

Am!

Jeff tripped over the dog while walking back to the Christopher Street station. The side street was Sunday-empty, the afternoon wet, cold and nasty – the kind of afternoon sensible people spent indoors, with coffee and the *Times*. (Jeff, a masseur, was sensible; but had a long-loyal Village client who overpaid him handsomely to come in from Jersey.) His mind was on other things; the dog trotted from behind a dumpster right into his path; and before he could stop his left foot caught it square in the side.

“Sorry!” said Jeff, stumbling. “Ow, *fuck!*” said the dog.

“Sorry,” Jeff repeated, “are you okay?” Then he stopped, realizing that he’d just talked to a dog.

The dog also stopped, with a wary look, as if realizing it had made the mistake of talking to a human. Jeff saw that he – it was male – was street-mongrel thin, ribs outlined through mangy fur. He half-held out a tentative hand. “Are you okay?” he repeated, for lack of any cleverer repartee.

The dog looked him over, and glanced at the empty street. “I’m alright,” he said *sotto voce*. “But listen – you think you could get me somethin’ to eat?”

A Korean bodega stood nearby. “Would a hot dog be OK?”

“That’d be great. But not with that yellow stuff - it kills my stomach.”

Jeff returned with a plain foot-long, having successfully resisted the offered garnishes of mustard, chili, hot sauce, pico de gallo, nuoc mau, or kimchi. The dog gobbled it avidly. He sat up, licking his chops. “Thanks, man. My regular hunting spots’re blocked off, construction or some shit like that. You’re a lifesaver. I owe you one.” He trotted off down an alley.

“Uh...you’re welcome...??” Jeff dazedly replied.

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That night, Jeff curled up to his warm, comfortable husband, and waited. “What would you say if I told you a dog talked to me today?”

Chuck thought about this for a moment. “What did it say?”

“I accidentally stepped on him and he said ‘Ouch!’ Not ‘Yipe’ or anything. I said I was sorry; and then he asked could I get him some food. So I got him a hot dog; he ate it, and thanked me, and left.”

“What kind of dog?”