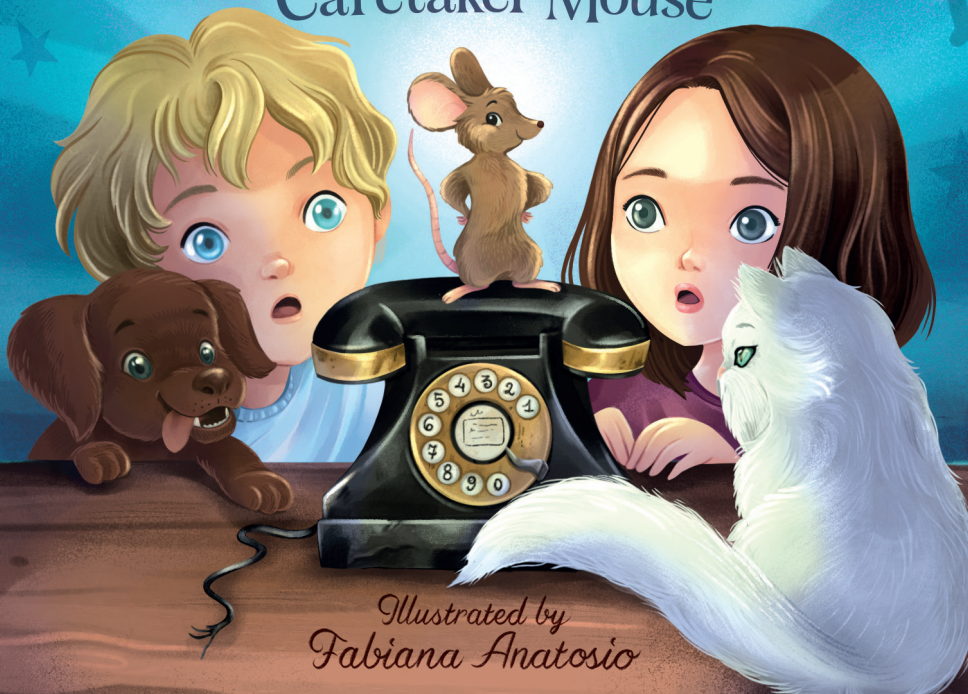
Stella Tarakson

MAGIC ANIMAL CAFE

Herriot the Caretaker Mouse



Illustrated by Fabiana Anatosio

Book 1 in the fun Magical Animal Cafe adventure series!

Ellie and her mum are starting a new life in a new town and a very, very old building. They're opening a cat café, but there's a lot to do first – like welcoming the Andersons. Ellie doesn't want to share her home with strangers, especially Blake and his energetic puppy, Choccy. But when Ellie and Blake discover a magical old phone and a mouse determined to get rid of them, they'll have to find a way to all get along together.

About the Magical Animal Cafe series:

Join Ellie and Blake as they start new lives in a new town and a mysterious old building. They've only just met, but already they share a magical secret: they can talk to animals! That could prove useful with Ellie's mum opening a cat café, but the café is under threat from a greedy property developer – unless Ellie and Blake can stop him.

With engaging illustrations and quirky talking animals, Magic Animal Café is perfect for animal lovers and young readers aged 7+.

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Stella Tarakson

Fabiana Anatosio

Sweet Cherry



Chapter One

'Can you get Mozart off the piano, love?'

Ellie tore her gaze from the sketch pad. 'Hmm?'

'Mozart,' Mum repeated. 'He's making an awful racket, and I'm trying to concentrate.' Bracelets jingling, she kneaded her forehead with one hand and leafed through a stack of papers with the other.

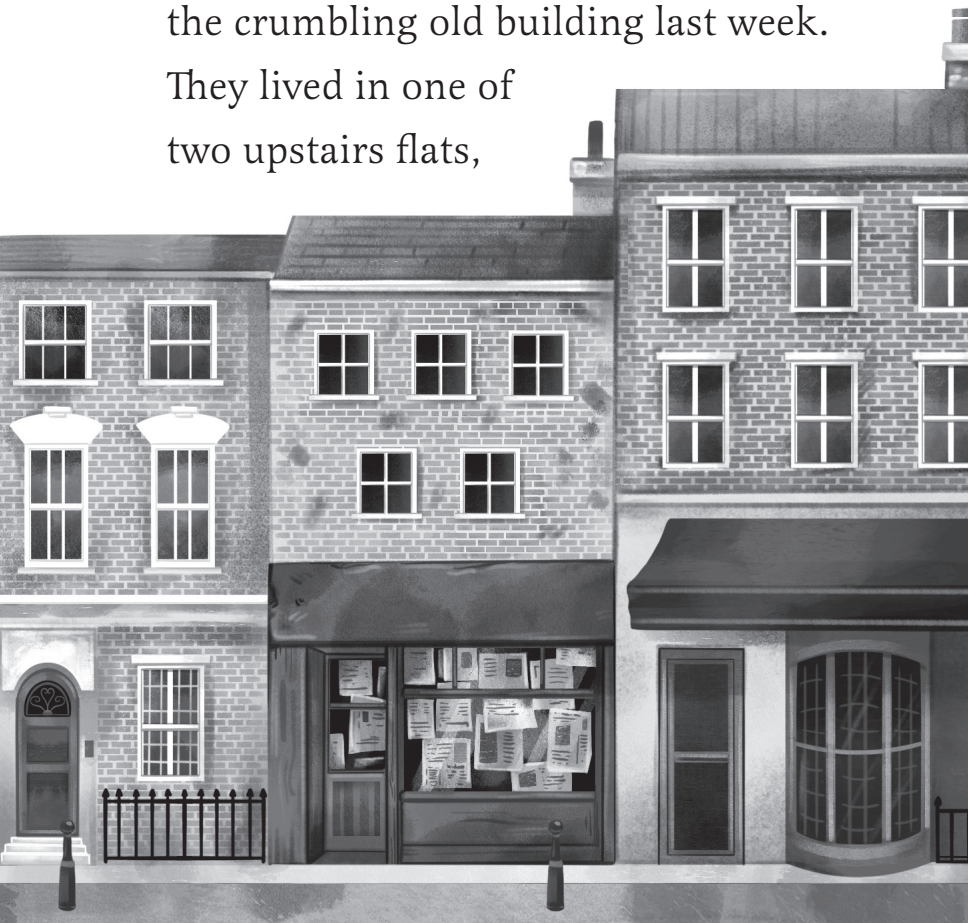
‘All right.’ Ellie put down her pencil on the packing crate that served as a temporary desk. She’d been too absorbed in her drawing to notice the tuneless *plink plonk plink*ing until now. She stood up and walked over to the piano. ‘Come on, you.’

