

For the Love of
Bob

About the Author

James Bowen is a street musician in London. He found Bob the cat in 2007 and the pair have been inseparable ever since.

For the Love
of Bob



James Bowen

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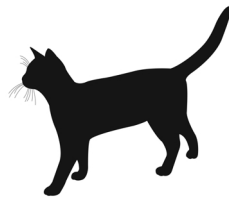
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To Garry, my mentor and teacher,
Mary, my angel from Angel and
Rowena and Kerry who took a chance
on me. I love them all greatly. Also,
special praise to my Kitty Belle, who
has become essential to Bob and me.



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*There is something about the presence of
a cat . . . that seems to take the bite out of
being alone.*

Louis Camuti

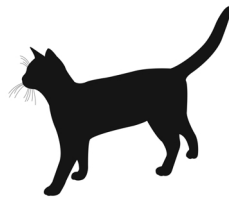


*If man could be crossed with the cat, it
would improve man but deteriorate the
cat.*

Mark Twain



Chapter 1
A Bad Start



Our bad day began when my alarm failed to go off. I'd overslept.

'Bob!' I gasped. 'We're going to be late!'

Bob looked at me with his big green eyes.

Chill out, James, he seemed to say. We have this under control.

I wrapped an extra-thick scarf around

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Bob's neck to keep out the chill then I grabbed my stuff. We dashed out of my flat in Tottenham, north London, heading for the bus that would take us to Islington, where I sold the homeless magazine *The Big Issue*. Bob ran beside me. We leaped on to the bus with moments to spare.

'We made it!' I said in relief.

But barely five minutes into our journey, things went from bad to worse.

Bob was in his usual position, half asleep on the seat next to me, when he suddenly lifted his head, looking around suspiciously.

I smell trouble, his body language said.

In the two years since I'd met him, Bob was usually right. Today was no exception. Within moments the bus was filled with an acrid, burning smell.

A BAD START

‘This journey is terminating here,’ said the panicked driver over the speaker. ‘Everyone off the bus. Immediately!’

It wasn’t quite the evacuation of the *Titanic*, but the bus was three quarters full so there was a lot of chaotic pushing and jostling. Bob didn’t seem in a rush. Deciding to trust him, I left the others to it. So Bob and I were among the last to get off. As it turned out, that was a wise decision. The bus may have smelled awful but at least it was warm.

We had stopped opposite a new building site. Icy winds were whipping towards us through the site at a rate of knots. I was glad that I’d wrapped the extra-thick, woollen scarf around Bob’s neck that morning.

‘It’s just an overheated engine,’ the driver informed us after a few minutes.

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‘We have to wait for a bus company mechanic to fix it.’

So, amid much grumbling and complaining, about two dozen of us were left standing on the freezing cold pavement for almost half an hour while we waited for a replacement bus.

By the time Bob and I hopped off at our destination, Islington Green, we had been on the road for more than an hour and a half. We were now seriously late. I was going to miss the lunchtime rush, one of the best times for selling the magazine.

As usual, the five-minute walk to Angel tube station was a stop-start affair. It always was when I had Bob with me. Sometimes I walked with him on a leather lead, but more often than not he perched on my shoulders, gazing

A BAD START

curiously out at the world, like the look-out on the prow of a ship. It wasn't something people were used to seeing every day of the week, so we could never walk more than ten yards without someone wanting to say hello and stroke him, or take a photograph. That didn't bother me at all. I knew Bob relished the attention.

The first person to stop us today was a little Russian lady.

'Oh, *koschka*, so pretty!' she said.

I stopped to let her say hello properly, but she immediately reached up to Bob and tried to touch him on the nose. Not a clever move.

Bob lashed out with a wild wave of his paw and a very loud *eeeeeeow*. Fortunately he didn't scratch the lady, but he did leave her a little shaken. I had to spend a

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few minutes making sure she was all right.

‘You should never do that to an animal, madam,’ I told her, smiling and being as polite as possible. ‘How would you react if someone tried to put their hands on your face? You’re lucky he didn’t scratch you.’

‘I no mean to upset him,’ she said. ‘I very sorry, very sorry.’

I felt a bit sorry for her.

‘Come on, you two, let’s be friends,’ I said.

Bob eventually allowed her to run her hand, very gently, along the back of his neck. The lady was very apologetic – and very hard to shake off.

When we finally got to the tube station, I put my rucksack on the pavement so that Bob could lie down on it – our

A BAD START

regular routine. Then I started laying out my stack of *The Big Issue* magazines. I had to sell at least a couple of dozen today because, as usual, I needed the money.

But before I'd managed to sell a single magazine the heavens opened, raining down on me and Bob and forcing us to take shelter in an underpass near a bank and some office buildings.

Bob really hates the rain, especially when it's freezing cold. This day he almost seemed to shrink in it. His bright marmalade-coloured coat also seemed to turn a little bit greyer and less noticeable. Unsurprisingly, fewer people than usual stopped to make a fuss over him, so I sold fewer magazines than usual too.

Bob was soon making it clear that he didn't want to hang around. He kept

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shooting me withering looks and, like some kind of ginger hedgehog, scrunched himself up into a ball.

‘I get the message, Bob,’ I sighed. ‘But it’s nearly the weekend and I need to make enough money to keep us both going. My stack of magazines is still as thick as when we arrived. We have to sell some!’