

The story of 'the'...

One day a Word woke up, drew back the curtains, and looked out on the world it knew and loved. As it gazed across the lines of the lexicography below it couldn't help feel, deep down in its spelling, that in some strange way the day ahead was going to be different.

The Word was only a small, simple three-letter construction and wasn't used to being troubled by such vexing thoughts. So it tried to forget about it, while tucking into a light breakfast of toasted apostrophes, with some freshly squeezed commas.

Throwing open its wardrobe it pondered on what face it would wear that day. Should it be one of the old favourites like 'Garamond', 'Courier', or perhaps something a little formal like 'Baskerville' or 'Times New Roman'? These faces were safe, easy to read, thus guaranteeing regular work in the many turgid tomes of unnecessary bureaucracy.

However, somewhere in the back of its typography a small voice urged it to try something a little more daring and unusual. Suddenly the Word remembered a little number it had picked up at one of those alphabet boutiques a couple of weeks ago. It reached deep into the wardrobe and pulled out the 'Emme Script' still wrapped in plastic.

The new face fitted well, hugging its kerning tightly, giving it a frail almost childlike appearance, but with strong hint of the feminine to its line.

Today she was going to be feminine. She couldn't remember when she had been so feminine; no more accountants' letters or boardroom minutes, it was time for this little lady to try paragraphs new.

Page 3

As the Word headed off to the lexofile - where all idle words go to find out where they could be next written – she dreamed of trilogies, novellas, and concrete poetry. Would she be hand written in a budding authors note book, or perhaps land a supporting role in the next great American novel? What she really dreamed of was landing the opening sentence of most published book ever, the Bible – she would be immortalised in reprints forever.

The exchange was packed; in fact the Word couldn't remember the last time she had seen so many different typefaces in one place at one time. There had to be some typographic law against this, she thought, as she moved off into the melee.

It was at times like this that the Word was glad that she was only three letters long. She remembered meeting

‘Antidisestablishmentarianism’

at a party, and though impressive in length and complex in construction, he soon found his career hit the margins because he was too long for the modern printed sentence. He had a few flurries in spelling competitions in America, only to end up doing charity work for dictionaries in the reference section.

As she edged her way towards the job board she felt a polite tap on the curve of her ‘h’. She turned and there standing before her, bold as brass, were three capital letters ‘URL’. She was amazed that such an acronym would dare to show its face in the exchange. It was a well-known fact that words had a strong

dislike for members of the 'Abbrevhood', because of their total lack of respect for all things grammatical.

Page 4

"Fancy trying something new?" whispered the URL.

"Oh... I don't know... perhaps...depends," murmured the Word.

"It's... er... on-line. Okay with that?" replied the URL in an even quieter whisper.

The word could feel her spacing starting to tighten and she began to worry that she might italicise in public. Although digital was responsible for nearly everything written these days, on-line was taking it too far. If she was really honest she missed simplicity of the 'hot metal on thick cartridge' days.

"On-line? Does that mean I'll wearing 'Arial' all the time?"

"Not necessarily and when I say on-line, it does come with the usual health benefits package that includes the option of being printed."

"What kind?" asked the Word.

"The usual office paper, but it does come with full range formatting options and top-line full colour potential."

"Yeah they all say that but nothing ever comes out of it. I've been doing office work for as long as I can remember, I was hoping to up-grade to a magazine, or even a book - something with a bit of gloss or texture."

"This is on-line. It's bigger than that; this is all about access, infinite space and 'Up-to-dativeness'. But if it's titles you're interested in - it's a catalogue."

"A catalogue about what?"

"Books."

"That's different."

The journey through pixilation made her feel a little nauseous, but she soon forgot how uncomfortable she felt as the whirl and colour of 'wwwdot' flew past the windows of her trans-sentence. Finally they pulled up outside the site canteen and the word got out and went inside.

The canteen was packed with computer commands, dialogue boxes and a whole range of text faces milling around waiting for their movement orders.

"Looks like these guys have all been shopping at the same discount face fitters," she mumbled to herself as she tried to find a place to sit.

"Works outfitters," said a voice from beside her.

She turned to see the word 'Search' lounging about with the descenders of his 'h' crossed, and sporting a smart but practical 'Verdana' number.

