

Pet

Elbow looks bored today. Unusually so. He's sitting outside with me. His feet are propped up, crossed one over the other and resting on the flat elevated holder. He's been out here all afternoon. I saw him yawn a couple of times and take his feet off the holder to swivel around in his sitter another time. But, the rest of the time he's just been there in the sitter, eyes closed. He's not wearing his upper cloth. That's not too unusual. He likes to sit there, eyes closed, cloth off, snoring away the afternoon. What's unusually about today is that he hasn't even bothered to retrieve his cold metal toy from the house.

Usually what will happen is Elbow will come outside some time after his first meal and then plant himself down in that white striped sitter he likes so much. It sags under his weight. Then, he will close his eyes or maybe he'll get up after awhile, stretch, and sit back down. This routine: sitting, sleeping, yawning, stretching is repeated in more or less the same order until his mate comes home. Always, though, he has his favorite cold metal toy with him.

He likes to hold it between his teeth, drawing the liquid into his mouth. Then, when the liquid is emptied, he turns his head to the side, and releases the toy onto the ground. Then with one swift movement (oftentimes accompanied by a loud guttural noise) he slams his heel onto the toy. This is his favorite game. He likes to play it all afternoon.

This afternoon is different. Elbow is bored. And now so am I. I like this game he plays because it seems to keep him entertained. When he is not playing the game (or his other favorite one where he takes the cold toy and, after draining the liquid, tosses it at the side of the house- though, he is good about always collecting his toys before his mate comes home) he'll often lay with me on the grass. Today he's not even doing that.

I think there's something the matter with Elbow. Lately, he's been acting odd, not only today. Yesterday he was also looking bored so I thought, ok, why don't I give him something to do. So I went and got his favorite cold toy from his storage closet (where he keeps it cool. I should talk to Roberto about this; he has more practice than I, and always has good advice, like when he recommended I let Elbow and his mate know when to let me out in the night, so I didn't have to wait for them), but he just took it and put it on the table. No happiness at the sound of the toy opening, no annoyed look at the liquid dribbling down his chin, no dropping of the toy on the ground or satisfactory smash of the heel on the toy. He just let the toy be on the holder and closed his eyes. The poor guy. I don't know what's wrong with him.

Admittedly, Elbow and I haven't always gotten along. I always liked his mate, Bellybutton more. They came as a pair, though, so I took them together, and Elbow and I have gotten closer over time. Probably because we spend more time together than I do with Bellybutton. I will say, though, that Elbow, when he wants to be can be well behaved and a lot of fun. When I came to them, I had many names that I thought beforehand would be fitting, but on my arrival, I forgot about those names and gave them the only ones that fit; Bellybutton because her upper cloth is always showing off this part so proudly and Elbow because it is his most prominent part.

When I was younger, we would go to the river where it's a good place to gather. I would take him out along the river. And merrily announce our presence to all around. He was always so popular. We would stop awhile and one and then the other would come up to Elbow to get a smell of him. The comments were all

appreciate. Admittedly, this made me proud. Maybe it wasn't entirely me who was the reason for how he was, because of course Elbow has his own way of being, but I have definitely shaped him into a good one. Then, at least.

I met Roberto on one of those walks by the river. He was taking his out, leading him through the dirt and grass towards me and Elbow. He must not have seen me because he went right between me and Elbow. We had a good laugh at that. As we tried to untangle ourselves, Elbow reached down and clumsily pushed me and yanked me. Roberto made some comment like: he looks like a real handful. I just shrugged, like, he's just a little rough around the edges.

After we had untangled ourselves and departed, I saw Roberto now and then. We became friendly. He's slightly older than I am and has on several occasions given me some good advice.

When I was younger, Elbow would on occasion play with his cold toy so often that he became frenzied, tottering when he stood and waving his hands wildly. I would watch him cautiously for when he got like that, he might step on my tail or one of my toes. There was a time in specific when for some reason for sunrise after sunrise, Elbow would get like this. Bellybutton would leave and Elbow would be laying in his sleeper, but then at the sound of the roller leaving, he would spring out of his sleeper to grab his toy. Only when the roller returned (and I did notice it was almost exactly the same amount of time he waited before taking the last toy) did Elbow, languidly I might add, open the food chest and pull something out for him and his mate.

I told this to Roberto and he assured me that he had been through the same with his: what I should do, he recommended, was have him take me out to the outdoors to produce liquid when his mate left, and then shortly after, do it again (even if I didn't have to produce liquid), and then a third time shortly thereafter (again, even if I didn't actually have to produce liquid).

