

Landing On My Feet

THE ADVENTURES OF POOHKA THE CAT



ADELAIDE GODWIN



*This is for Oliver, Charlotte, Nathalia,
Cameron, Rory, Erin, Holly and Heston.*

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In August 2006, Poohka, the main character of this story, was living as a feral cat on a private estate in Sotogrande, southern Spain. Poohka went missing for over a month and, when he eventually returned on the 23rd September, he had a very badly broken leg. To this day, no one knows how the injury happened or where he was during this traumatic time in his life.

Only Poohka knows and this is his amazing story!

I would like to believe it is true
(albeit a little far-fetched!).

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Chapter 1 - A bad day to be hungry

Sotogrande, Andalucía, southern Spain.

Life in Sotogrande was good for Poohka and his friends. He enjoyed the freedom of living on a private estate, he was fed a healthy meal once a day, and he had a good circle of friends. What more could he possibly want?

‘Morning, 3jabs,’ Poohka called to his best friend. ‘Did you have a good night’s hunting?’

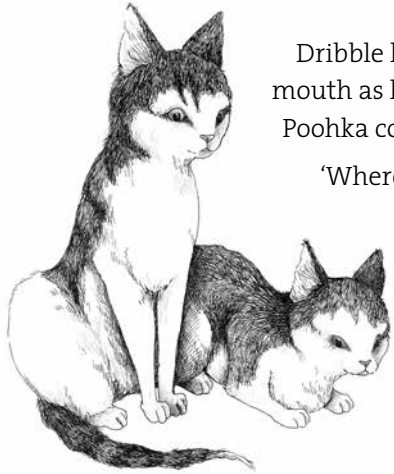
‘Mate, it was brilliant,’ 3jabs replied as he groomed his rather grubby-looking coat. Poohka liked that 3jabs was more intent on enjoying himself than wasting precious time on his appearance. Life was too short, so 3jabs lived life to the full. No exceptions!

‘3jabs, will you tell me the story of how you got your name?’ Poohka asked.

‘What, again?’ said 3jabs. But Poohka knew that 3jabs loved telling the tale. The highlight of his day was explaining to any new cats passing through, especially the young ladies, how he had actually got his name. And Poohka never tired of hearing it – he was so very proud of his loyal friend.

‘Well, you see, it happened like this,’ 3jabs recalled. ‘I was waiting patiently for my daily meal to arrive, close to the workers’ hut, when – blow me down – I smelt the most delicious aroma of sardines coming from a newly deposited large wooden box. You know me, I’m an easy target when it comes to my food, and I could not resist the temptation.’

3jabs took a deep breath, paused briefly, then continued. ‘So I cautiously made my way over to the box. The smells were so overpowering by this stage, but I was aware of Greta, the tall elegant lady who took it in turns to feed us, standing close by, so I told myself to be on my guard...’



Dribble had started dripping from 3jabs's mouth as he swapped his story for a daydream. Poohka coughed.

'Where was I?' he exclaimed, licking his lips. 'Yes, well, to cut a long story short, I succumbed – I walked straight into the box. Bingo – the door to the box slammed shut!' 3jabs jumped on all fours as he spoke. 'I had walked into a trap!'

'What happened next?' Poohka asked, his attention fixed on his best friend.

'I was not going to give up easily, so I hissed and I clawed the wire frame at the other end of the wooden box, then, of course, I hissed some more.' 3jabs chuckled. 'But all the while, the sardines were practically talking to me, telling me to eat their fishy delights. So I quietened down and devoured them with so much relish, I nearly forgot I was trapped inside the wooden cage. The next thing I knew, I was being picked up in the box. Then I heard a car door slam, and an engine start. I do not understand why humans want to get into those fast-moving vehicles; I cannot see the point of them,' 3jabs grumbled. 'Anyway, after a terrible journey – no creature like myself has ever experienced so many pot holes in such a ramshackle road – eventually we arrived at a building that made my stomach turn,' 3jabs said. 'I'm not boring you, am I?'

'Oh no, not at all,' said Tigs, who was sitting closest to 3jabs, to the right of Poohka. Tigs had heard the story many times too, but all the young cats enjoyed the tale.

