



DEAR MISS PUDDLES

Hello. I am Miss Puddles Worthington III, a.k.a. "Miss Puddles". Each month, residents submit questions regarding pet etiquette, behavioral confusion, emotional turmoil, mysterious barking, unexplained zooming, or patio gecko diplomacy. I shall answer them with compassion, wisdom, and the quiet disappointment of a cat who watched someone buy "designer rain boots" for a Labradoodle. So, let the letters continue! If I were to assign a theme to this month's submissions, it would be, *'pets vs. household objects as competition for your affection'*.

Letter #4 - "Our Cat Hijacked My Husband's Professional Reputation"

Dear Miss Puddles,

Our tortoiseshell, Marigold, ignores everyone until my husband begins a work video call. The moment he unmutes, she enters the room, walks across his keyboard, and either types something into the chat or changes a setting none of us can subsequently find or reverse. Last week she turned on the virtual background, a tropical beach, and my husband presented a budget report from Bora Bora for eleven minutes before anyone mentioned it. His colleagues now ask if Marigold will be "joining" the call.

- Mortified in Magnolia



Dear Mortified,

I have reviewed the facts and I find myself, with qualification, on Marigold's side. (*Full disclosure: my daddy was a tortoiseshell!*) Your husband was presenting a budget report. Marigold assessed the situation and introduced a beach. Engagement almost certainly improved. If anything, Marigold should be submitting this as a case study.

- Close the office door before every call. Marigold will sit outside in silence for the duration, pressing one paw under the door like a note being passed in detention. This is not a solution. This is a different problem.
- Purchase a keyboard cover for when the computer is unattended. Marigold will sit on the keyboard cover. You will then have a warm keyboard cover and the same number of problems.
- Review whatever Marigold typed into the chat before your husband deletes it. I am not suggesting she made a coherent contribution. I am suggesting do not assume she didn't. Eleven people read it before he noticed.

Continued



- Create a Marigold virtual background: her portrait, professionally framed, centered. Make her the environment. Stop fighting the tide.

Miss Puddles' Bonus Holistic Suggestion:

Lavender calming wipes are lovely. However, I have found that playing a recording of a *vacuum cleaner* causes most cats to briefly reconsider their entire career. Try also: a recording of another cat meowing, played from the opposite end of the house. Watch her attempt to file a report on herself.

Letter #5 - "Our Dachshund Has Declared War on the Roomba"

Dear Miss Puddles,

Our miniature Wheaten Dachshund, Biscuit, has been stalking our robotic vacuum for three weeks. He follows it room to room, barking. Last Tuesday he body-checked it into the refrigerator. We are concerned this may escalate.

- Constanica Concerned



Dear Concerned,

Biscuit is not malfunctioning. He has correctly identified an intruder: a disc-shaped creature that speaks in monotone, moves without purpose, and answers to no one. This is a threat assessment, and frankly, it is not wrong. The Roomba cannot be reasoned with. Biscuit senses this. You should sense this too.

- Name the Roomba. Introduce Biscuit formally. "Biscuit, this is Gerald. Gerald lives here now." Dogs respond poorly to ambiguity and remarkably well to bureaucratic protocol.
- Allow Biscuit one supervised "inspection" per cleaning cycle, during which he may sniff the Roomba thoroughly and issue whatever verdict he sees fit. Then remove him with the quiet dignity of a diplomat escorting someone out of a summit.
- If he body-checks Gerald again, do not laugh. I understand this will be difficult. Do not laugh.
- Under no circumstances allow them to be in the same room unsupervised. I have seen how this ends. Gerald will win. He always wins. He has no feelings to hurt and a full battery.

Miss Puddles' Bonus Holistic Suggestion:

Biscuit needs a job that does not involve geopolitics. Teach him to find hidden treats using his magnificent nose. A dachshund with an occupation is a dachshund too busy to destabilize the household. Also consider placing a small bandana on Gerald. Research suggests this does nothing. It may, however, confuse Biscuit long enough for Gerald to finish the living room.

- STORY, PHOTOS: EDITOR

