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A STREET CAT NAMED BOB - BY JAMES BOWEN

There's famous quote I read somewhere. It says we are all given second chances every day of our lives. They are there for taking, it's just that we don't usually take them. I spent big chunk of my life proving that quote. I was given lot of opportunities, sometimes on daily basis. For long time I failed to take any of them, but then, in early spring of 2007, that finally began to change. It was then that I befriended Bob. Looking back on it, something tells me it might have been his second chance too. I first encountered him on gloomy, Thursday evening in March. London hadn't quite shaken off winter and it was still biting cold on streets, especially when winds blew in off Thames. There had even been hint of frost in air that night, which was why I'd arrived back at my new, sheltered accommodation in Tottenham, north London, little earlier than usual after day busking around Covent Garden. As normal, I had my black guitar case and rucksack slung over my shoulders but this evening I also had my closest friend, Belle, with me. We'd gone out together years ago but were just mates now. We were going to eat cheap takeaway curry and watch movie on small black and white television set I'd managed to find in charity shop round corner. As usual, lift in apartment block wasn't working so we headed for first flight of stairs, resigned to making long trudge up to fifth floor. strip lighting in hallway was broken and part of ground floor was swathed in darkness, but as we made our way to stairwell I couldn't help noticing pair of glowing eyes in gloom. When I heard gentle, slightly plaintive meowing I realised what it was. Edging closer, in half-light I could see ginger cat curled up on doormat outside one of ground-floor flats in corridor that led off hallway. I'd grown up with cats and had always had bit of soft spot for them. As I moved in and got good look I could tell he was tom, male. I hadn't seen him around flats before, but even in darkness I could tell there was something about him, I could already tell that he had something of personality. He wasn't in slightest bit nervous, in fact, completely opposite. There was quiet, unflappable confidence about him. He looked like he was very much at home here in shadows and to judge by way he was fixing me with steady, curious, intelligent stare, I was one who was straying into his territory. It was as if he was saying: 'So who are you and what brings you here?' I couldn't resist kneeling down and introducing myself. 'Hello, mate. I've not seen you before, do you live here?' I said. He just looked at me with same studious, slightly aloof expression, as if he was still weighing me up. I decided to stroke his neck, partly to make friends but partly to see if he was wearing collar or any form of identification. It was hard to tell in dark, but I realised there was nothing, which immediately suggested to me that he was stray. London had more than its fair share of those.