'Well, as I was saying, we entered this white, clinical-looking building and were met by the owner of the joint: Antonio. He's not a man I ever want to see again! My senses told me to be very cautious of him. "What have we here?" Antonio asked in perfect

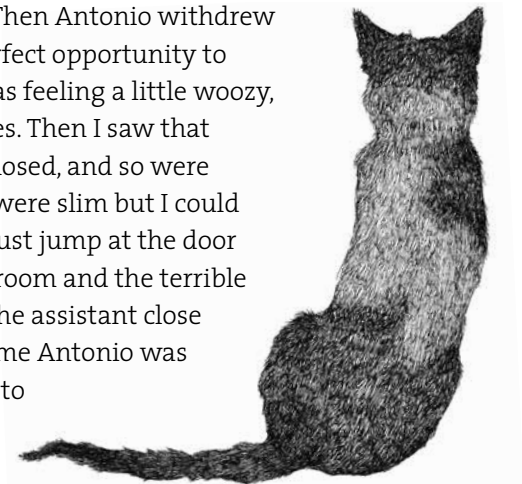
English. "Oh, just another cat from our estate to be neutered," replied Greta. "Can I leave him with you, and we will collect him tomorrow?" "Of course, any time after twelve tomorrow will be fine," said Antonio.'

3jabs turned his head slowly to all the cats in his audience. "Just another cat" she said! And of course I am not 'just another cat' – so I had to prove they were wrong. The wooden box was carried into a yellow painted room with white tables and metal instruments everywhere. I was placed on the table in the centre of the room and the young assistant came across, gave me gooey eyes and chatted to me through the wire netting. Meanwhile, the door at the other end was being slowly opened by Antonio the vet. What the idiots did not realize was I could see everything going on in the mirror hanging on the wall behind the assistant!

"Keep the cat's attention, Anya," said Antonio, "while I give him a quick injection to put him out."

"Put me out" he said! Well, no one is ever going to put ME out.' 3jabs gave a hiss into the air, then looked down again to check that Poohka, Tigs and the others were still paying attention.

'I turned round so swiftly that I just caught the tip of the syringe in my shoulder. I winced with pain but wasn't going to stop now. Then Antonio withdrew his hand, giving me the perfect opportunity to escape,' 3jabs went on. 'I was feeling a little woozy, but I still had all my marbles. Then I saw that the door to the room was closed, and so were the windows. My chances were slim but I could not give up now. If I could just jump at the door handle, I could escape this room and the terrible syringe. I darted one way, the assistant close on my tail, during which time Antonio was setting up another syringe to plant into my backside.'



All the while, I was getting wobblier on my paws, but I wasn't any the less determined.

The next thing I knew, Antonio flew in my direction with the syringe in his hand like Billy the Kid. I could see anger flashing in his eyes. I had no choice but to aim for the side table that held all the medical equipment and I flew at it with all my might. The tray went crashing to the floor, and a glass bottle tumbled, smashing close to the tray. It all happened so fast, things went flying all over the place – implements fell down the side of the cabinet, more glass was breaking. I was doing a really good job of trashing the place,' 3jabs grinned.

'All of a sudden – wham! – he got me, right in the rear hind quarter. This time the pain was excruciating. Within seconds I was feeling drowsy, and completely unsteady. All I thought about was not giving in. I fought the sedative with so much determination.' 3jabs stopped for a breather as his audience waited, captivated. Poohka's mouth had dropped open, waiting for the climax of the story, even though he knew what was to come. 'As I tried to jump up at the door handle, it seemed to move,' he continued, slightly less dramatically. 'I was becoming more unsteady by the minute and found that I could not jump – my right back leg kept giving way. What was I to do?'

'What did you do, 3jabs?' cried Tigs, his paws at his cheeks in horror.

'Before I knew it, another syringe was plunged into my left side, and suddenly my body became numb. But I refused to close my eyes and I could see Antonio and Anya bearing down on me. I just about heard Antonio's voice say, "We'd better get this job done quickly, before this maniac comes around." Then everything became a blur! I do vaguely remember being dumped back into the wooden box, and the door slammed shut. The remains of the sardines were starting to smell a little rancid, but I was so out of it, I did not care. I closed my eyes, and fell into the deepest of

sleeps. That is the last I remember of that awful day.'

