

Hotel FOR Cats

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Translated by Anna Brooke



Chicken
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*To my cats, past and present: Tao, Anakin, Leïa, Sookie and
Obiwan, not to mention Esmeralda and Gelsamina.
And to Mathias and Aurélien, of course. – MARIE PAVLENKO*

*To Swing, Moune and Kida (thank you,
Amandine P. and Gauthier B.).
To my 'child-who-thinks-she's-a-cat', Saskia.
To my mother who let me have a cat as a child :)
To Maïck and Nelly, my grandmothers.
And a special mention for Collo. – MARIE VOYELLE*



SOME
CHARACTERS
IN THIS
STORY

MAGDA



A kindly French lady, about seventy-five years old, who loves flower-print dresses, milky tea and squashy cushions.

She's in charge of a rather unusual establishment in Paris, France: Hotel Charamba, a hotel for cats. It's a place where pet cats stay when their families go away on holiday (for a weekend, a week, a month . . .). Magda feeds them, cuddles them and sometimes spends hours throwing them mice (don't worry, not real mice – ones that she has knitted herself!).

Magda has also invented a brilliant cat-food distribution system, but more about that later.

So, you see, she's a lovely lady and is convinced that she's the head of the household.

BUT SHE'S WRONG.

THE REAL MASTERS OF THE HOUSE ARE:

BOBINE



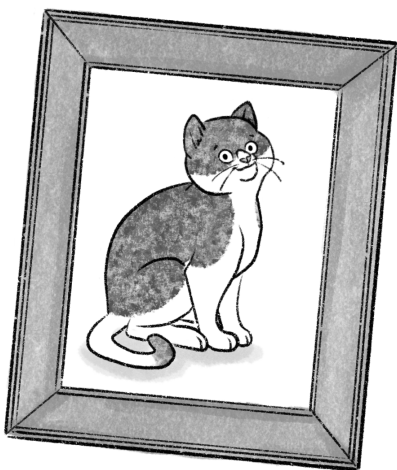
(That's the French word for 'bobbin', or a 'spool of thread'. It's pronounced *Bob-eeen.*)

Bobine is an old female Persian cat with very long, tangled white hair. She has pawful trouble with her matted clumps of fur and dreads being brushed.

She once lost a fang in a fight with a bulldog. The dog, by the way, still has the tooth lodged in its bottom.

She has grown calmer with age. Hates noise. Laps up nettle soup as if it were milk.

Distinctive feature: she secretly wants to learn how to knit (so sits for hours, still as a statue, watching Magda).



MULOT

(It's the French word for 'field mouse', pronounced *Mu-low*. Why would anyone call a cat *Mouse*?)

Mulot is a black-and-white moggy who Magda found abandoned in a bin when he was just two days old. He was curled up with a family of mice. Magda fed him with a bottle and saved his life.

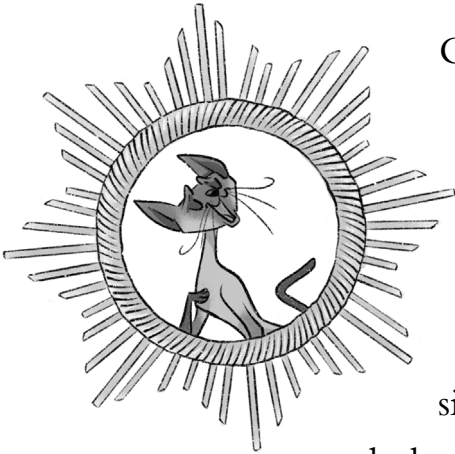
Mulot hates his name. (Can you blame him? How would you like to be called after something you might eat, like Cheeseburger or Rice Krispies?)

He's a strong cat who loves to strut his stuff, show off his muscles and look for fights. But deep down he's a propurr softy.

Distinctive feature: an intense fear of cucumbers.

CARPETTE

(Pronounced as it reads, *Car-pette* is the French word for ‘rug’.)

