

Adventures with Elliott
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I was sitting out on the back porch with Elliott just watching the evening. I noticed a deer meandering across the back field, and after a moment Elliott also noticed the deer. He started with a low rumbling growl, with his ears up and ready for action. So I ask him, "You realize that that deer poses no threat to us, right? And he said, "It's a question of their nature. You see, deer will push the boundaries that other animals won't. They are imperial in their outlook, and arrogant in temperament."

As if on queue the deer stopped and looked over at us, and even though they do not have expressive lips, it actually smirked at us. It was as if it were saying, "Our time is coming. You know it. Deep down inside, you know it."

Without breaking eye contact with the deer, Elliott said "See what I mean? Even so, they are not the real concern. It's the squirrels. They have a plan, they are sneaky, and they are always watching. Watching everything, and everyone. And when you are not looking, they are taking notes! And have you noticed that they are nowhere in the Bible, or evening news? They are all about keeping a low profile."

I could not argue with him. The dog thinks things through.

Adventures with Elliott Part 2 (cont)

It was 3:30 AM. The room was dark as I began to realize I was in bed, and something had disturbed me - woken me from a deep and pleasant sleep. Something had awakened me, I thought repeatedly... but what? Something damp and soft touched my hand. My hand was hanging off the bed, and something had touched it. I reached over for my phone and slowly angled it towards my bedside. At first all I could see were two pointed horns and two light reflecting eyes; not moving, not making a sound. All I could do was stare, and hope I would remember how to breathe soon. Then my phone screen changed, shining more light onto the horned creature at my bedside. Elliott. Elliott stood there with that "Want'a go out back?" look on his face. After my pacemaker had dialed down some and I had gotten my robe on we made our way downstairs and out the back door. I looked around the dark yard unable to see or recognize anything. Elliott nosed around following trails only he perceived. After a while we both settled at the picnic table looking out into the back field and hazy sky. "You hear that?" Elliott practically whispered. "They should be quietly sleeping. Not making a sound, not even a skweek or a peep. But if you listen hard, they are softly jabbering together. Working out every last detail, every preparation, every position to cover, every resource to place, and every contingency to prepare." I understood his intensity, but not his point. The look on my face must have betrayed my confusion because he looked over at me with that "Squirrels. Devil rats. Fuzzy tailed demons. Emissaries of evil. Call them what you want, but don't ignore them." look. Back in my bed drowsy and warm I wondered about Elliott's recent obsession with the coming squirrel uprising. Too much conspiracy theory TV, listening to the wrong podcasts, hanging out with those mutts down the street? I didn't know where he was getting these ideas, but I am getting concerned...

Adventures with Elliott part 3 (cont)

As often happens, I was sitting on the couch scrolling through my phone while

Elliott lay sleeping in my easy chair. That chair being mine is apparently up for debate. Nonetheless, he was deep asleep dreaming of dog stuff I suppose. When all of a sudden he popped out of the chair, staring intensely out of the front door. Ears up and tuned into something of tremendous urgency. He was on guard, in junkyard dog mode, ready for action, and expecting it. After a short while of being targeted in, he slowly looked back at me and gave me that look. That "Squirrels man. They are up to something." look. He went on, "Have you ever noticed that most of the time they do not have any nuts with them. Their media campaign is all about them finding and hiding nuts. But then you never see them with any actual nuts. None. Zip. Nada! It's all fake news!" As I considered what he'd said, he slowly walked to the chair and settled back in. After he had fallen back asleep I went to the door and was able to spot several squirrels prancing around the neighbor's yard. None had any nuts. A cold shiver ran down my spine...

Adventures with Elliott part 4 (cont)

A few days later Elliott was out back making his rounds. All along the fence line, checking for the unusual or unexpected. Then at one point he seemed to come upon something. He was frozen to that spot. Sniffing it for all it was worth. He then did something very unusual for him, he sat back on his hind legs and folded his ears back tight along his head. And he stared. He stared at one particular spot. I looked and noticed nothing but a clump of bushes. He continued to stare hard. After awhile Elliott slowly walked back to the table I was sitting at, and with a dash of decorum he laid down, ears and eyes remaining fully engaged with his subject of interest. He let out a low quiet growl through which he clearly intended, "Honey badgers. They're recruiting Honey badgers. They must be getting ready to make their move. If I only knew what they intended - fuzzy little tree weasels. This is starting to feel like Columbia 1967, no make that Laos 1969. Lost a lot'a good men there. They had Honey badgers there to. Makes me want some Jack and Mary Jane." That reminds me; I have to check with that dog rescue group and find out more about his history.