Poohka, Tigs and the other cats all gasped as 3jabs's story came to an end. But he hadn't quite finished.

'The following afternoon,' 3jabs went on, chuckling, 'I was collected by another lady from the estate, Annabel, and her husband Alex. I heard Antonio explain to them that it had taken three injections to knock me out, and even then I was not completely under. He also told them I had caused absolute havoc and ruined his surgery, so he never wanted to see me again! As I was carried into Annabel and Alex's car I breathed a huge sigh of relief. Then I concentrated on what they were saying as Alex turned the key to start the engine. Before taking his foot off the brake, he looked at Annabel and said, "I think we should call him 3jabs. What do you think?" "I think it is the perfect name for him," replied Annabel, smiling. And so that is why I am affectionately named 3jabs.' 3jabs grinned to himself as his story finally came to a close.

Poohka rolled over and stretched out to his fullest length in awe of his friend 3jabs. Poohka closed his eyes and thought of how lucky he was to have such a beautiful place to live, with such wonderful friends. Especially his greatest friend of all, 3jabs. But his friends weren't all cats. He loved his daily walks with Alex and Annabel around the villas of Sotogrande. Life could not be better. In fact, it was perfect!

As the other cats wandered off, Poohka felt a grumble in his stomach. 'I'm feeling a little peckish,' he realised.

'Go and check out the dustbins outside the entrance of the estate,' said 3jabs. 'I got a good whiff of some prawns when I passed by earlier. Normally I would have been tempted to take a look and sample the delights, but I had a good night's hunting and am ready for my siesta.' And, with that, 3jabs yawned, then closed his eyes to take a nap.

Poohka had another good, slow stretch, then got to his feet and meandered in the direction of the rubbish bins. 'Wow, prawns,' Poohka said in a whisper. 'My favourite.'

As he arrived at the large refuse containers, the smell of prawns was quite overpowering. Poohka's heart missed a beat at the prospect of the feast to come.

He climbed up a discarded carpet that was propped against a cardboard box beside the rubbish bins, then leapt up on to the top of the bin. He immediately started rummaging through the contents to get to the source of the fishy smells. But there were no prawns in here.

Undeterred, Poohka jumped into the next-door rubbish skip. And there they were! Nestled in a corner, a big bag full of discarded prawn shells.

'This will keep me busy for the rest of the afternoon!' Poohka thought to himself, thrilled at his find. Siesta time would have to wait – this was far more important.

Poohka was surprised that he was the only one around the dustbin area. Normally, if his chums had caught a whiff of the prawns, they would be in the bin alongside him, consuming the delights before they were all gone.

'Never mind,' he thought. 'This means they are all for me – how wonderful is that?' Poohka, unable to contain himself, started to purr loudly, as he scavenged the prawns and satisfied his growling stomach.

Soon, Poohka came across one really large untouched prawn. It was full of juicy meat, but as he picked it up in his jaws, he slipped on the can where he had placed his left paw. The delicious prawn fell from his mouth and slipped down into the pile of rubbish inside the container. Poohka wasn't about to let such a juicy prawn go, and began pawing his way deeper into the skip.

All of a sudden, the whole container moved! It lurched sideways, tipping Poohka out of the rubbish bin into an even bigger container full of hundreds of bin bags. He leapt up, struggled desperately to get to his feet amongst the rubbish, and saw the bin he'd first climbed into hanging perilously above him. He knew he had to get out before the contents of this one were poured on top of him. But he could not move fast enough, and his meows went unheard. Rubbish poured down as Poohka heard the first skip crashing back into place on the ground, with the next one only moments behind.

Poohka, terrified, tried hopelessly to scramble to the top of the rubbish, but just as fast as he climbed, more containers of rubbish were emptied on to him. He meowed as loudly as he could. Surely someone would hear him? Alas, no one did! The rubbish machine made so much noise that nothing could be heard by the dustmen doing their Sotogrande round.