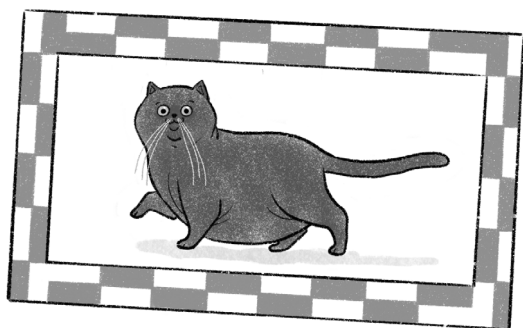


Carpette is a middle-aged Siamese male who thinks he was a human in a previous life.

Carpette loves to sing to his fellow lodgers. He's also looking

for love – he's convinced his soulmate must be out there, somewhere. (The question is, where?) He often speaks to his future love when he's alone (or *thinks* he is).

Distinctive feature: a fan of Elton John, he meows non-stop on the off-chance a record producer might be passing and hear him.



COUSCOUSSE

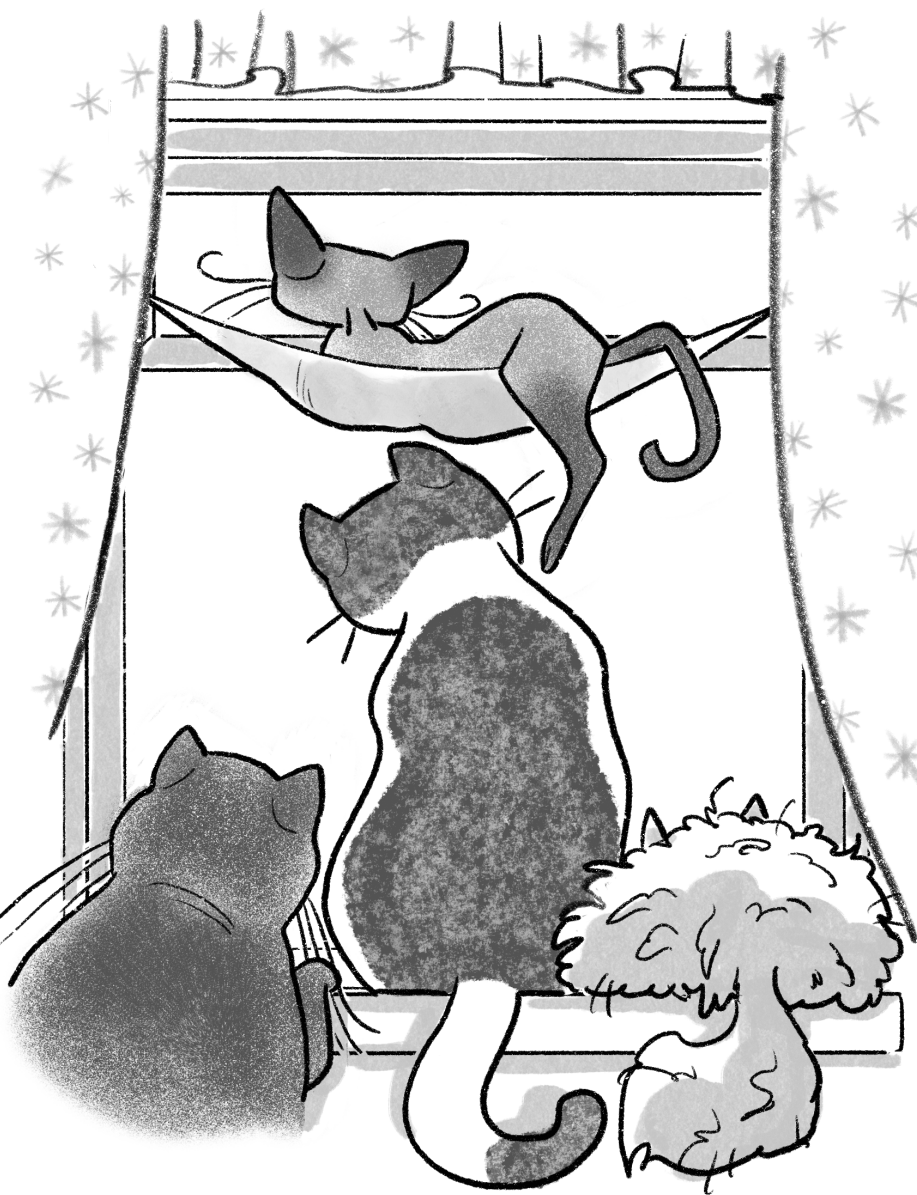
(Magda's funny spelling of 'couscous', pronounced *Coos-coos.*)