Ellie placed an arm under Mozart’s fluffy belly and scooped him gently off the keys. He squirmed in protest, but settled on Ellie’s lap when she sat cross-legged back on the floor. He placed a paw on Ellie’s drawing.

‘Do you miss it too?’ she whispered into the cat’s ear, so that her mum couldn’t hear.

The house in Ellie's drawing was small and neat, with lace curtains and flowers in the window. It looked bright, cheerful and welcoming – not like the dump they lived in now, she thought.

Ellie and her mum had moved into the crumbling old building last week. They lived in one of two upstairs flats,



where the ceilings were low, the windows were small, and the floorboards were dark and uneven. As unsettling as their flat was, however, it was nothing compared to what was downstairs.



The ground floor had been left empty for years. Before that, it had been used for all sorts of things, from a post office to a vet's surgery. Remains of these past lives



kept turning up in odd nooks and crannies: safety caps for medicine bottles, curled up scraps of paper, broken pens and pencils. Junk.

Just yesterday, Mum had discovered a peeling leather trunk covered with moth-eaten blankets. The trunk was fastened with a padlock and stashed in the bottom of an old cupboard. It looked mysterious, locked up and hidden away like that. Ellie couldn't help wondering what was inside – but it was probably only more rubbish, she decided.

'I'll deal with that later,' Mum had said, closing the cupboard door. 'After the electrician's gone.'

Ellie had to admit the place looked better since the electrician had put in new lights. Old newspaper still lined the street-facing window, but the place wasn't quite so gloomy, and the shadows weren't so deep. Still, there was a long way to go before it would be ready for customers. The painters and decorators were due soon, and there was so much left to do that her mum had quickly forgotten about the trunk.

'Ow!' Ellie yelped as Beethoven pounced on her, digging a claw into her thigh. Mozart yowled at the interruption, and the two cats started hissing and batting each other with their paws. Chopin stalked over to see what was going on.

‘Stop it, you lot,’ Mum said, waving a sheet of paper in their direction. ‘I’ve got to order the sign this afternoon or it won’t be ready for opening day, and I’m still not even sure about the name! What do you think, Ellie?’

‘I thought you’d already decided.’

Mum had been agonising over what to call her new business for weeks:



Catmosphere, Purrfection, The Pawsome Café, The Clawsome Café.

'Yeah, but I think I've changed my mind again ...'

'Don't,' Ellie said. 'Cattucino's good. You should just pick something and go with it.'

'I suppose so.' Mum twisted one of her long dark curls through her fingers and smiled. 'You're so sensible. Maybe you should be running the cat café instead of me.'

Ellie opened her mouth to speak but thought better of it. It was true, her mum wasn't very businesslike. She was the artistic type, with her long flowing

dresses and armloads of bracelets. Before the divorce, Mum had been a concert pianist, and after it a piano teacher so that she could spend more time at home. A few months ago, she'd inherited an old building from her grandfather – Ellie's great-grandfather – and decided to set up her own business.



‘It’s the chance I’ve been looking for,’ Mum had said, her eyes shining as she outlined her plans.
‘We’ll live on the first floor and rent out the second floor flat for extra money. You can help out in the café. It’ll be great, sweetie, you’ll see.’

Ellie hadn’t wanted to move. She hadn’t wanted to leave her friends or change schools or be forced to share their home with strangers.

‘What time did you say that family is moving in?’ Ellie asked.

‘The Andersons? I’m not sure. Soon. You can give their son a tour.’

Even though she’d never met the Andersons, Mum expected Ellie to

make friends with their son simply because they were the same age. Ellie knew nothing about him! What if he was mean or spoilt or both? What if he was just boring?

Ellie heard the rumble of a van pull up outside. She swallowed nervously. 'They're here.'

END OF FREE EXTRACT

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