

The Translator

The cat spoke.

"Meow."

<I'm hungry.>

Gerrard adjusted his earphones and stared. Fluffy sat by her empty food bowl, apparently ignoring him, and then she looked up and spoke again. "Meoww."

<I'm really hungry>

Gerrard jumped, sending the cat in a screech across the kitchen's linoleum floor and out of sight.

"Sorry about that."

He poured some dry food into her bowl and sat back down at the table. His grin was almost painful. After a few deep breaths, he reached out with a trembling finger and switched off The Translator. His science project, a pile of electronics, threaded with frayed wiring and cabling, and slapped together with duct tape, took up the breadth of the kitchen table. He hadn't even had the chance to work up a poster yet, and the Science Fair weekend loomed but a day off.

The mudroom's trapdoor jerked open and Wolf loped in. The German Shepherd paused long enough to shake himself dry.

"Woof."

<Happy to see you>

Gerrard couldn't believe his ears.

"Me, too."

The dog trotted over and nuzzled his leg. Gerrard reached up to a cabinet and pulled out a box of treats.

"Come on, boy. You like these. What do y'say?"

Wolf stood up on his hind legs.

"Come on, say something."

The dog whined and uttered a short yelp.

<Please give me >

Gerrard tossed his earphones on the table and ran out the kitchen through the dining room, screaming. "It works! It works!" Wolf howled and chased him into the adjacent living room. They turned up a corner of the hall rug and raced up the stairs to Gerrard's room, where they leaped onto his bed. Wolf slobbered over his buddy as they wrestled.

A few minutes later, Gerrard lay on the tussled bed covers staring up at the single light fixture. His arm caressed Wolf, who nestled his nose into an inviting armpit. He was still breathing heavily when the front door clicked open.

"Gerry. You here?"

It was his step-brother, Brady, a sophomore at Hamden High. Saturday morning football practice was over.

"Hey, squirt. Are you upstairs?"

Gerrard ran to the top of the stairs with Wolf close at his heels. "Brady! It works! It works!"

Brady took a step into the kitchen and threw his gear into a corner. "You mean that pile of junk?" By the time Gerrard arrived, he was at the refrigerator gulping down an open milk container.

"That's not junk. You're looking at The Translator."

Brady kicked the fridge door closed. "And it's supposed to do what?"

"Watch. You'll see." Gerrard held up the ear phones. "Just listen."

Wolf sauntered into the kitchen. Gerrard grabbed the treats and held them over the dog's head. "Come on, boy. You want these, right?"

Brady asked, "What am I supposed to be hearing?"

"Just listen. Listen when Wolf says something."

After a few more jiggles of the box, Wolf spoke up.

"Woof."

Gerrard looked up at his brother. "Well?"

"I got nothing."

One of the earphone banana plugs lay on the table.

"Hold on. This thing got pulled out."

"Later, buddy. Gotta get washed up." Brady patted Gerrard on the head and darted up the stairs.

Gerrard donned the earphones. "Damn it, Brady. You always treat me like a kid. This thing really works. You'll see."

The voice from upstairs echoed from the bathroom. "Gerry, you're the smartest one in the family. You're gonna win the science fair for sure."

<Gerry, you're a geek and you got no chance at the science fair>