

Gretel and a Stranger's Question

by
eve armstrong

2021 March 12

One spring afternoon, I walked with my schnauzer Gretel in Washington Heights by NY Presbyterian Hospital. We passed a woman who, upon seeing Gretel, stopped and asked me a question. She had a thick accent of some kind and wore a mask, so I lost her consonants and heard, 'Hoo uh ih ai ah?' While I saw her face only from bridge-of-nose-up, she looked gravely concerned. I figured that that was how she always looked. Because nothing was wrong.

I said, "What?"

She repeated, "Hoo uh ih ai ah?"

My brain rapidly scanned possibilities. I thought, oh! "*Who cuts his hair off?*" (Gretel sports an adorable hair cut, thanks to my husband and me, and passersby comment on it often.)

I beamed brightly and said with enthusiasm, "Oh! Me, with my husband!" She stared at me. Just stared. As in: she had no idea what more to say or do. I thought, okay weirdo, and kept walking.

A block later I realized. She had asked, "Who cut his *tail* off?" (It had been cut before we got her.)

I sure hope that that woman does not have friends in organized crime, lest I run into her again. She will have it in for me.