

## LINGUISTIC

By Edward Einhorn

(A white room, with both a living room and kitchen section. There are two exits leading to the bedrooms and one imposing looking that leads outside. SANDY and JOHN are sitting in the living room. SANDY is reading from a dictionary.)

SANDY

Antonym.

JOHN

A word of opposite meaning.

SANDY

An-tray.

JOHN

What?

SANDY

A-N-T-R-E.

JOHN

Oh, Ant-er. A cave.

SANDY

Ant-rorse.

JOHN

In a forward direction.

SANDY

Or?

JOHN

In a forward direction.

SANDY

Or upward direction.

JOHN

Or upward direction. Next.

(Pause.)

Next.

SANDY

John?

JOHN

What?

SANDY

Isn't it ironic, that we're—

JOHN

Let's not talk about it.

SANDY

Why not?

JOHN

Next word.

SANDY

Antrum.

JOHN

A hollow organ, such as a sinus cavity.

(BETH enters.)

SANDY

Anuran.

JOHN

Salientian.

SANDY

Anuria.

BETH

Oh my god!

SANDY

What's wrong?

BETH

I thought that...

SANDY

What?

BETH

I didn't understand a word you were saying, and I thought that...

JOHN

Lacking urine.

BETH

Excuse me?

SANDY

John asked me to read off the words in the dictionary. He's giving definitions.

BETH

How come?

SANDY

To make sure he remembers them all, I suppose.

JOHN

Next word.

SANDY

Sorry. Anurous.

BETH

This really won't do you much good.

JOHN

Lacking an ourus.

SANDY

An ourus?

JOHN

A...a tail, sorry.

BETH

You don't just lose a bunch of words, like everything from A through C. You lose abilities.

SANDY

Was that Latin again?

JOHN

Greek. Next word.

BETH

Whole categories of things. Ways of thinking.

SANDY

We don't have to do the next word. You know it.

JOHN

Tell it to me.

(MICHAEL enters.)

SANDY

You know it.

JOHN

Tell me.

SANDY

I just don't like to say.

JOHN

Oh, for God's sake.

SANDY

Anus.

MICHAEL

Looking up dirty words in the dictionary again, John?

SANDY

Oh. No, we're—

JOHN

The posterior opening of the alimentary canal.

MICHAEL

I don't think you quite have the knack for it, yet.

SANDY

Anvil.

JOHN

An incus.

MICHAEL

So what exactly are you doing?

SANDY

Or?

JOHN

An incus. Next.

BETH

John wants to be sure he still remembers all these words.

SANDY

Anxiety.

MICHAEL

That's one word we don't have to worry about forgetting.

JOHN

Apprehensive uneasiness.

BETH

No.

JOHN

Yes. Apprehensive uneasiness.

BETH

I wasn't talking to you, John.

JOHN

Then I got it right.

SANDY

Yes.

JOHN

Good. Next word.

SANDY

Anxious.

MICHAEL

Apparently.

JOHN

Worried.

MICHAEL

It's beginning to sound like an aspirin commercial.

JOHN

Do you mind?

MICHAEL

Not at all. Go on. Don't worry about me.

SANDY

Any.

JOHN

One, some, or all.

MICHAEL

Pretend I'm not even here.

JOHN

Listen, this is very important to me.

MICHAEL

How can you possibly hope to learn the whole dictionary?

JOHN

I don't hope to learn it. I know it. I just don't want to forget it.

BETH

Not the whole thing?

JOHN

Yes. The whole thing. I learned it last night, while you were sleeping.

(MICHAEL grabs the dictionary)

MICHAEL

Polemonium.

JOHN

Jacob's ladder.

MICHAEL

Surcingle.

JOHN

A belt for a horse, to hold a saddle or pack.

MICHAEL

Zymurgy.

JOHN

The science of fermentation.

SANDY

He hasn't gotten one wrong, except for some alternate definitions, and we began from page one.

BETH

You learned this all last night?

JOHN

Yes. Well, the one's I didn't know already.

MICHAEL

Don't you find that a bit odd?

SANDY

You don't think he's—

JOHN



I've always had a good memory.

BETH

An eidetic memory?

JOHN

Eidetic. Characterized by extremely accurate recall, especially of visual images. I suppose.

MICHAEL

What was that? Have you turned into a computer?

JOHN

(matter-of-factly)

No.

MICHAEL

Beth, test him.

JOHN

I'm perfectly okay.

MICHAEL

Test him.

BETH

Okay, okay.

(Smiling, in a happy tone.)

I can't stand this little room. What did I just say?

JOHN

You said you can't stand this little room.

BETH

Repeat after me. Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers.

JOHN

Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers.

BETH

What's my name?

JOHN

Um...Beth.

BETH

Good. He seems fine, so far.

MICHAEL

What's my name?

JOHN

What?

MICHAEL

My name. What is it?

JOHN

Your name?

MICHAEL

Yes. Your name is John, and mine is...

