

Chapter Two.

New home.

After waiting for what seemed like forever, not sure what was going to happen, El Gordo drifted into a light sleep. But suddenly, a loud noise woke him up, making him slide across the cage floor. It wasn't a dream – this was really happening, he thought. The car stopped, the noises stopped, and his tummy rumbled. The cage lifted up again, being turned this way and that as it was carried by a human, and it wasn't gently! He was being bumped around and he didn't like it one bit!

Dropped unceremoniously on the floor of an elevator, then promptly booted to the back as three oversized kids stormed in, their music, if you could even call that cacophony music—blaring. El Gordo was thumped against the rear wall of the elevator. "Why must humans always be so loud? Can't they do something useful like sleep? Take me home, please," he lamented. "It's even noisier out here than the cat home. How am I supposed to get any sleep again?"

Just when he thought things might settle down, he was on the move again. Abruptly scooped from the floor, he found himself travelling backward, clueless about his destination. A hollow knock, then a click... muffled voices echoed. Suddenly plunged into darkness and then, just as quickly, exposed to blinding light, he landed with a thud on the floor. Trapped in the cramped crate, unable to turn around, all he could see was a window filled with endless sky and the glaring sun. Distant, muffled voices floated around him—just disembodied voices, echoing ambiguously. Who were they? He hadn't the slightest idea.

Suddenly, El Gordo's cage was hoisted up and spun around, revealing feet and the arrival of two bowls set just out of reach. Was that tuna he smelled? His favourite! The room fell quiet, and then, miracle of miracles, his cage door swung open. An elderly woman peered in, and for a moment, El Gordo considered giving her a scratch for the interruption. But that tuna was calling his name! She tilted the cage, gently nudging him onto a chilly tiled floor—not as cold as his last digs, but still chilly. The tantalising aroma of food filled the air. Just as he was about to dive into his meal, a hand reached towards him. No thanks, he thought. He darted under a chair for cover. The chair shifted, sending him sprinting for refuge under a table. All he wanted was a quiet spot to relax, get his bearings, and perhaps plot his approach to that delicious tuna without all these human shenanigans.

"Okay then, have it your way," the gentle voice of the old lady whispered, and she left, softly closing the door behind her.

El Gordo waited and waited, but she never came back. His stomach, however, won out. With a rumbling belly dictating his actions, he cautiously emerged from under the table, half-expecting the old lady to ambush him. But no, the coast was clear. After a lengthy vigil of watching and listening, he finally approached the bowls. Food and water. He devoured both in record time, but then came the next crisis: where was the litter tray? He scanned the room—nothing. He clambered onto a chair—still nothing. In a last-ditch effort, he leapt onto the counter and spotted it. A metal bowl held a plastic one, taller than his usual litter tray and inconveniently occupied by two human cups and a plate. No litter in sight, but desperate times call for desperate measures.

After finishing what he needed to do, he looked for somewhere to sleep. On the table he saw a high pile of things that looked soft enough to make a bed, white with a red check pattern all folded in neat squares. That will do, he thought. He could make the jump. It wasn't far. The last thing he was expecting as he landed was to slide across the table, crash into the pile, continue off the table and have to twist to land on his paws, but he did it. He landed on the neatly folded squares of fabric, not so neat now, but he soon realised they were soft enough for a bed, and sleep he did.

El Gordo's peaceful sleep was shattered by a loud scream. Suddenly, he was being lifted, hearing the old lady say words that didn't sound happy at all. Before he knew it, he was pushed through a little flap door, just like the one in his box at the old place, and he found himself outside. It was chilly.

He took a look around and noticed that the bars of his new "cage" didn't go all the way up. Plus, they were spaced wide enough that he could just walk right through them. His new concrete floor seemed bigger than the one at his last home. Curious, he strolled over to the bars. There was a chair, and a big white box at the far end of this new outdoor space.

As he peered through the bars, his heart skipped a beat. He was way up high, and the humans below were tiny, like little bugs. "I hope they don't expect me to jump from here. I won't do it," he thought, his furry face filled with worry.

Exploring his new balcony, El Gordo could still hear the old lady inside, using loud, naughty words. He pondered, deciding he would be as good as possible; he didn't want to give her any reason to be upset with him, especially since he didn't know how long he'd be staying here.

The chair had a soft cushion on it. "That'll do for a nice sleep spot," he thought, his whiskers twitching slightly. Curious, he then explored the small box with a flap, similar to the door on his old box, and went inside. To his surprise, it had a litter tray, but no cosy spot to curl up. "How thoughtless," he considered, disappointed at the idea of his tray being in his sleeping space. "Looks like it's the chair for me," he concluded.

Before snuggling down into the chair, he thought he'd try the flap in the door through which he'd been pushed. As he suspected, it wouldn't budge. It was locked tight. He returned to the chair, determining it would do for now - at least it was warm, not raining, and much quieter away from the still grumbling woman inside. He kneaded the cushion with his paws, making it just right, and drifted off into a cosy nap.