"Pardon?" replied the Word.

"Sorry, I didn't mean to listen in there, but this is a place of work, we're under construction - you designer faces are supposed to be here yet."

The Word looked her self up and down and then round at the bland selection on view – he was right. "But they said..."

"Don't worry if you're here, you're here for a purpose."

The Word looked around her. "Is this fuss normal?"

"Not normally" 'Search' replied.

"Have you done this kind of thing before?"

"Baby I've been in these gigs right from the start. Sometimes they try to use 'Find', but they always come back to me in the end. Rumour has it..."

"What... Rumour here?" the Word said cutting in.

"No, he's long gone."

"Shame. I haven't seen him in a long time."

"I think he got picked up in a round robin e-mail."

“Oooh nasty. I hear e-mails don’t use punctuation, he could end up anywhere with nothing to snack on.” They were momentarily distracted when two sub-commands collided, cancelling each other out and retranslating a nearby subhead into High German in the process.

Page 6

“So is a catalogue always like this?” asked the Word.

“A piece of imported body text told me this kind of thing has never been tried by the source before.”

“You have to admit it is a little unusual, it must come as a bit of a shock.”

“They’ll get used to it, they usually do. Once they hit the screen they’ll soon forget what it was like. Personally I don’t know what all the fuss is about. They serve the same purpose; the main difference being they don’t get to through the roller coaster ride of four colour printing.”

Word smiled to herself as she remembered the experience of being printed. “I love all that. The smell... the paper”

“You’re not one of those touchy feely kind of words are you?”

“Well, I do like a bit of ink and texture if I’m honest.”

“Get with the programme girl! This is a catalogue about books not a book. There is a difference. It’s a practical thing not a work of art. I suggest if that’s what you’re looking for then head straight over to delete and trash and go and find yourself a good book.”

The Word considered his advice for a moment, after all it is what she had always wanted, but then again if she were really honest with herself she wouldn’t know where to start.

“There are so many to choose from, it’s very confusing.”

“I know the big pink ones are writing so much these days, so many new titles. If you stick around here for a while I’m sure you’re going to pick up a few useful contacts. It is about books after all.”

“True,” mused the Word.

A few commands passed near by and looked down their listings, shook their heads and moved on. The word snatched up a couple of colons that happened to be near by, savouring their rarely used flavour.

“Why do you think they decided to move everyone into on-line anyway?”

“That’s easy. With all this extra material flooding in these days, they can now keep up with it all, that’s the advantage of these places they’re easy to change. The always up-to-date-catalogue. You have to admit it has a certain ring to it.”

The Word smiled hoping that ‘Search’ would never try out one of those self-writing programmes she had heard about. Suddenly a drop shadow passed over the two of them as the ‘Cursor command’ appeared before them.

“Ah there you are. I’ve been looking for you everywhere. You were supposed to report to the font folder as soon as you got here.”

“Oh sorry didn’t know this is my first time as a designer face.”

“Well - welcome aboard. Time to go.”

At this ‘Search’ straightened and whispered to the Word, “Watch out for these guys they think they own the place because they have a direct line through to the big pink ones.”

Page 7

The Word had nothing to fear, the glide was quick and she soon found herself installed into the design programme. By the white ultra-glow decor and black polo-neck serifs around she knew she had to be in design.

“Ooooh, lovely little tight number, you’ll go down a storm with our little the ‘Slice and dice’.” Oozed the ‘co-ord’.

“Slice and dice?”

“Slice and dice are designers, and ‘Drag and drop’ are writers - thankfully we don’t get too many of them around here.”

“No writers! Where’s delete? I want out now.”

“Baby... honey... can I call you that? Relax and take it easy. You’re in a book, written by a writer but it has been designed not just laid out – so as to speak. A lot of books are going that way now-a-days.” The Word looked a little blank. “You know, when is a designer, not a designer? When they’re a typographer - heard that one before?”

“I have to admit it is new to me,” mumbled the Word half apologetically.