JOHN

You are a lawyer.

MICHAEL

That doesn't answer my question.

JOHN

You are...my companion.

MICHAEL

You don't know.

JOHN

You are...

SANDY

Shoot.

JOHN

Listen, I'm perfectly okay. So, I forgot your name. And I memorized a few words.

MICHAEL

Memorized a few words? You learned the whole fucking dictionary. In one night.

JOHN

A lot of them I already knew.

MICHAEL

How many?

JOHN

I don't know. More than half. And I knew most of the roots, of course.

MICHAEL

Well, then, that explains it. Jesus Christ, I'm surprised it took you a whole night.

BETH

Lay off him, Michael, I don't know how he learned all those words, but it doesn't sound like the disorder to me.

MICHAEL

It certainly isn't normal.

JOHN

What are you so upset about? I haven't forgotten one word.

MICHAEL

Except my name.

JOHN

Well...

SANDY

What do we do if he has it? Quarantine him?

JOHN

Thanks.

MICHAEL

He's already quarantined. What are we going to do, create little subquarantines? What a fucking mess.

SANDY

Then what do we do?

MICHAEL

Nothing. If he has it, we're already doomed, if we weren't before. You, especially, Sandy.

SANDY

Darn it. Darn it. Darn it.

BETH

Listen, there's no need to panic. Anyone can forget a name.

JOHN

I'm perfectly okay. I feel fine. I remembered Beth's name. And I remember Sandy's. And yours is...Robert?

MICHAEL

No.

JOHN

Agamemnon?

MICHAEL

What?

JOHN

Did I get it right?

MICHAEL

Whats century do you think we're living in?

JOHN

Listen, I just met you a couple of days ago. Give me a break.

SANDY

Michael. His name is Michael.

JOHN

Michael?

SANDY

Yes.

JOHN

Michael?

MICHAEL

Yes.

JOHN

Is that a name?

MICHAEL

Yes. It's my name.

JOHN

I don't think I've ever heard that name, before. Is it foreign?

MICHAEL

Agamemnon sounds natural to you, but Michael sound foreign?

JOHN

It's not?

BETH'

Maybe it's just stress. We're all stressed.

MICHAEL

He's not stressed, he's sick. How much more proof do you need?

SANDY

How are you feeling, John?

JOHN

Valeo.

MICHAEL

Valeo?

SANDY

It's Latin.

MICHAEL

English. We talk English.

JOHN

I'm aware of that.

SANDY

Do you have a headache? Or feel dizzy? Or confused?

JOHN

No.

MICHAEL

He just thinks it sound more natural for me to be named Agamemnon than Michael.

BETH

He said he's a classicist.

MICHAEL

Maybe that's why he can't remember what language we're speaking.

BETH

He remembered our names.

MICHAEL

And the meaning of every word in the dictionary.

BETH

I think he's alright.

MICHAEL

You had better hope so. Because, if he's not...

BETH

I know.

SANDY

Test him some more, Beth.

BETH

I don't even really know how. I was just guessing.

SANDY

You're a psychologist.

BETH

I'm a therapist, not a neurologist. He seems okay to me. If he were sick, there would be more of an indication. He must have just forgotten your name, Michael.

JOHN

Well, if this inquisition's over...

(JOHN grabs the dictionary and sits down with it.)

MICHAEL

What is that you're reading, John?

JOHN

What are you talking about?

BETH

Leave him alone.

MICHAEL

The object in your hands. What is it?

JOHN

It's a...a thing with a lot of words in it.

MICHAEL

What's that called?

JOHN

It has all the words and what they mean.

MICHAEL

And that's called...

JOHN

Tell him to leave me alone.

SANDY

Don't you know?

MICHAEL

John?

JOHN

Just leave me alone.

(JOHN throws down the dictionary and storms out of the room. The others stare after him. Silence. There is an electronic sound, and it sounds like something is being unlocked. The door to the outside opens.



That same sound will be heard everytime the door to the outside opens. The MAN enters, in a protective suit. He is carrying food..)

BETH

It's time for lunch.

SANDY

I thought it was dinner.

BETH

Maybe.

MICHAEL

Our last supper.

BETH

Don't be melodramatic.

SANDY

Do you really think John's all right?

BETH

How should I know?

(The MAN silently puts away the food in the kitchen.)

SANDY

Sir? What's happening outside? Do think they're going to find a cure, soon? Sir? Do you want to join us for lunch? Please? Or play a game of pinochle with us? Or just talk? Please, don't go right away. Maybe you could tell us what the baseball scores were, today? Or the stock market results? Or perhaps you'd care to tell us when we'll be let the heck out of this goshdarned place?

(The MAN leaves, closing the door behind him. Silence.)

MICHAEL

Yeah, you're right, Beth, I'm getting melodramatic. Everyone else is so fucking calm.

SANDY

Oh, would you please just shut up.

MICHAEL

Yeah, why not. We all might as well get used to the silence.