

Ramón – a memoir

I am not as young as I used to be, so I thought it would be good to write a memoir before I go.

I was one of a litter of six kittens born in an alley at the back of a souvenir shop in Ibiza. I was always hungry, always getting into mischief and always having a great time. When I was about six months old I took to visiting a nearby hotel where a human put out scraps of food. They were *absolutamente* delicious. My favourite was a delicate fish pie with shrimp and a lemon sauce. After a while I gave up going home and moved into the hotel. No one seemed to mind, in fact I was really very popular.

It was not long until I had a comfortable place of my own. I could chase lizards to my heart's content, I had regular meals and I loved, just loved, lazing and snoozing through the heat of the day and stretching a bit in the late afternoon. I moved in with the hotel manager and her husband. I lay on their bed and frisked around a bit for their entertainment. In the mornings I went out hunting – I am a great killer. I don't know why but the humans were never that thrilled with my offerings. Ah well, 'La vida es así' [that is life] as my mother used to say. I am a cat and killing is what I do.

We all lived together in the hotel for quite some years but then there was this disturbance which I must tell you about. Sometime around mid-morning, after my hunt, my favourite human picked me up, stroked me a lot and then put me in this box. A pet traveler she said.

Well, I'd never been in such a thing in all my life. It was awful and I let her know it. But she took no notice. From that point on, things got worse and worse.

I was unceremoniously slid into the back of a transit van which was already occupied by a row of boxes, also containing cats like me. Well I say like me, but they were not really like me at all. These were not from the alleys that I know, they were of a much higher social class. Pure bred, and didn't they know it. Snooty to the tips of their whiskers.

The door slammed shut and we were in the dark. No problem for us, we can see in the dark. But what the hell was going on? I was looking forward to my usual afternoon nap and here I was, no sun, no light, no lizards. Just a wire fronted cage and some paltry offering of food. No sign of my human either. I took a nap. Nothing else to do.

After a lot of stopping and starting, everything went quiet. Then there was this funny movement. It was hard to say, but I am pretty sure the van was swaying. I felt a bit queasy. I can't tell how long this went on for, but I heard the tannoy 'Would all drivers please return to their vehicles'. Then we were off again. Finally, the rattling van came to a halt. There was a human voice: 'Let's park up for a bit of a rest, is that ok with you? I've been here before and there are free showers at the back of the main block'. The door opened and someone looked in 'Sure, they are all ok in here'. I could see that it was already night. Behind the human there was a billboard that said Sobradiel, Zaragoza.

I could hear the other cats moving around but soon there was silence. I couldn't tell if it was day or night when I woke up, so I growled and yowled a bit. By the sound of it, the van was on the road again and I was bored.

I got up and paced around a few times. I was about to settle down for another nap when I heard a pathetic little mewling coming from the box next to mine. I must have been too anxious to notice her before but there she was, a blue Persian with deep orange eyes. There was a thick folder attached to the side of her

cage filled with paperwork – pedigree information, passport, vaccination certificates, you name it, she had it. Her name was Lucinda, but I decided to call her Lulu. She was very pretty. *Hola*, I am Ramón. May I call you LuLu? She looked up. ‘Ramón?’. I gazed at her elegant pointy ears. What a glamour puss! She gazed back. ‘Ramón?’ she said, again. ‘Yes Lulu, that’s right. I am Ramón, a fully-grown tom cat, a *gato* in my prime. If cats could blush, she would have blushed. ‘Oh, wow’ she said. ‘I’ve never actually met anyone like you before’.

I was aghast. ‘*Eso es increíble* - where have you been all your life? You mean you’ve never .. you know’.. what should I say, I was stuck for words, I only had the alley cat vocabulary to draw on. I paused. She looked up again. ‘No’. She said, and sighed. ‘Well’ I said, ‘*no hay tiempo como el presente*’ [no time like the present]. I can help you out there’. Then I remembered that we were both locked in separate cages.

‘Lulu, my love, my pet, I’ll be in you, I mean I’ll be with you, just as soon as I can’.