Adventures with Elliott part 5 (cont)

It was late one night. Past my typical bedtime. Elliott was upstairs in the bedroom guarding Miss Kim and I was out back finishing a cigar and admiring a pleasant summer night. Everything was as it should be, and as I expected. Calm, gentle rustling in the trees. Then, almost imperceptibly an odd chattering came from some distance to my left. I glanced that way and saw only bushes, right where they belonged, and nothing else. While I was puzzled over the chattering, more began to my right. I cautiously looked to my right. Now that high pitched was on both my sides, and it was not identical. There was a back and forth, call and response quality to it that that sent a shiver of unknown but immediately danger down my spine settling in my gut. I had no plans, no understanding, no insight, no experience with anything like this. Then while I was frozen with indecision, yet another sound began to catch my attention, a sound behind me, close, and very different. This new sound was a rough, deep, menacing sound. Wild and penetrating it too seemed to be in some way associated with the others. There was an intentionality to it all. A conversation of sorts. Announcing location, movement, intention, commands. I could not begin to understand it, but my monkey fear was peeking. It was time to be somewhere else. Trying to be the least provocative I could, I rose from the table and made my way steadily to the backdoor. Then into the house locking every door behind me. I armed the security system and went on up to the bedroom. There I found Kim asleep, and Elliott sitting on his bed like a parent waiting for a child well past curfew. Elliott's look stopped me cold, and we

gazed at one another. Breaking the silence he yawned loud and long. It was that type of yawn that says, "It was a reconnaissance team. Two squirrels and a honey badger. They were scoping out the place while running a practice tactical exercise. They are about ready, it won't be long." He curled up in his bed and snug and silent. I too got into bed where I thought and rethought over and over about those sounds, and what Elliott had said. Quite some time later I drifted off into a restless sleep.

Adventures with Elliott part 6 (cont)

It took a couple of weeks, but a legal sized envelope arrived from the dog rescue group that we got Elliott from. The addressing was hand written, and the flap was overly secured with tape. I took the package to my home office along with a fresh coffee, opened the envelope and began reading. After the first couple of paragraphs I had to stop and start over from the beginning, not sure what I had been reading, or if I'd misread it somehow. "Dear Sir, I had hoped that I would never receive your inquiry. I have dreaded it for some time, but hoped against hope that the past could somehow remain silent and unquestioned." What was I reading, I asked myself? I had simply asked the dog rescue group what they might know about Elliott. I knew they had "rescued" him from somewhere, nursed him back to health, and then when they posted his picture my wife inquired and the next thing I knew I had a particularly articulate dog as a pet. Before long the "pet" concept vanished along the wayside. The master/pet relationships had quickly become a pack relationship. We all artfully dodged the question regarding an alpha male, and it all worked itself out. Reading further "When we were notified of a stray dog over at the county dump, we expected a scared pup that we'd have to somehow capture but that's not what we found. I remember pulling up to the place, spotting this dog sitting near the entrance. He was just calmly sitting there watching me pull over. I got out of the car and slowly approached him trying not to spook him. He never flinched, which really surprised me, even when I squatted down next to him. He leaned in so I could scratch his head, and check for a collar and tags but there were none. I slipped a rope leash over his head and I swear he smirked. That was really the first sign that this was a very unusual pup. I started to walk back to the car, but he wouldn't budge. Then he stood up and began walking back into the bushes that lined the road. I thought it was going to try to run off, but after a few steps he stopped and began nosing around in the bushes and trash. After a moment he pulled out a small case of some sort. Holding it by the handle in his mouth he walked to the car where he and his bag jumped into the front seat. And off we went.

Adventures with Elliott part 7 (cont)

Arriving at the rescue kennel the dog (we didn't yet know his name was Elliott) settled into one of the available pens. He nuzzled his bag under the bedding and curled up and fell asleep. Over the next few weeks he had healed and put on some weight. Things were looking up for him. Then one day while a volunteer had him out in the yard for some exercise I could no longer help myself. I went into his kennel and gently slid his case out from under his bedding. I noticed there was a hole on the side of the case, and it looked like a bullet hole, or what I thought a bullet hole should look like. Ignoring the hole I unlatched the case and lifted the lid. Lying on top were a couple boxes of Tick & Flea collars. That made sense. Elliott was a dog with a strong sense of personal hygiene. Under the collars I found a small stack of passports. They had different names, but all had a picture of Elliott. That seemed very odd! Elliott had never mentioned traveling abroad. Laos, Cambodia, Syria, Columbia... Not your typical vacation destinations, but to each his

