

A sneak preview of **Little Truff and the Siamese Cat**

With Chloe, the chocolate point Siamese

The Nelson family are having morning coffee with their new next-door neighbours while Little Truff is outside taking a break.

I raised my head and sniffed. It was time to check up on the family in the living room. How were they getting on with our new next door neighbours? Had they finished their morning coffee yet? And what was more important, had they remembered to save the leftovers for me?

The smell of spices mingling with fresh bread, caramel and coffee was mellowing, so I knew the food was being eaten. However, something completely different alerted me.

This fragrance had the sweetness and warmth of thyme but a slightly musky edge. I'd never experienced anything like it so I decided to find out what it was.

It came from the direction of the high wooden fence separating the Stevens's property from ours. Barry had planted a grape there, espaliering it along five strong horizontal wires, where it soaked up the sun and grew rampantly east and west throughout the summer. As it was the first Saturday in October, the second month of spring, fresh green buds were breaking open on the branches.

The mysterious fragrance grew stronger as I checked the boundary but as everything looked just the same, I sat down on the grass, puzzled. Then, intuitively, I felt I was being watched ... but couldn't see anyone.

The scent was concentrated two-thirds the way along the fence line centring behind a little detail I'd overlooked – a peephole. It was the clue I'd been seeking, only this time it was blocked out. Usually it was easy to find but as no light shone through from the other side, someone or something must be spying on me.

'Come on out! I know where you are,' I growled.

There was a slight movement behind the fence then the knot-hole cleared and light shone through it once more.

A scratching sound started midway up the horizontal slats and continued to the top of the fence. A chocolate-coloured paw covered in short fur hooked over the palings and anchored itself into the wood with its claws. It was followed by another then the tips of two widely-spaced, pointed brown ears appeared.

These merged into the most extraordinary cat's face I'd ever seen. It was the shape of a perfect triangle but what arrested me were her blue eyes. Set at a slant they had a brilliance that put sapphires to shame, radiating intelligence with shrewdness and feeling.

'What sort of cat are you?' I asked in awe. 'Are you a boy or a girl?'

'I'm Siamese,' she stated with an unwavering gaze, 'and female.' Then in less than a second she was standing on the fence, her dark head atop a slender cream body with long, chocolate-brown legs and tail.

I gazed up at her, spellbound. It wasn't just her exotic feline beauty that held my attention; it was also the effect of her presence. Her regal bearing made her an imposing figure.

'Like a queen,' I heard myself murmuring in awe.

'Yes, I *am* a queen,' she affirmed in clear tones. 'My name is Chloe. I'm a chocolate point Siamese queen *and* your new next-door neighbour.'