The wire grill on my box was tied up with string. She was in a much fancier cage with a magnetic latch that opened from the outside. I chewed at the string. Nothing happened. I bunched myself up and dashed at the wire, shoulder first. Ouch. Nothing happened. I looked again. It was a bow. Ah, perfect. I gripped one end of the string in my sharp little teeth and pulled. Yes! It moved. Soon I was free. And when I was free, it was easy to reach the magnetic latch on Lulu’s cage, and to prop her door open.

Minutes later, we had finished. She looked at me fondly. ‘Oh Ramón, that was amazing. But I am just a teeny bit worried, I should have checked your paperwork first.’

My what? I’d never heard that one before. ‘Your paperwork. My mother said I never should you know, I am a pure-bred pedigree. I am sure you are also champion blood, but we were in such a rush’.

Oh no, I said, not me. I’m from the alley. I love you my pet, it was love at first sight, pure *amor*, not some ugly commercial intercourse. If cats could turn pale, she would have done so. ‘You are from an alley? If they find out, they will kill me. Ramón, you must go, go quick, quick before anyone sees us together.’

I shrugged. Cats can do that. As I left, Lulu’s door swung back on its latch. I stretched a bit and returned to my box. Moments later the door of the van swung open again and two humans appeared. One of them pointed at Lulu. ‘That’s the one’. The second human climbed in, picked up her cage and passed her out of the van. That was it, Lulu was gone. The human returned and my heart missed a beat. Me next? I crouched at the back of my cage, ready to fight. ‘Pass me those cable ties would you. This string has come loose’. ‘*Mierda!*’ [shit]. With the ties in place I was well and truly locked in. There was no way out now.

The van travelled on, stopped and travelled on again. After what might have been days the van doors were flung open yet again and someone flashed a torch around the cages. Police.

I knew this type from my days in the alley. One by one the other cats were hauled out and their paperwork was inspected. The police were delighted. ‘Thank goodness we had that tip off. What a haul. Let’s get these animals to the station and read the micro chip data. False passports, changed identities – there must be thousands of pounds worth here.’ My ears pricked up. Forgery, fraud, foreign cats, stolen and imported under the guise of a regular pet courier, what was going on?

Finally I was lifted out of the van. By now it was dawn. It was cold. There was no hint of sunshine, only a damp grey light. I had no idea such conditions could exist. Back home we just don't get what I now know is 'fog'. Anyway, that was the least of it. We were driven to the police station where we were inspected. I resisted like mad and they gave up. 'Just a stray, mixed in with the pedigrees' someone said. Stray, I thought, not me, I am Ramón.

The humans were busy on the phone, checking the internet, tracing the victims of the crime and identifying those who had been defrauded. But what about me. I yowled. One of the humans looked up. 'What about that one, shall we just let him go? He's destined for East Haddon but that's still 20 miles away. No one will know.'

Another human came over from behind the desk and said 'Kitty, Kitty, Kitty' – I hate it when they do that, like I don't understand or like I am some kind of baby. I hissed. She looked at the label on the side of my box. 'Orchard Close, East Haddon. Why that's just close to Long Buckby, I'm going that way myself. I'll take you there, kitty, kitty. You are legitimate, in fact you are the only one who is. Someone will be waiting to greet you.'

The car came to a stop. Where the hell was I? I was even more confused when I heard a familiar voice. It was my human! 'Ramón, at last, we were so worried about you'. Cat's don't often swear but that's what I did. '*Mierda!*' [shit]. They knew? They let this happen to me? It was a plot, I'd been cat-napped but not by accident. I swore again. My human tried to pick me up, 'Thank you so much for bringing him – we had been phoning and phoning but got no answer from the courier. And it was such an expensive trip, we were really worried.'

Well that was while ago now. I have lived in Northamptonshire for several years but this is not where I belong. To tell the truth I've never been accepted by the locals. I hate rain and snow and I long for the heat, the smell of summer and the lizards. The birds don't taste the same and I miss the easy company of proper Spanish cats. I sometimes wonder about Lulu and our kittens, but that's all in the past.

As I look out of the window at the rain I make up my mind. I'm going home, I don't care how long it takes. I'm going home. I put my nose out of the cat flap that they had specially installed for me, and I set off, one paw in front of the others.

Note: all the characters in this story are fictional, and any similarity to the travels of a real cat called Louis are pure coincidence.