I gave it a try and on the first day, he didn't play with his cold toy as much. I was happy when Bellybutton returned that day there was a glow on her face when she saw Elbow had prepared her something from the food chest.

Since then, Elbow has reverted somewhat and the fault is entirely my own. As I have gotten older the little things he does that used to bug me, I just let go. Roberto warned me about this. He warned me that even the smallest thing, like say forgetting about the spot behind my ears, if uncorrected will give Elbow leeway to misbehave in other ways. Roberto is probably right and I have seen how he behaves: remarkable well, much better than Elbow or Bellybutton.

I am not jealous or even a little bit envious, because Roberto has put in a great deal of work, but I do wish Elbow would learn something from Roberto's. But all efforts have proven futile.

Bellybutton is another story. I always, and I would never show this to Elbow, wanted her more than I wanted him. They came together so oh well. She has always been the better behaved of the two. She has needed minimal encouragement, goes out on her own and always returns promptly. To this day, it takes much encouragement to get Elbow to go out. I have to push and goad him. With her it is different. Sometimes, I hear her leaving even before I am awake.

Then, I get up to check my bowl and sure enough it is full, as well as a fresh water. It is rare, so rare for Elbow to provide such care.

Elbow is still looking terribly bored. He took his upper cloth off and now his big belly is red. He's going to wake up soon and then be angry: howling, screaming, knocking, then shuffling inside.

Roberto pointed me in the direction of a number of different sources to look at when considering how to guide Elbow and Bellybutton. He showed me the bushy tailed scamperers that scuttle along the ground after one another, then bound together in flight when chased. Roberto called this merged defence: to bring two opposing (or at least differing) beings together, go after them both and unison entails. Roberto then showed me the flapping floaters who land now and then to pluck the squirming slimy things from the ground. Upon chasing, the one gathering flaps away for cover and the one remaining back in the nest must then be the one to gather. Roberto called this responsibility transfer: he advised to use it when I notice one or the other taking too much of a role-for the sharing of work.

Roberto also demonstrated focused anger (if Elbow and Bellybutton are not getting along, do something to focus this on you-thus, removing it from them), patience reward (if Elbow and Bellybutton seem to be frazzled, I lay in one spot for as long as I can), among others.

Elbow is, and has been, by all accounts resistive to these. Perhaps I should be harder on him: remove more of his rubber walkers, puncture his cold toys, or even produce liquid inside. I used to do that more, but now I have become more lenient. When I last saw Roberto and shared some of this with him, he nodded knowingly and said: we are all stomach rubbers in our youth and toenail clickers as we get older. All in all Roberto is a good fellow, but it does bug me when he speaks in code like that. I knew he wanted me to ask what that meant. And I waited, but he didn't give. So, begrudgingly I asked for an interpretation. We were out on a walk together, he with his (the name keeps escaping me), me and Elbow and Roberto stopped suddenly then, so suddenly that his nearly walked into Roberto. Roberto looked at me seriously: just that we rub our bellies on the ground, in the dirt, on the floor of the indoors, in the wet; our bellies scrub the world and then we in turn feel like we know the world. But then as we get older we walk, clicking, gliding even across a room, above the floor. We said goodbye soon after.

Elbow is still out here making noises as he sleeps. I wonder if Roberto was right. If maybe it is ok the way I am now with Elbow. The effects clearly suggest otherwise. Though Bellybutton has turned out well. Which is odd because I have done the same for both, treated them the same. Roberto advised me on one of our first walks; neither one should receive preferential treatment. And I followed this advice, yet Bellybutton comes and goes with ease, while Elbow huffs and puffs, spilling things on the floor, filling the house with the awful smell of burning whenever he tries to prepare food. I don't know what's wrong with him. I tried responsibility transfer and it worked, for a time. And I tried merged defence immediately thereafter (Roberto recommended this as a powerful corrective combination), and it worked, for a time.

It all, at it's own pace, slipped back to how it is now. There must be something I did wrong, some piece of advice Roberto gave that I misheard or didn't listen to clearly enough.

Maybe so.

Or maybe Elbow has been and will continue to be immune to my efforts. He is probably just a bad one. Imbalanced in one way or another. He looks bored; I could give him some excitement, get him going (as I have done so many times in the past), or I could lay here enjoying the warmth. It is so warm today; the weather won't last.

Then, after I've enjoyed the warmth I'll go back inside to wait for Bellybutton's return. She is the one who will give me fresh water. She is the one who will give me a treat. She is the one I am proud of.
She is the good one.