As the claws of the machine began to whip around the rubbish, Poohka tumbled back and forth to avoid the mechanical pincers, desperately grabbing at anything that might help to save him. He was hot, scared and running out of energy. Just when he thought he could scramble no longer, Poohka found a large black bin liner containing something very solid – solid enough to protect him from the giant claws – and he propped himself next to it. Exhausted, Poohka collapsed beside it.

Panting heavily to get his breath back, Poohka put a solitary paw up to his face. Then it hit him. Of course! It was Wednesday – rubbish day! The day everyone knew to stay well clear of the rubbish bins. No wonder no other cats were around!

'I was so consumed with hunger, I forgot what day it was,' Poohka told himself. Then he slumped back, and suddenly everything went black.

Chapter 2 - No place for a siesta

In August, the hottest time of the year in southern Spain, Spike sat motionless in the heat of the sun. He was perched on a decaying branch of an old cork oak tree. The week had passed too slowly for Spike, a mature and splendid looking vulture. Spike longed for Wednesdays to come around, and waited impatiently.

There was a gentle but obvious roar of a lorry in the distance. Spike jumped up, stretched his scaly neck and flexed his claws. 'It's coming!' he cried joyfully.

Señor Arbol, the once majestic cork oak tree, groaned loudly. 'For goodness' sake, Spike, if you carry on with this behaviour you will break my weary old branch. Then you will lose your prime spot here at the rubbish tip.'

'OK, OK!' he yelled with excitement, struggling to contain himself. 'I'll try my best, but my tummy is rumbling so much, and my food is on its way!'

As if in reply, the decaying branch beneath Spike made a big creaking noise. Spike gulped and immediately stopped bouncing up and down. Spike liked his vantage point closest to the dumping area, and he'd fought hard to get this prime position. He had no intention of losing it now!

As the lorry made its way along the parched, uneven surface of the landfill site, it jerked up and down and side to side. Both Señor Arbol and Spike could feel the vibration of the vehicle as it came nearer.

Spike could barely contain himself when the lorry stopped close to the old cork tree. The branch creaked loudly once more. Señor Arbol let out yet another big sigh.

All of a sudden, heads popped up from the mounds of rubbish already scattered across the landfill site. All eyes were fixed on



the lorry about to dump its load. Squeals of excitement echoed around as the smells from the rubbish drifted through the air.

The driver and his assistants climbed down from the cab and set to work. The smells grew stronger as the crushed contents of the lorry were tipped up and over – exposed for all to see. The men climbed quickly back up into the driver's cab and the door slammed closed. Within seconds the noisy lorry moved away over the bumpy ground, its chains clanging against the empty container. As it turned out of the site, turning right onto the main road heading south, peace returned to the site of the newly dumped rubbish.

Within an instant, all sorts of creatures appeared from nowhere. They all had the same desire: to have a long-awaited meal. A feast of all feasts!

But Spike was the first to swoop down on top of the new rubbish. He ripped and pecked his way furiously through the bin bags, eating everything edible in his path.

All the rats, mice and other animals knew only too well to stay clear of Spike. He could not be trusted – before you knew it, you could be his next meal. Spike would eat anything – dead or alive!

Raimondo was a lazy, overweight individual, and head of the rat fraternity. He exploited his position as Chief Rat – especially on Wednesdays. Raimondo wandered over to the newly dumped rubbish, careful to stay clear of Spike. He was in search of his rat underlings in order to feast on the best pickings they had already unravelled.

Just then, a junior rat, Paco, was celebrating his find: a banana skin brunch to end all brunches!

'Thanks, Paco,' Raimondo said as he approached. 'You can move on now to another area until I am done here.' The Chief Rat began munching the tasty banana skin.

'Right you are, boss' said Paco, without hesitation. 'Come



on, kids, let's move down the pile,' he added glumly. 'We'll get some food there if we are lucky.' So Paco and his family moved obediently along.

Raimondo was already well into Paco's leftovers and ate the lot with gusto. After a few burps and sighs of delight, Raimondo eventually wiped his whiskers with his front paws, rolled over and let out a big yawn. Now that his stomach was full to the brim, it was time to take a much-needed siesta. Raimondo tweaked his whiskers, gave his tummy a good scratch, closed both eyes and promptly fell asleep.

