

Day of the Huntress

Sedona, our wire fox terrier, turned a year old on January 17, 2006. She knew we didn't have a party or an elaborate celebration planned, so she decided to mark the occasion in her own special way.

Our terrier is a real dog's dog: she loves to roll on and occasionally eat dead worms, snails and slugs; she chases lizards, and bark at cats. While she rarely digs a hole of her own volition, she will always assist me with ones I've dug. She is not afraid, in other words, to get her paws dirty.

I left on Sedona's first birthday around 8:00 a.m. (a solar energy firm at this point in my varied career), and Mike assumed his usual routine as a work-from-home dad. At that time, his days consisted of diligent monitoring of his online classes interspersed with household chores, often followed most nights by a band rehearsal or performance. So man and dog kept each other company during the day, and Nan and dog hung out together in the evening.

Mike began working steadily at the computer, which left Sedona to her own devices. Her habit upon rising is to patrol the garden extensively then, once satisfied no foreign invaders have encroached on her domain during the night, she repairs to her bed for a marathon nap.

Today was different.

Instead of returning inside through her doggie door for her daily snooze, Sedona remained in the garden most of the morning and Mike, once under the spell of student requests, lost track of time - and her.

About mid-day, realizing the dog had made herself scarce, Mike stood up from the computer to go find her. Turning around to exit the computer office, he was mystified to see a toy mouse on the carpet just inside the door. Mike's father had doted on his cat and had bought for her some fur-covered toy mice. When he was clearing out the apartment after his dad's death, Mike found the fake mice and hadn't wanted to part with them. Odd, Mike thought, that Sedona had found them in his office (he didn't even know for sure where they were stored), and had pulled one out.

Bending down to retrieve the toy, Mike was aghast to discover what he'd thought was a toy was actually not: it was a real mouse, real dead. Gentle Sedona had bagged her first kill and had apparently quietly deposited the trophy where Mike was sure to spot it.

After quickly disposing of the deceased and scrubbing his hands with near surgeon-like vigor, Mike located the dog (placidly napping in her bed by now), and assured himself she was no worse for wear. He began to fix himself lunch and Sedona, roused by the prospect of errant foodstuffs dropping on the floor, stayed by Mike as he ate. Once he was finished, he returned to his computer work. Sedona went outside again.

At mid-afternoon, with a lull in the action at school, Mike rose for a break. He had dishes to wash and garbage to take out - his regular daily duties. (He likes to keep a very tidy house).

Walking into the living room, he saw that Sedona was inside and curled in her bed. The look of sleepy innocence on her face as she lifted her head was in sharp contrast to the morning's carnage. Then, to Mike's horror, his eyes were drawn to a spot just beyond her bed. Lying in sweet repose, not two feet from where she'd been napping, was yet another dead mouse. Like the first one, this rodent bore no visible signs of trauma but had been, it seemed, deposited on the Berber with gentle reverence.

Again a wad of paper towels was employed for a hasty funeral service, Mike chuckling all the while at our dog's surprising killer instinct. "Wait until I tell your mother," he told her menacingly. Sedona knew it was an empty threat.

I arrived home by 5:00 p.m. or so and listened to the story with astonishment. Mike detailed our dog's exploits with obvious delight, and we both marveled that a creature who'd never snapped or growled or displayed any ill-temper could suddenly act so out of character. We hadn't even been aware we had any mice in the garden, and here Sedona had captured two in a single day! We enjoyed a good laugh about it, and I think we were also a little proud of her.

Our habit upon coming home, which is a holdover from her house-training days, is to immediately usher Sedona outside. Still laughing at the image of our dog bringing two inert field mice into the house, I stepped outside while Sedona dove through her doggie door. As the dog headed off the patio on patrol, I turned to sit in a chair. My eye was caught by a dark lump at the edge of the cement, and I think I knew what it was even before close inspection confirmed it: a third mouse lay dead on the patio. Half-yowling with revulsion and half-laughing, I called on Mike to perform a final service, committing the day's last soul to Mouse Heaven.

On January 17, 2006, in our tiny corner of the world, an entire mouse family - Mater, Pater and Junior - was wiped out. Just as sinister names from history like Jack the Ripper and Vlad the Impaler can still clutch the human heart, Sedona likely earned a moniker that day that strikes terror in the local mouse world: Sedona the Snapper.

While I'm sure she relished every moment of the hunt, the acts of violence, curiously, have not been repeated to this day. As no additional furry creatures have been slaughtered, one must ponder the possibility that Sedona committed the atrocities specifically *because* it was her first birthday. She seems such a sweet little creature to have such a dark heart . . .

And in case you're wondering, the answer is no. The three mice were not found wearing diminutive dark glasses, nor was a tiny white cane lying next to any of the bodies.