash into a pocket, Marla parked

her pink minivan in the store's lot. Steve zipped up his coat and faced the door, smiling as he whispered to himself. "We're going to meet Chloe MacDonald, the world famous inventor. The kids will be so excited."