As soon as Raimondo's snores rang out, Paco and his family could go back to scavenging without fear of interruption. Paco had to find as much as he could to keep his family going. The population was growing here at the rubbish dump, and no one knew if there would be enough food to go around in the months to come.

Señor Arbol watched the scene unfold feeling very tired and weary. He could remember the days when he was the focus of a wonderful estate, greatly admired by estate owners throughout the country. But sadly, times had changed, and the estate was now used as a landfill site.

What's more, Señor Arbol knew his own days were numbered. What he wanted more than anything was for the rains to come to quench his thirst. He only had a small supply of water stashed away for emergencies, and he wondered if he could survive the month of August with the sun beating down so fiercely. His branches were badly scorched as was the outer layer of cork around his trunk.

As he surveyed the scurrying animals, Señor Arbol thought he saw something unusual out of the corner of his eye. Of course there was a lot of activity going on within the enormous pile of rubbish, but something inside made him feel that this was important.

Señor Arbol strained to see what it was that had caught his attention, and saw a head rise from a black bin liner. As the head fell slowly back down, it knocked a tin can, and a jingling sound rang out. Most of the animals stopped for a moment before they quickly resumed their meals.

Nearby, Spike was far too intent on ripping open bags and boxes to notice the noise. But as the tin can rolled down the heap of rubbish, Señor Arbol knew it was his duty to do something. 'Raimondo,' he called in his deep, melancholy voice.

Raimondo opened one eye, then promptly closed it. He was not going to let anyone disturb his much-needed siesta!

'Raimondo, this is important!' called Señor Arbol. This time his voice was low but showed more determination and urgency.

'What do you want? I am trying to have a well-earned siesta,' replied Raimondo.

'I need your help. Raimondo, please!' pleaded Señor Arbol.

Raimondo had been woken from one of his wonderful dreams, and was about to curl up to go back to sleep, when he remembered that it was Señor Arbol who had saved his life not all that long ago, when he too had ended up on the rubbish tip.

'OK, OK, what is it?' Raimondo reluctantly replied. 'This had better be important. I do not take kindly to being woken from a good dream!'

'I have seen some unusual movement in the lower left quarter, not far from Spike,' said Señor Arbol. 'I think it may be an animal in distress. Please try and stir the little creature, then get it over to me as quickly as possible before Spike becomes aware of anything.'

'How come you always give me the easy jobs?' Raimondo murmured sarcastically.

Señor Arbol ignored the rat. 'If Spike knows what is going on,

the injured animal will not stand a chance, so you must be quick, but please also be careful.'

'OK, OK, I will get on to it, pronto!' gasped Raimondo.

The Chief Rat began climbing the pile of rubbish that Señor Arbol had indicated, not far away from Spike.

Fortunately, Spike was still totally immersed in devouring all sorts of unsavoury things in his area, oblivious to anything else going on around him. However, Raimondo was aware this could change in a second.

Raimondo's eyesight was pretty good, but as he approached he couldn't see any sign of a little animal in distress. Raimondo did not dare get any closer, as it would draw attention to himself as well as to whatever Señor Arbol had seen.

If Spike realised something was going on, he would raise the alarm, then his whole ghastly family would descend on the landfill site and they'd all be in really big trouble! The thought sent shivers down Raimondo's spine, conjuring up a terrifying vision of Spike and all his relatives pecking away at both him and his troop of rats, not to mention the injured animal he was trying to save.

But perhaps it was already too late for the creature buried within the rubbish?

Raimondo started tapping the small tin can tied to his neck to send out his emergency signal to all his fellow able-bodied rodents. Within seconds, over fifty strong rats surrounded him, ready for instructions.

'Paco,' Raimondo said, 'there's an injured animal out there who needs my help. I need you to take your group over to Spike and cause a disturbance. You must keep Spike distracted long enough for the rest of us to get to the left-hand quarter and to that damsel in distress,' explained Raimondo.

'We're on to it, Chief!' Paco cried, then immediately scampered off in Spike's direction with his group of rats.

Once Paco's group were in place, Raimondo and his group moved swiftly towards the lower left-hand quarter, dodging plastic bags, tin cans, string, ripped cardboard boxes and all sorts of other discarded rubbish. Eventually, Raimondo came to a halt; he'd spotted a bundle of matted, dirty ginger fur amongst the piles.

