

The Schnauzer Detective: The Case of the Cat Burglar

They call me Digit. I'm a miniature schnauzer. I live with two humans, Karen and Ted, in a place they call The Maritime Republic of Eastport.

I'm sitting on one of the two living room sofas, as close as possible to the front door. This is an important spot because sometimes intruders knock on the door or ring the doorbell and I have to chase them away. "My house! Get out of here!" I bark as long as needed.

My humans are away, at a place they call "work." Usually I accompany Ted to his workplace - it's my second home. But he is away for meetings and I'm stuck home alone. I bark to Alexa, one of their machines, to play a detective story.

"The Hound of the Baskervilles, by Sherlock Holmes," Alexa says in a female human voice. I love this story.

After a very, very, very, very long time, I hear a car pull into the driveway. My tail wags. I know what all the cars in the neighborhood sound like and this one is my favorite. It's very quiet - it's called a "Prius" - but that's not why it's my favorite.

The door opens and Karen enters. Extra waggy tail! She puts down her things and I give her a nice doggy kiss.

"What do you think?" she asks. "Is it puppy play time?"

I want to eat but it's still too early. Puppy play time will have to do.

We root through the toy box. Mr. Manatee, Croaky Frog, and Squeaky Squirrel, my interns, come out and await instructions.

“Where’s that mouse?” Karen asks.

Ruff! I thought all the mice stepped in traps or moved away.

“That wind-up mouse. I can’t find it.”

Wind-Up Mouse is fuzzy and moves in circles. I used to think he was fun but it’s much more fun to chase Mr. Manatee when he rides on top of the Roomba.

Karen empties the toy box, but no sign of Wind-Up Mouse.

“Well, go find him,” she says. “Use your nose.”

Already on it. I scan the living room, look under both couches, under the chairs, and behind the TV. No sign of him.

But I smell something strange, something out of place. Most of the room smells like dust and candles and sometimes popcorn, but this smell is kind of musky and grassy.

I follow the smell. It’s concentrated around the toy box, but continues into the hallway, where it disappears completely. Very strange!

My stomach reminds me it's time for dinner. I use the Doggy Force to tell Karen.

“Would you like some dinner?” she asks.

It worked! Waggy tail!

She opens the kibble box, driving away all other smells and thoughts.

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The next day, another toy is missing, a small squeaky bird. Again, there’s a strange musky, grassy smell between the toy box and the hallway, but nowhere else.

And the day after that, something that upsets Karen quite a bit. “We’ve been robbed!

Someone stole all my necklaces!”

She runs to the phone in the kitchen and calls the police.

Twenty minutes later, a squad car arrives. “Are you sure you didn’t misplace them?” one of the officers asks.

“I wouldn’t have moved all my necklaces at once. Someone took them.”

The two policemen poke around, look at the door and windows, and dust for fingerprints. “No sign of forced entry, ma’am. We’ll file a report that you can send to your insurance company.”

Following a hunch, I sniff around the bedroom. Sure enough, that same musky grassy smell is on the desk where her jewelry was. It leads to the same spot in the hallway, where it disappears.

I tell this to the police but they ignore me. One of them tries to scratch my head but I’ll have none of that. They have a job to do. And so do I.

The police leave and I sniff around the hallway. I look up.

And see the metal ring hanging from a black chain, attached to a wooden trap door.

Of course! Sometimes my people pull on the chain and a ladder comes down. It leads to the attic.

I bark at the chain. “People! Come here! I need your assistance!”

“What do you want?” Karen asks. From her facial expression and voice tone, she is still very upset.

I bark at the chain again.

“You want to see the ladder?” Ted asks.

“Yes, pull down the ladder,” I bark.

Ted reaches up and pulls on the chain. Wooden steps swing down.

The steps smell musky and grassy.

Now I know where I’ve smelled that odor before. It’s been a long time, but we had an intruder in the backyard a couple of times that smelled just like that. I chased the intruder away and after the second time, it never returned. The intruder was a white and tan cat, obviously up to no good.

Cat! There was a cat in the house! I bark furiously to let my people know.

“What is it?” Karen asks.

She climbs up the stairs into the attic. I don’t normally go up there, but manage to clamber up after her. Miraculously, I don’t fall.

I follow the scent to a cardboard box, turned upside down. I push it over and find a rope with a hook on one end. I look up. The rope could have been thrown over one of the rafters and the hook attached to the ladder to pull it up.

The scent continues to one of the attic windows. It’s unlocked. I bark.

“What is it?”

“Cat!” I nudge the window open with my nose and it swings open to the side. It’s dark outside. Cats love the dark, so no one can see their misdeeds.

I jump out onto the garage roof, which is a little bit lower than the rest of the house. And slide, slide, slide. Those shiny things on the roof called “solar panels” have no traction.

I slide toward the asphalt driveway far below, but throw out my feet and stop myself on the covered gutter. That was close.

Karen sticks her head out the window and starts to come after me.

“Stay there,” I ruff. “I’m doing surveillance and you might give me away.”

There! Illuminated by a streetlamp, a cat paces back and forth on the street corner, a plastic bag in its teeth. It isn’t white and tan, it’s gray with dark stripes.

A blue van pulls up to the corner and a window rolls down. I swivel my ears toward it. “You got something useful this time?” a male human voice says. “I told you toy mice and birds ain’t worth nothin’.”

The cat meows. I understand a little cat. “Ask any cat,” she says. The voice sounds female. “They love toy mice and birds.”

“I don’t speak cat,” the man says. “Pay in cash or something we can fence.”

“I got some jewelry this time,” the cat meows. “You’ll like it.”

Karen’s jewelry!

“You got what I need?” the cat continues.

“Sounds like you want your payment.” A hand extends out the van window with some dried up herbs in the cupped palm.

The cat bares her teeth and starts batting her paws in the air. “Catnip! Catnip!”

I’m not about to let these hoods get away with Karen’s necklaces. I leap from the garage roof and land atop a big bush. I slide down the branches, battered by leaves and twigs the whole way, and hit the ground.

I’m in a daze but shake it off and run as fast as I can toward the corner.

The cat has regained her senses and lifts the plastic bag in her teeth, bulging with Karen’s necklaces, toward the van passenger. I put on an extra burst of speed, leap forward and snatch the bag out of the cat’s mouth. Then I turn and bark fiercely at the culprits.

“All that barking, someone’ll call the cops again,” the man says. The van peels off and the cat runs in the opposite direction. I grip the bag with my teeth and chase the cat across front yards and driveways. It’s fast but so am I.

All those years of chasing squirrels pays off and I corner the cat against the wall of a house. She arches her back and hisses.

“You robbed the wrong people,” I try to say. But with this bag in my teeth, it comes out “Rrrrooo rrrrrr rrr rrr.”

Karen runs to me from our house. “Digit! What are you doing? Are you okay?”

I lay the bag at her feet. She looks inside and shouts for joy.

I keep the cat burglar cornered and we call the police on Karen’s cell phone.

“You need help for your addiction,” I tell the cat. “You can’t steal from people.”

“I know,” she admits. “I have a human too and she’ll have to bail me out of animal jail again.”

“You’re one great detective,” Karen tells me as we wait.

I give a “Rrrroooo” in response. Maybe I should do this full time.

This town needs a schnauzer detective agency.