“It’s all very complicated and sensitive. Let’s just say there are a few unresolved issues in both camps. Occasionally it all flairs up and when that happens, just keep your head down. Whatever you do don’t bring the subject up down in fonts, or you’ll be stuffed into ‘Wingdings’ or ‘Dingbats’ and before you know it you’ll be sidelined into ‘Symbols and TM’ where you’re in for a really dull existence.” He turned and the whole wall lit up and spun round to reveal what looked like blueprints. “Okay let’s see - ah, there you are. Looks like you’re in prime position – lucky you. If you’d like to glide over to ‘Opened font file E’, then wait there and design command will move you into place when they’re ready.

“Thanks.”

“Enjoy.”

Page 8

The open font file was like a relaxed lounge area, where various faces sat in little cliques chatting to each other. As she passed by she could see that each group were in fact families of faces that she didn’t recognise – most comprised of the same relatives - bold, light, condensed and the occasional heavy. She went up to the singles bar and ordered a long cool exclamation mark.

“Been here before?” asked a rather ‘Esoteric’ word dressed in a face that suited him.

“Er no,” replied the Word bending her exclamation mark over to take a sip.

'Esoteric' looked her up and down and slugged back a dash. "Well I can see the S&D has finally cottoned on the way things are now."

"What do you mean?"

"It's down to you lot now. I haven't been used for ages, but I'm still here so can't complain I suppose."

"I'm surprised. I would have thought you would be in great demand."

"I was in the 'Brody days'. But they're long gone. Occasionally I get a bit of retro-stuff, when the S&D goes all nostalgic. No, these days it's the little feminine numbers, like your good self, that are making the headlines. Though, I will add, if wasn't for us the whole san-serif scene would have allowed the Helvetica and Futura mafia to dominate the scene totally."

Page 9

The Word was beginning to find all this very interesting; she had never met anyone with such an in-depth knowledge of faces before. She felt she could stay there for ages and take it all in. Before she never really paid much interest, dressing up in the same classic serif faces which probably why she ended up being used in so much administration.

Suddenly, the low under-chat of the room stopped, as a lone trendy looking command sauntered into the room.

"Oh, here's the boy," whispered 'Esoteric'.

"What's he looking for?"

"Oh he's 'font select'- really loves himself."

"I can see," muttered the Word as she watched the handsome command scan the room.

The command stopped and focused on her.

"You're the one."

"Me?"

"You're the new import aren't you?"

“I suppose... I never thought of myself like that, it makes me sound like a commodity,” replied the Word trying not to capitalize and underline.

“She’s new to design.” Esoteric cut in sensing her anger.

“That’s why she’s in demand. New is design. How many dashes has it been now? Ten? Twenty?” said the command directing his gaze onto ‘Esoteric’.

“THERE IS NO NEED TO BE RUDE!!!!” shouted the Word unable to hide her anger and contempt. The barman nodded and poured her another four exclamation marks.

The command was taken aback and paled by 40%. He wasn’t used to single faces, without the protection of a family, talking back to him like that. “Easy lady, easy.”

“Well it’s totally unnecessary.” she replied her anger subsiding a little.

“s...orry,” offered the command his shading returning by 60%.

“I hope you mean it, because if you don’t I’m going no where and I’ll happily stay here with my good friend and learn more about the history of design.”

‘Esoteric’ brightened a little, “I haven’t even started on Gill.”

“Sorry I’m going to have to relieve you of your friend; she’s hot and is wanted right now. In fact if we don’t get out there soon the S&D will start banging on the box, rebooting and checking the connections. So Madame if you wouldn’t mind could you please follow me.”

“Maybe I should start loosing my setting a little more often, perhaps I’d get that kind of respect,” said ‘Esoteric’.

“Put yourself in for a bit of re-kerning and you never know,” replied the command prepared to guide the Word to her new home.

Page ten

It was better than the Word had ever imagined. She got the prime slot on the title page, not only that she was ‘doppelgangered’ so she appeared twice in

the same sentence there were only two other words to share the three leader snack dots. It turned out that the other two words 'Story' and 'of' had been redesigned to match her face exactly. She got to know her new companion well and soon discovered that this was an e-book that was going to be on-line as well being printed as a book. A limited edition sent out to a special audience. She got to experience the roller coaster ride of being printed as well as being able to appear in many places at the same time – which gave her a whole new perspective on things.