Raimondo's heart sank. He had desperately hoped he'd be saving a beautiful lady rat. Instead it appeared to be something much bigger.

He turned to the rat by his side, a grey-furred rodent named Pedro. 'Pedro, hold the troops back at a distance. I will go in to check out this creature first. We cannot be too careful.'

Pedro nodded. 'Be on your guard, Raimondo,' he replied. 'We will be ready for all eventualities.'

'Thanks, Pedro, I know I can trust you,' said a worried Raimondo.

Spike was still happily devouring all kinds of goodies. He was currently enjoying a half-eaten chicken and some delicious potatoes coated with scrumptious custard. His eyes rolled with delight when, all of a sudden, up popped Paco and his gang of rats. Before Spike could chase them away, they started throwing at him any sort of rubbish they could get their paws on.

'Get away, you horrible rats, or I will gobble you all up!' Spike cried out. 'If you are not careful, I will coat you in some delicious custard and add you to my dinner!' Spike was getting angrier by the second; he had no intention of abandoning the latest treasure of goodies he'd unravelled from a luxury carrier bag!

'Keep throwing things at him,' called Paco to his fellow rats, 'until I give the all-clear.'

So the barrage continued, and Spike got angrier and angrier. But he didn't want to retaliate and lose his precious bag of goodies in the process.

Although the thought of custard-coated rat did not

overwhelm him, Spike decided it was time to take some action. He could use the pile of clean bones neatly stacked at his side as weapons, and began to shower the rats with the chicken bones. He grinned as, one by one, the rats retreated down the rubbish pile, ducking and dodging the missiles being hurled at them from a height.

Spike was beginning to wonder if he'd need to call on his family of vultures for assistance, but that would definitely mean forfeiting his gourmet meal!

Then, as suddenly as they had appeared, the gang of rats backed off, and had soon completely disappeared from sight.

'Thank heavens for that!' Spike sighed with delight. He quickly returned to gorging himself on the feast in the bag before anyone or anything could take it away.

Raimondo moved cautiously towards the mound of ginger mess. He first poked his nose and then his feet into the motionless bundle of fur.

'Nothing happening here,' said Raimondo. 'I think he's a goner. I'll remove some of the debris on top to investigate further.'

'Be careful, Chief,' called Pedro from a distance.

'Don't worry, I will,' gasped Raimondo. 'I am not enjoying this one little bit.'

Raimondo began digging away the rubbish around the matted ginger and white fur. Suddenly he froze.

'What is it, Chief?' cried Pedro.

'It's a CAT!' shrieked the Chief Rat.

Pedro and his troop of rats shuffled further back at this revelation. They'd risked their lives trying to save a CAT. Their number one enemy!

'Bring the cat to me,' boomed Señor Arbol.



Raimondo spun around. 'You must be kidding,' he said. 'This is not a rescue I want to be part of.'

Señor Arbol sighed. 'You must help the creature, Raimondo. Please bring it to me as quickly as possible.'

Raimondo stared at the matted fur, until eventually guilt got the better of him. He started to prod the cat, hoping it was either dead or in a coma. Raimondo wanted to get out of this predicament as soon as he could, return to his cosy home and get on with his siesta!

The cat still showed no sign of life. Raimondo was reluctant to get too close to the cat's head for fear of waking it and ending up as its dinner.

The Chief Rat signalled with a paw to Señor Arbol. 'I cannot do this. It's way beyond the call of duty.'

'Please, Raimondo, if the cat is still alive, just bring the little mite to me, and you will be free of it. Remember, I once did the same for you.'

'But what if I help save this cat only to be eaten by it, once it's back to health? No, thank you!' Raimondo shouted. 'Pick another sucker; I quit!'

Raimondo turned to his gang. 'Come on, lads, let's get out of here. A rat saving a cat – you must be joking.' The rat started to walk away, but then stopped in his tracks. He'd seen the cat's chest move. 'It's breathing!' he gulped.

'All the more reason to save it!' sighed Señor Arbol. 'I am very disappointed in you, Raimondo. I thought you were a better rat than that. If you let the cat die without even trying to save it, it will be on your conscience for the rest of your life. Can you live with that?'