own. Then the real surprise. Under the passports there was a small stack of papers. Many were written in languages I did not recognize, but thumbing through there were a few phrases that popped out. "has on occasion served the government in critical ways, but in undocumented services in disavowed locations...", "...not a concern, he has the highest possible clearance...", "He can be fully trusted to address this situation leaving no possible link or trace back to us...". Then at the bottom of the case were several bangs tied closed. I lifted one and shook it a bit. It sounded like marbles or small rocks. I opened the bag and poured a small amount of the contents into my hand. There were cut gems, diamonds, gold coins, and other things I did not recognize. Family heirlooms I assumed, so I put them all back in the bag. I put everything back as I had found it and returned the case to its place under the bedding. Strange to say the least, especially for a stray abandoned dog. But then shortly after, two men in sharply cut black suits came by asking about Elliott. So I led them back to his pen, but he was not there. The bedding we neatly folded and put away, with no sign he had ever been there. All I could imagine was that he had already been placed in a home, so that's what I told them. They had plenty of questions, but I really had no answers. After they left I purged our records of any hint that Elliott had been with us. Then a few days later he reappeared and we placed him with you and hoped that would be the end of it. He never caused us any problems or concerns, but it just felt like there was much more to his story than he let on, and we would do best to stay out of it. So I am hoping this is the last I will hear of Elliott. He is a wonderful dog, but it just seems like it would be better to let this episode of life end now."

Adventures with Elliott part 8 (cont)

I tucked the envelope away in the back of a drawer and finished my coffee as I struggled with what I'd read. It would have been easier if it did not ring so true. All I had learned was that I was probably correct assuming there was quite a bit more to his story, and I was unlikely to ever learn much more. I wanted a coffee refill so I headed to the kitchen, my mind roiling in thoughts and assumptions... Later that day Elliott came up to me with that head shake and yawn that meant he wanted to go out back. So off we went. Once out back, rather than patrol the yard he settled down near me on the patio. While appearing to be laying there basking in the sunlight, his eyes were sharp and busy scanning the backyard, the trees, and the deep field beyond that. After awhile I was becoming drossy in the sun, daydreaming for all I was worth, when Elliott yawned in that very particular way that says, "My operatives, amm associates, amm acquaintences, yah that's it, they tell me it would all be over by this time tomorrow." Why tomorrow? "Tomorrow is National Squirrel Appreciation Day, January 21st.", he seemed to say with raised eyebrows. "How do you know these things?", I ask before thinking. He dropped his head in thought, and then, "I like you, I really do. You are kind, reliable, just a really good guy. But you need to trust me. If I share something, just accept it. Knowing more just puts all of you at unnecessary risk. I don't want that, and neither do you." That was probably the most serious discussion Elliott and I have ever had. I could see in his eyes that he was concerned for us, and wished he could be more forthcoming, but knew that was unwise, actually somehow risky, dangerous. That was enough for me. I leaned down and started scratching his belly because I know he really liked that, and it was a good way to thank him.

Adventures with Elliott part 9 (cont)

The next afternoon I came down the stairs and found Elliott was licking on a raspberry popsicle that Kim was holding for him. Kim looked up and said, "No opposable thumbs." What else was there to say?

After he had finished he made his way over to me and nuzzled my leg, even pushing me towards the backdoor, so out we went.

After the usual patrol around the perimeter he settled on the patio next to me. He seemed to be deep in thought. His mind was far away and focused.

"It's over. It all went down last night. They were overconfident and never suspected that they would be infiltrated and compromised as completely as they were."

"By morning, the few that survived woke to find most of their comrades slaughtered in their bunks next to them. There was no rhyme to it. Six in a group, four lifeless and two untouched. Eight in a group. Five taking a dirt nap and the others rubbing the sleep out of their eyes. Worst of all, half the group is simply gone. Beds were left made, just empty. And the honey badgers... They all left in the night... No trace, no fur, no blood. All that was left where each of them had been sleeping was a photo. A photo of each of them laying there fast asleep. And hand written on each photo something to the effect of "This is your one do over. There won't be a second." You won't be seeing any honey badger anywhere near for several generations, count on it."

"You will see a few squirrels in the trees. Shell shocked survivors. Shadows of their former selves. Sitting and listening for any hint of danger, eyes wide and twitching. They won't be returning to their war rooms or armories for fear of booby traps, snipers, and all the next level forms of automated carnage that is waiting for them. They have not even been observed gathering, or even having conversations. Just quietly mumbling to themselves, not making any sense, or eye contact. But they had much, much worse intended for us. All of us."

So life went on. Peaceful, manageable, few mysteries, and time to sit and "talk" with Elliott. I learned to let Elliott sit and stare intensely into nothing in particular. If there were things I needed to know or learn, he'd tell me. I'd share my thoughts and he'd listen and consider, and sometimes he'd comment. It was always fascinating, the things that that dog noticed or shared.

One day Kim was straightening the bedroom and happened to move Elliott's bed. Underneath she found a bag with a hole in it and asked me what I thought it was. "You know Elliott. " I said. "He is full of surprises and mysteries. But without them, life would not be as amazing as it has been. Besides, we owe him his privacy. Trust me! "

The End