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Inthe Spotlight

By Anna Malpas

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This week, President Dmitry Medvedev attended top-level talks with Barack Obama on nuclear security, and the world sat up and took notice when his cat went missing. Or didn't.

The alarm was sounded Tuesday by the Sobesednik.ru news website, a source not famed for its reliability. But the report had some good details about posters on lampposts and a quote from his breeder saying Dorofei should be past the surging hormones of his youthful runaway phase.

Moscow region police officially denied that they were searching for a cat, but Twitter came alive with discussion. Dorofei became one of the world trends, and someone started a Dorofei Twitter account, in which he said he was scared of being handed over to Putin and had taken refuge in the U.S. Embassy.

It was Medvedev who trumped the rumor, writing a Twitter message that knowingly pressed the buttons of all the journalists and bloggers. "About the cat. Sources close to Dorofei have learned that he didn't go anywhere. Thanks to everybody for worrying."

He used a slang word for cat, kote, that is used to describe the popular Internet genre of cat-lovers' adoring photos and videos of their pets.

Long-haired Dorofei has been something of an enigmatic figure up till now, rarely photographed, although a little more often than the Medvedevs' teenage son Ilya. Medvedev referred to him dismissively on the children's version of the Kremlin's website, saying "We have a moggy. A fat one. He's called Dorofei."

He is a Nevskaya Maskaradnaya cat, a beautiful Russian breed that is not effusively friendly in my experience. His one moment of fame came in 2008, when reports said he had to be castrated after he came off much the worse in a fight with Mikhail Gorbachev's cat. Komsomolskaya Pravda joked that he now had "experience of political struggle."

He has allegedly written a weekly column about the doings at the Kremlin in trashy women's magazine Tainy Zvyozd, or Secrets of the Stars. But the claws have never really been out. The magazine, which puts Putin on its cover at every opportunity, formerly ran a column with the byline of his Labrador retriever, Connie. We last saw Connie lounging on a sofa and enjoying a good rubdown from Putin as his wife Lyudmila perched awkwardly in the corner in footage shot during the national census in 2010.

Meanwhile, it girl, journalist and now opposition voice Ksenia Sobchak was called for questioning by police after the Life News tabloid reported its journalists were beaten up and their video camera broken in her Tverbul restaurant. She faces legal action from a powerful and strongly pro-Kremlin media outlet.

In a bizarre story that seems to be taken fairly seriously by police, journalists were filming in the restaurant where Sobchak was socializing with Solidarity activist Ilya Yashin, liberal leader Boris Nemtsov and his girlfriend Anastasia Ogneva. Life News claims that its journalists did not come to film Sobchak but that the conversation at her table "attracted their professional attention." It says the whole group then attacked the journalists and one suffered bruises and had her video camera broken. Police have opened a criminal case over "deliberate destruction of property" — not beating — although no one has yet to be charged.

Sobchak said on Twitter that Life News had submitted "a false report of beating." She added that paparazzi know the score: If they try to film secretly, "I have the right to expose them and defend myself." She skipped the questioning because she is in Florida and jokingly wrote on Twitter in prison slang, begging: "Don't make me take the rap."

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