Raimondo knew Señor Arbol was a wise old tree, but this wasn't what he wanted to hear right at this moment. He couldn't care less for the cat, but he did care about Señor Arbol.

Raimondo took a deep breath, and spun on his heels. 'OK, troops, we're back on the job again,' he gasped. 'But nobody wake the cat, otherwise we'll all be for it.'

Pedro and his fellow rats crept closer and closer to the animal. They surrounded its furry body and, in unison, very gently lifted the motionless creature. Carrying their greatest enemy, they inched slowly towards Señor Arbol, trying to avoid tin cans, rubbish and anything else in their paths that might make enough noise to wake their dangerous load.

But Pedro was looking ahead to the great cork oak tree and didn't see a decaying banana skin poking out from the rubbish. He stumbled and lost his grip on the cat's head! An almighty gasp went out from all the rats carrying the animal and then they froze in fear.

Pedro slowly reached down to the cat's head and lifted it back up in his trembling paws. 'It's, err, OK, err, lads,' he said in a stuttering voice. 'The cat is still unconscious but let's move on quickly.'

The rats let out a great sigh when eventually they reached the base of Señor Arbol's trunk.

As soon as they'd released the still-motionless creature, the rats darted off in the direction of the new pile of rubbish without waiting for any more orders. Back to scavenging once more!

Raimondo quickly sent out a signal via his tin can that the job was now terminated – the rats could get back to their previous activities, well away from Spike. Finally, Raimondo could resume his siesta, and he did so easily, falling gently into the land of nod and dreaming about faraway places after a job well done – albeit for a cat!

Meanwhile, as night fell, Señor Arbol tended the little ginger cat, becoming more concerned with the condition of the injured animal curled up at the bottom of his tree trunk. Although he

could feel breathing coming from the cat, there were no other signs of life.

Señor Arbol desperately wanted to keep the animal alive. He felt responsible for the animals around him, and after all the rats' efforts to deliver the cat, he could not give up now! But Señor Arbol's powers were limited and the recent drought had reduced him to living off his emergency supply of water.

He soon realised he had no choice – he would have to give the cat what little fluids he still had, whatever the consequences to himself.

He focused on sending all the fluid in his branches down through his trunk to the outer coating of cork, by which the comatose animal lay. Then with one great, final effort, he squeezed the fluid out of the cork right into the cat's mouth.

As he passed on his 'elixir of life', Señor Arbol felt his whole trunk shudder, then wither a little more. His energies fell considerably, but he knew this was the only chance he had to save one of God's creatures.

It was now very clear to Señor Arbol that if the rains did not come soon, his life would be over.

Chapter 3 - Time to wake up

Poohka felt cold, tired and strange. Where was he? He didn't dare open his eyes, but he twitched his ears. He could hear the rustling of tree leaves, but he had no idea where he was. Very slowly, he opened his eyes. 'Where am I?' said his squeaky, scared voice.

'You are safe, little one, for the time being,' said the low, tired voice of the cork oak tree that towered above him. 'I am Señor Arbol, and I will help get you well again and on your way as soon as possible.'

'This must be a terrible dream!' squealed Poohka. 'I live in Sotogrande – a beautiful place. This is just a h-h-horrible nightmare,' stuttered the cat.

'I am sorry, little one, for this is not a bad dream. You are in a landfill site, where all the rubbish is dumped, far away from your beautiful home,' whispered Señor Arbol.

Poohka felt a tear roll slowly from his eye and along his whiskers, dropping onto his lips. He licked it away and shook his head.

'What is your name, little one?' asked Señor Arbol.

Poohka was scared, but the old cork tree seemed trustworthy. 'It's Poohka, sir. Please, what am I to do? I must get home, back to Sotogrande.' He could feel himself shaking, but he knew it was not just from the cold.

'I will see what I can do to help you find your way home, but it will not be easy,' whispered Señor Arbol. 'There are many dangerous creatures here and so you must not stay long. I do have one friend I can trust but I am not sure if he will be prepared to help. The problem is that you are a cat!' Señor Arbol sighed, his voice getting ever fainter with his diminishing