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Opening extract from

Landing On My Feet The Adventures of Poohka the Cat

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

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?'

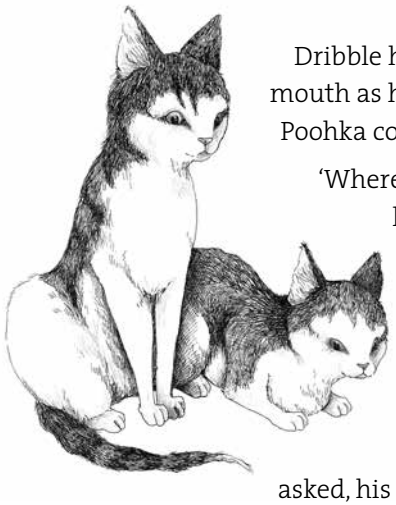
'Mate, it was brilliant,' 3jabs replied as he groomed his rather grubby-looking coat. Poohka liked that 3jabs was more intent on enjoying himself than wasting precious time on his appearance. Life was too short, so 3jabs lived life to the full. No exceptions!

'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

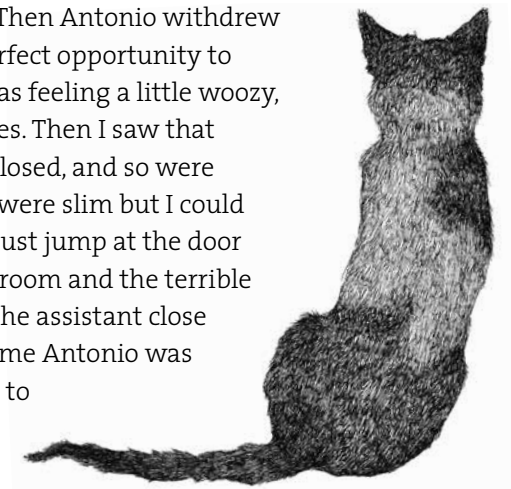
English. "Oh, just another cat from our estate to be neutered," replied Greta. "Can I leave him with you, and we will collect him tomorrow?" "Of course, any time after twelve tomorrow will be fine," said Antonio.'

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.