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Prologue: 
Poodle and What?

There once was a chicken named Poodle who called a cool cock-a-do-doodle. He ate not just any old noodle but gobbled the kit and caboodle, including the strudel; it’s truedle. He ate oodles.

Chicken Poodle liked sweets, which in bird-world is rare, but what did he care? He clucked with such flair, eating his treats and increasing the heat to his beets and his wheats and steamed soups, which he scooped as they thickened like glue, like goops.
Chicken Poodle liked dogs—at least one.
Not every bird does (it’s not done).
His best friend, he thought, was a beagle named What?.
Wait, what was that name? It was What?.

Yes.

Yes, What? was What?’s name.
It was always the same, for the word *what* means What?
all the time.
What? wiggled and waggled and struggled to bark, but all that came out was a barky remark, such as “What?” and then “What?” and then “What?” like a rhyme, like “What-what-what-what-what-what?” like a sound in an arc, like a chime in quick time, and when Poodle asked why, the beagle barked, “What?”
Poodle sighed.
Was What? asking a question?
A doggy expression?
In every new session,
What? only said, “What?

Sometimes What?’s flopping ears
were flapping in fear,
with his tongue dangling out
to the right
and his eyes open wide—what a sight—
but Poodle would settle What?’s fears
with green spears of asparagus,
ready to bite.
Poodle loved words,
as you’ve probably heard—
even copied the words of the birds: 
*tweety tweet*

Herds of birds (we call flocks) 
all worried and scurried 
as Poodle spoke bird-words in talks. 
Hear that birdy-bird sound? 
*Tweedle-deet.*

When birdies said, “Tweet,”
he’d repeat. It was sweet 
because *tweet* is a word to a bird.

What? only barked, “What?”
You see it?

Poodle loved bird-tweety words.
Poodle loved words for their beautiful looks, like small sculptures in books, like *thirst* with its *th* and its *t* rising up. Up *th*, down *irs*, up *t*—it makes *th-irs-t*.

But *poof* and *goof* both go low at the start, with the *p* and the *g* hanging down: little art.

Some ups, some downs—here’s the proof: *thptgfpthg*. That sounds like *thah-paht-gaff-paht-ha-gah*. What?

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It is important to grow up seeing what words look like. Only hearing words provides no idea of spelling or of the beauty of word shapes.

We love the beauty of the ascenders such as *h* and *f* and the descenders such as *p* and *j*. 
Poodle also liked bumpy old *m’s—
that was him—
and liked all the la-dee-da-*l’s
that rolled off so well
when they swung
off his chickeny tongue.
He liked *oo’s that go *hoo in the night
like blue circles: *oo-*oo!
What a fright, right?

Poodle liked *z’s,
with their zig-zags—oh please—
turning right and then left
with a zip like a wheeze.

What? saw none of that.
What? just barked, “What?
What-what-what-what-what?”

When Poodle asked, “What?”
with his tongue in the breeze,
in the air like the bees.
Poodle just sighed and sank to his knees.
Oh, Poodle loved words for their beautiful vowels, such as \( a, e, i, o, \) and then \( u \) (that’s all of them—whew), for the vowels loved by fowls—that’s different from \textit{foul}s—like the \textit{ooo} howl in \textit{soon}, or the \textit{eee} vowel in \textit{wheel}, or the \textit{oh} sound in \textit{home}, or the \textit{ow} sound in \textit{growl} or in \textit{owl} or in \textit{prowl}, or the \textit{eee} sound in \textit{peel}.

It was such a big deal.

He loved scratchity words, like \textit{snicker} and \textit{snake}, and \textit{chicken} and \textit{quicken}, and \textit{shaking} and \textit{fake}, and \textit{caulk} and \textit{block}, and \textit{gawk} and, yes, \textit{loch}, which sounds just like \textit{lock} when we talk.
He loved growly-grr words that begin with a *grrr*, like *gravel* and *grotto* and *grubby* and *gear*, like *gruffly* and *grunt* and *grody* and *grub*, like *grimly* and *grabbing* and *grub-a-dub-dub*.

Not What?.


“Words,” Poodle told him. “Words,” Poodle said. “I’m talking ’bout words; **there are eight kinds** ahead in the language,” he pled.

What? said, “What?”

What? was hopeless.
There are **eight kinds of words**, to be clear, and the nouns are the first—not the worst—to appear. They won’t burst, not these words, oh never you fear. It means there are eight kinds to hear!

Let’s rehearse.

So here’s a noun: *thirst*.

We make this admission: *thirst* names a condition, so dry. Nouns name things, aye; that’s their mission. See why?

What? (nope) saw nothing; he only barked, “What?” and his tail waggled left and then right like a shot.
“Words,” said the bird, but the beagle, confused, seemed so unenthused. How could he choose among words such as *bruise*, or *blues*, or *dues*, or *fuse*, or *cruise*, or *shoes*? He was only a beagle, whose mind quickly blurred.

What? was a beagle, not a seagull or eagle, not legal or regal, not a beetle—just a beagle. “What-what-what-what-what?”


Poodle felt so forlorn. His thinking was worn.

That’s our prologue of Poodle the chicken and What? the dog.

As the prologue ended, Poodle looked down and noticed the bottom of the page.

“See?” said the author. “It’s right below this sentence.”
noun

The name of a person, a place, or a thing:

Fred, Florida, flapjack
Chapter One: Nouns

It happened this way, one wind-willowy day, that Poodle did say to What?, “What?, let us survey the noun. Let us weigh some with sounds like bouquet, or beret, or affray.”

Nouns are names, Poodle thought. The language has got an array of them, lots, as it ought, but What? had not caught this plot. His mind was in knots.