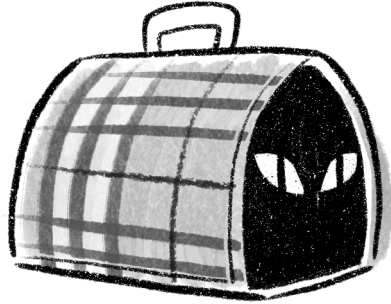
A chubby female Chartreux (her tummy drags on the floor), Couscoussse was one of Magda's first ever lodgers, but her owners never came back to get her.

Couscoussse lives in her own little dream world, inventing stories that she believes are true. For example, she thinks she can communicate with the ghost of Albert Einstein (or Berty, as she calls him). She asks him questions all the time.

Distinctive feature: she pretends to have studied at university in America.

BUT MAGDA KNOWS NONE OF THIS . . .





1. SUF-FUR-CATING HEAT

So, there you have it. You've met all the characters, and so now it's time for our story. Ready? Let's go.

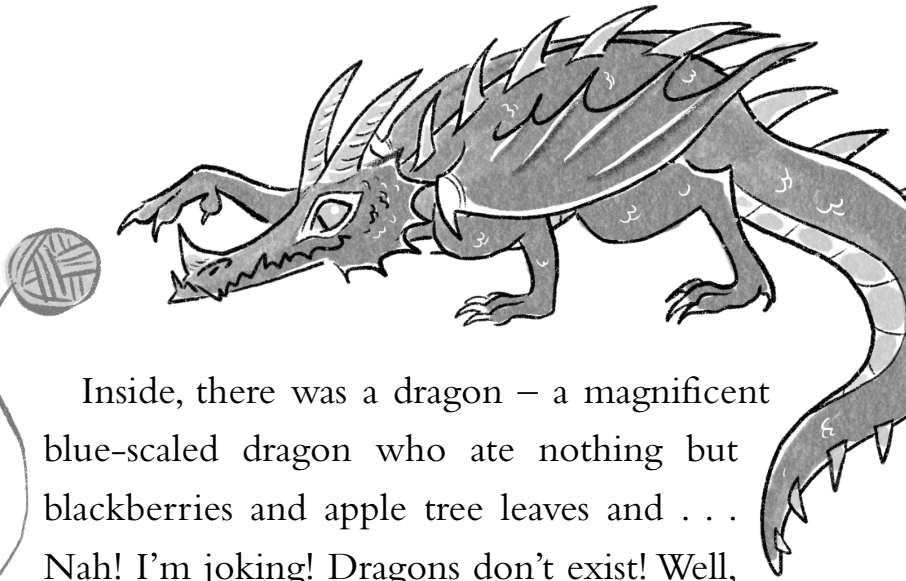
It all started one late morning in July, when a man in a velvet suit stopped in front of the glass doors of the cat hotel.

It was a hot day. A scorching day, in fact. And so sunny that the neon-orange 'Charamba' sign, whose lights were usually so strong they could be seen from the far end of the street

at night, seemed almost pale.

Not that the man noticed. He was hot and flustered and needed to mop his brow, which is why he put down the carrier he'd been holding, and drew a hankie from his pocket.

Which is when a yowl escaped from the carrier.



Inside, there was a dragon – a magnificent blue-scaled dragon who ate nothing but blackberries and apple tree leaves and . . . Nah! I'm joking! Dragons don't exist! Well,

not in real life. Though they *do* exist in pretend life. But as this is real life and not pretend life, I can tell you it wasn't a dragon.

What it *was* was a cat. (Obviously – this book's full of them.) A black cat.

And although to the man the yowl had sounded like a 'meooooowww . . .', what the cat in the carrier had really said was, 'You got to be kitten me! I'm dying in here. Paw-lease hurry up!'

