

Magic + Thieves = Alaska
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Awarded 3rd Place in 2013 Young Adult Short on Words Competition

The yellow taxis honking at really bad drivers, street vendors selling huge hot dogs and deluxe hamburgers to hungry customers and of course, skyscrapers. This place is not town; it's a city – to be exact, New York City, USA. Hi! I'm Joey, a street pooch raised by no one but me. I scramble for food just like any other street dog but my scramble got me somewhere unexpected, *talking and writing!* It started out like this. At 10 a.m. on a casual day I was sitting near a café, with my favorite fire hydrant conveniently located nearby, just waiting for an unsuspecting café customer to walk by with a muffin bag so I could snag a yummy treat. Soon, a guy with blue eyes, blonde hair and strangely, wearing all black headed my way. He clutched a really crinkled brown bag in his hands and as he approached he began stiffly speed walking. 'Here's breakfast!' I thought in my head. I leapt and pounced and POW! The bag popped open sending gold magic sparkles raining through the air and landing on me and the fire hydrant. And then, in less than ten seconds I was gone, out of New York and in a house in northern Alaska, the home of Mr. and Mrs. Hilt and their daughter, Lizzie. Mr. Hilt was the town snow plow and Mrs. Hilt ran a dress shop in town. During the winter months, they don't get home until 7 p.m. but their daughter, Lizzie, got home from school at 4 p.m. On this particular day, the little girl who I would later come to know as 'Lizzie', walked into her bedroom just as the fire hydrant and I appeared out of nowhere. At first, Lizzie just stood there speechless. Then she raced toward me, scooped me up and screamed to no one in particular, "Thank you mom and dad for getting me a puppy!"

"A little looser so you're not squeezing me" I managed to wheeze out.

"Who said that?" asked Lizzie, with a quivering voice.

"Me. Oh yeah, that's right. Humans can't understand dogs" I replied.

"Yes, I can!" retorted Lizzie. "I CAN hear you!" Then she dropped me and picked up the fire hydrant and started slowly spinning in a circle, in a cautious, defensive manner.

"Look person," I said, "I'm a talking dog, not a burglar!"

She turned around and stared at me, "You can talk? You can really talk?" she questioned, eyes wide.

"Apparently," I replied. "And can you let me out? Long distance travel makes me have to go".

"Yeah, sure, I'll let you out but I must ask, why are you all sparkly?" a puzzled Lizzie asked.

"I don't know! Just let me out, please!" I shrieked while crossing my legs and hopping up and down.

"OK, OK. Calm down. Here's the back door" she replied calmly.

The door squeaked open and cold air rushed in over my fur. I sprinted outside while Lizzie wet off to read a book. In a little bit she let me back in and in an awed voice told me, "This book on magic I am reading says sparkling animals that talk and appear out of nowhere have been sprinkled with magic sparkles. One by one the magic sparkles fall off and the animal will return where it came from, but sadly only living things can return, so your friend the fire hydrant will be staying put. You already don't have as many sparkles now as you did when you appeared. You had 15, I counted, and now you only have seven."

"I only have seven sparkles? That was quick" I yelled.

"Why are you yelling?" Lizzie asked.

"Because my ears are frozen and I can't hear very well! I replied in a loud voice.

"Are you hungry?" she asked, "Dogs that are loud are usually hungry."

"You read my mind!" I screamed.

Lizzie ambled over to the cabinet, opened it up and grabbed a can of sardines, pulled the silver tab and slowly ripped it open, letting me smell each juicy fish before I could eat them. She set down the little silver box full of fish and said, "Go ahead, eat" in a gentle, loving voice. So I did. While I was eating three more sparkles fell off, leaving only four. After eating the scrumptious sardines Lizzie and I sat down in the living room to snuggle up on the jumbo couch to watch TV. We watched a lot of wild animal shows and sometimes I barked at the TV. But Lizzie calmed me down by petting me. Sadly, doing this made three more fall off, leaving only one sparkle.

"Oh, no! cried Lizzie. "There's only one sparkle left on you!"

"Well, with our few remaining minutes together, we should properly introduce ourselves" I suggested.

"I'm Lizzie." She tried to sound cheery, but I knew that on the inside Lizzie was crying.

"And I'm Joey" I bowed and spoke in a fancy English man's voice. Then all of a sudden, the very last sparkle fell off.

"Wait Joey – don't go!" Lizzie shrieked.

"Remember me by the fire hydrant!" I called and in an instant I was back in New York City knowing I would remember this day, the man dressed in black and especially my friend, Lizzie, for the rest of my life.