

A sneak preview of
Little Truff's Saves the Kereru

with Chloe, the chocolate point Siamese

The Nelson family and their neighbours, the Stevenses, are spending Christmas at Piha, the world famous surfing village on the west coast of Auckland, New Zealand.

Chloe joined me in the shade of the pergola. Sheltered and warm, it was the ideal place for a chat as the tiling on the patio retained the heat of the day.

Stretching a companionable paw towards her, I said, 'I'm so glad you're here, Chloe ...' but before I could ask the question burning on my lips, a loud whoosh-whoosh of giant wings cut through the air.

We looked up and gasped with amazement.

Two huge birds soared across the courtyard. As their strong wings lifted, I saw flashes of white, which vanished with each down-stroke. They circled towards a grove of native palms on the other side of the wall – trees that looked like coconut palms but without the nuts.

Slowly descending, they spread their wings wide, gliding towards the tallest in the nīkau glade.

Spellbound, I whispered, 'What are they?'

'New Zealand native pigeons,' Chloe said, her voice dropping to a whisper as we watched them alight on the fruit-bearing branches below the lengthy crown of fronds. 'Māori call the birds "kererū", but they're known as "kūkū" or "kūkupa" in Northland. Their common name is "wood pigeon".'

'Are they usually that clumsy?' I asked

'Yes,' Chloe said with a grin. 'It's because of their size, you see. They're one of the biggest pigeons in the world.'

'I figured they might be.'

'So how long do you think they are from head to tail?'

'Hmm. I don't really know,' I said, squinting my eyes to get a better look. 'They're much taller than my thirty centimetres – and look quite heavy too.'

'Actually, just over half a metre.'

'Wow!' They commanded respect.

Their weight caused the branches to sway, but once they'd settled, I saw they had smallish, pigeon-like heads atop their large bodies, and like a bright lollipop, their straight, red beaks were tipped with orange. A cook's apron, in silvery-white, covered each breast and belly.

'Look at them when they move,' I said in awe as they leaned forward to scrutinize us. 'The sheen on their dark green feathers changes to purple and gold.'

'Magnificent,' I whispered.

We sat still, wondering what was going to happen next.

The birds remained silent as they sat observing us.

After a while it became quite unnerving. I was about to say something to break the tension when the largest of the pair cocked a red eye at me and said, ‘Who are you?’

‘Who ... me?’ I said, trying to appear friendly while hiding my nervousness. From the size of him, he had to be male.

‘Yes, you,’ the smaller bird cooed. The soothing sound of her voice was definitely feminine.

‘Oh, my name is Truffles but my family calls me Little Truff. I’m a Cavalier King Charles Spaniel of the Blenheim type because my coat is chestnut on pearl.’

‘And you have a big spot on your head,’ the female said sweetly. ‘That’s so-o-o cute.’

‘It’s my lucky spot – and it really *is* lucky, too,’ I insisted.

‘Aha!’ the male wood pigeon said. ‘I’ve heard about the Blenheim spot and the good luck it brings.’

‘Thank you,’ I said, politely, turning to introduce Chloe. ‘This is my Siamese friend ...’

The large native pigeon cut me short. ‘We’ve met before.’

For once in her life, Chloe remained silent.

‘You live next door in the suburbs, don’t you ...’ he continued, still addressing me; it was more a fact than a question. Then turning his head full on to study us squarely with both eyes he added, ‘... and sometimes you work together.’

‘Yes, we do. Sharing keeps us sharp.’ I hadn’t thought of ‘us’ working together. I wondered what he meant by that.

‘And what’s that to do with you?’ Chloe demanded, scrutinising him through hostile slits, blue as acetylene flames.



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The New Zealand Kererū or native pigeon.