'Don't worry, Wolfgang, everything's going to be fine,' the man cooed in reply, walking through the hotel door without the slightest idea of what Wolfgang had said.

'I'm not worried, Norbert,' the cat squeaked. 'I'm just desperate for a weeeeeeee!'

What can I say?

That's the problem with humans, isn't it? They think they're cleverer than other



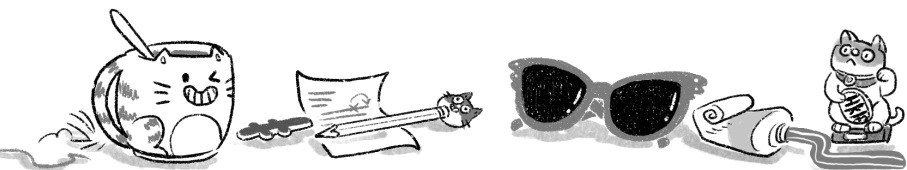


creatures, but really, they don't understand very much – especially not cat-speak (or whale-speak or giraffe-speak, at that . . .). Cats understand humans though, which is clawsome!

The door opened into a large chintzy lobby, at the back of which sat a huge wooden desk, topped with a computer. To say the desk was cluttered would be an understatement. See for yourself.

Around the computer were: piles of folders, heaps of pens (pink, green and black), a figurine of a pig sipping cocktails, a purple wig, a stapler shaped like a pear, several plants (including a heart-shaped cactus), knitting needles, two or three balls of wool, three cat-themed mugs filled with dregs of tea and a big fan blowing air at full blast.

And in front of it all sat a white Persian cat



with very tangled fur, who didn't so much as bat a whisker when the man in the velvet suit walked over and called, 'Helloooooo?'

'Comiiiiiiiiing!' came the high-pitched reply, as an elderly lady in a yellow-and-mauve flowery dress burst through the door behind the desk. 'Ah, *bonjour!*' she said (which means 'hello' in French). The creases around her blue eyes wrinkled like piped buttercream as she

smiled. 'I'm Magda. And you must be ...'

'Norbert,' said Norbert, holding out his hand. 'We spoke on the phone . . . about Wolfgang's stay . . . for two weeks.'

'Oh, yes, yes!' Magda



peered into Wolfgang's carrier for a moment.

But Wolfgang thought he'd die of embarrassment!

You see, the pee that had needed to come out before, was coming out *now*, in the corner, like water gushing from a tap! *A cat-astro-pee!* Wolfgang thought. *I've never felt so embarrassed!*



'Ah, Wolfgang's busy,' said Magda sweetly. She stretched out her hand towards the white Persian. 'This is Bobine, our eldest. Say *bonjour*, Bobine!'

Bobine didn't move.

Magda turned to Norbert. ‘Would you like to see Wolfgang’s room? He’s in number 13, and he’ll be perfectly fine.’

‘I’d love to,’ said Norbert.

‘Meooooowww!’ said Wolfgang, which meant, ‘Oh, the shame of it, Norbert! This is paw-sitively terrible. Peeing myself the second we arrive! Why didn’t you go faster? I’ll be the laughing stock of the hotel.’ And he put his paws on either side of the carrier’s walls, so as not to get them wet.

Then, still without the slightest idea of what Wolfgang had said, Norbert followed Magda through a door behind the desk, into a corridor covered in paintings of cats – kittens, pedigrees, alley cats, even cats wearing hats and scarves – and up a steep floral-carpeted staircase towards Room 13.

It was then that Bobine decided it was time to follow – to make sure, as any self-respecting hotel cat should always do, that their new

boarder got settled in. So, she leapt off the desk in front of the fan, which blew her fur up into a funny punk hairstyle, and set off behind Magda, three times fluffier than before.

Now it's time for me to tell you something very important that is going to affect the rest of our story.

I'm going to stop translating cat-speak.

Up until now, when a cat has spoken, you've always read 'meooooowww', followed by the human translation. But, from this page onwards, I'm only going to write the words in human.

OK?

Good.



