

A 'wolf' comes to visit

When dogs spot cats, will trouble ensue?



Dog Talk ELLEN WHYTE

THE sun dipped, a breeze sprung up, and so Target and I stepped outside to enjoy a breather at the end of a long day.

While Target watched the birds raiding our tree for seeds, Inkie kept watch by the window. Our cautious tuxie doesn't really approve of garden time. He thinks streets are dangerous. Tic Tac stood beside him, quietly superior as a veteran of several walks a week.

It was a beautiful evening, and our neighbours appeared one by



Polo is a sweetheart. — Photos: KIM FONG/Wuff & Wok Bistro



Polo hanging out at the pet-friendly cafe.

I put a hand on his shoulder and directed him firmly into the house.

Polo watched, tail wagging at me, but with a cynical gleam in her eyes. As her friend clucked with reproach, which was totally ignored by Polo, I waved and went back inside. I found Target the centre of attention with Tic Tac giving him kisses and Inkie sniffing him excitedly.

Target was superb. He acted completely unconcerned, strolling to the wing chair he has picked for his own, and settling down like a king on a throne.

Outside, Polo sniffed the gate. As she completely ignored her friend's suggestion they move on, Inkie slunk back and peeked out. Polo lifted her head, directed a thoughtful glance at him,

and then, super quietly, said, "Woo-woo."

Inkie jumped 3ft (about 1m) in the air, every inch of fur standing on end, and did a few spins.

stilled tail as she examined Target. Also, our gate opens at a touch. And it's never locked.

As Target froze, Tic Tac and Inkie yelled a warning.

one. Target kept a close eye on the joggers and the kids on bikes, but they didn't spot our old boy as they were absorbed in their own affairs.

Then a gate down the street opened and Polo appeared. Our neighbour is a very posh Malamute, a massive girl with a double fur coat inches thick, snowy white and shiny as fresh snow.

Malamutes are most often seen in Alaska and northern Canada, in the snowy regions. They're giant dogs, bred for super strength because they were used by native tribes to pull transport heavy goods. A team of Malamutes working together can pull a sleigh over huge distances in icy cold weather.

Polo is a poster girl for her breed, with a glorious coat and piercing blue eyes. We talk of her as being one of the "wolves" along with her friend Pica the Husky because the two girls look similar. In fact, according to a genetic study

in 2015, Malamutes and Huskies are closely connected to other Arctic dogs, namely the Siberian Chukotka, a sled dog that's popular in Russia.

So, as Polo is built for pulling sleighs and sleds, she's enormous and very strong. She was on her leash, and accompanied by a friend, but anyone might see at a glance the human was only nominally in charge. As Polo made a beeline for me, her pal had to trot hard in order to keep up.

For all her strength, Polo is a softy. I've known her since she was a pup, her head barely topping my knee, but now she's all grown up, she still wriggles with excitement every time she sees me. With her double coat, she's only out for a little while every day, spending the rest of it in her aircon home.

But when she is out, we chat. I pet her through the gate, and sometimes, I go and see her at her

mum's pet-friendly café.

Polo in her public role as chief greeter is a joy. She smiles all the time as delighted regulars bury their hands in her deep fur and give her lots of praise.

But while Polo is a pet in every sense of the word, her heritage makes her a predator. Rough and tough working Malamutes will hunt rabbits and squirrels.

While Target would be most insulted, to my mind, a Malamute may not distinguish too well between a rabbit and a cat. Also, when Target used to go for walks, he often strolled by Polo's house extra slowly, teasing her because he knew she couldn't get at him. Occasionally, he'd stop and clean his ears. Suggestively. Exactly where Polo could see but not touch.

So while Polo wagged her tail and smiled as she looked at me, I was aware of the focused stare and

Looking back, Tic Tac had fluffed her coat, trying to make herself impressively dangerous. Only slightly bigger than Polo's muzzle, she squealed defiance. Inkie squalled nervously right along with her, darting anxious glances at Target, me and Polo.

Whereas the cats are untutored on the subject of Inuit dogs, they are ace at spotting danger.

Target knew too because he was moving. To my surprise, he was not heading for the safety of the front door, or even me.

Our 14-year-old boy got to his feet, growling menacingly, and made a determined line for Polo. His hackles and furious expression told their story: Target would defend his territory.

While Target has been in his fair share of battles, and has beaten up some tough street cats, tackling Polo was definitely punching above his weight.

on end, and dived for cover under the table. Tic Tac hadn't a clue what was up but she was right with him. They huddled there, shivering with nerves.

Outside, Polo sniffed the air. Her blue eyes were filled with knowledge. For a moment, the tropical heat faded; I had an uncanny idea of how she'd look back in her native Arctic tundra. The blunt muzzle lengthened, and the strength of her projected.

After a long moment, Polo shook herself, and we were back in the present. The giant dog looked up at me and smiled, azure eyes sparkling and pink tongue panting in friendly salute. Then, head high, she loped off, her friend trotting alongside.

She is gorgeous, a powderpuff of a dog, and a wonderful friend. But she doesn't fool me or the cats for a second. In the wild, sweet Polo would eat cats for breakfast.