

Barney, the Greedy Cat

By Shirley Young



This is the story of Barney, a very fat cat, who had long Persian fur that sometimes made him look like a little bear. He lived in a very comfortable home with Mr and Mrs Jackson (Mummy and Daddy) and their teenage daughter Emma.

One fine summer's day, Daddy sat out on the patio talking to his friend, who happened to be a vet. Mummy had gone shopping and Emma was upstairs playing her music.

Barney wandered out of the open back door onto the patio. "That's a magnificent cat you've got there," commented the vet to Daddy.

"What a nice man," thought Barney and puffed out his chest. He liked to be admired.

"Oh yes, Barney is a lovely cat," replied Daddy, "but he does rather love to eat too much."

"Yes, I can see that," smiled the vet, looking at Barney again with an expert eye. "In fact, he is probably overweight. Not good for his heart, you know. It might be a good idea to put him on a diet for a while!"

Barney, who had been listening to all this, nearly choked. "A diet? I'm not going on any diet!" he thought, and quickly changed his opinion of the vet.

Barney knew all about diets. Or at least he thought he did. Emma had a friend who was always going on some diet or other, and was about as skinny as a rail. Emma was worried about her friend because all she seemed to eat

was grapefruit segments and black coffee, which wasn't healthy at all! Barney knew that because he'd heard Emma and her parents talking about it.

However, the vet had another kind of diet in mind for Barney. One that was healthy for him and would help him lose weight slowly. But Barney didn't know that. He thought that being on a diet meant you had to eat grapefruit and starve yourself (which isn't true of course!).

Then Barney heard the vet tell daddy, "I would suggest that you feed Barney skimmed milk instead of cream."

"Skimmed milk? I'm not drinking that blue watery stuff!" Barney fumed within himself. "I want proper milk with cream on the top."

"Another good idea would be to keep him down to just two meals a day for a while - one in the morning and another in the evening," said the vet.

Daddy nodded. "A good idea, we'll start on his diet first thing tomorrow."

Barney, weak at the thought, staggered across to the lawn and sank down. He imagined himself growing weaker and weaker and weaker - and being force-fed with skimmed milk and grapefruit pieces. Barney had never tasted grapefruit but he thought it looked horrible and shuddered at the thought.

"I can't stay here to be starved," he thought. "I know what I'll do. I'll run away to the woods!"

On the hill on the other side of the village green were some very thick and extensive woods. Barney had been there before and knew that there were many birds, mice and small creatures that he could feed on. And being a very nosy cat, he had also found an old woodman's hut with a pile of sacks inside, so knew he would be able to sleep there.

"Well," he thought, "if I'm going to go, I shall have to do it right now, because if I wait, I shall soon be too weak to run away."

Barney got up and headed for the open back door into the house. He remembered that he had left half a saucer of milk that morning. "No point in leaving that," he thought. "It will give me the strength to make it to the woods."

As he finished off the milk and shined the saucer with his little red tongue, a lovely smell of cooked food wafted past his nostrils. Barney straightened up and looked around the kitchen. The smell seemed to be coming from the top of the table.

Now Barney knew that he was strictly forbidden to jump up on the table, but he reasoned that since he was leaving home for ever, it wouldn't matter this one last time. So with one agile bound, he leapt up onto the table. His eyes goggled, because there in front of him was a plate of chicken breasts that Mummy had cooked and left to cool before going to the shops.

Barney pawed one piece off the plate and began to eat with gusto. Just as he was finishing, he heard the front door open and close. Mummy was coming back!

Barney whisked out the back door and trotted along the back of the cottages where he lived. As he approached cottage No. 7, he saw old Mrs Hurley standing in her open back door. "Hallo Barney!" she called. "I was wondering if you would appear, because I've just finished baking some sausage rolls. Would you like to have one?"

Barney hesitated. He knew that he should be on his way to the woods, but he thought it would be impolite to refuse food. And, besides, Mrs Hurley looked forward to his visits! So he followed her into the kitchen.

When he had finished eating the sausage roll he ran his tongue around his mouth and looked up at her. "Ah! I know what you're asking for," she laughed. "You want your favourite tit-bits as well, don't you?"

Barney's mouth watered as he watched her cut some cubes of brown bread and spread them thickly with marmite. How he loved marmite! She offered these pieces to him one at a time with her fingers. When he had polished off all of the pieces and saw that no more food was forthcoming, he decided it was time to go. Rubbing a quick 'thank-you' against her legs, he headed for the door and set off in the direction of the village green.

School had just finished for the day and a group of children were sitting on a bench on the village green eating some sweets they had just bought from the shop.

"Here comes Barney!" one little boy shouted. Everyone knew Barney's name because it was printed boldly with his telephone number on the bright red collar he wore. "Hey Barney! Do you want some chocolate drops?" called the little boy.

Upon hearing the words 'chocolate drops,' Barney immediately swerved off course and headed for the children. The boy threw two or three of the drops on the ground, and Barney quickly devoured them.

Just then, a little girl came running across the green waving a vanilla ice cream cone in her hand. But she wasn't looking where she was going and tripped - and SPLOSH, the ice cream landed on the grass a few inches in front of Barney's nose. The little girl burst into tears, but Barney, thinking this had to be his lucky day, began lapping up the ice cream. After all, he thought, he was only doing a service to the community by cleaning it up!

When Barney had finished the ice cream and saw that no more chocolate drops were being offered, he set off once more on his journey to the woods. However, on the other side of the green stood the village hall, the door of which stood invitingly open.

Now Barney was a very curious, nosey cat, and he could never pass an open door without just looking inside to see what was there. As he peered in, his eyes grew large with wonder. He saw long trestle tables set out with table cloths on them. Down the centre of each table were delicious bowls of food, put out ready for a party. There were two women busy at the other end of the hall, but they had their backs to him, so Barney crept in.

He quietly leapt up onto a chair, and then crept forward in a slinking movement across the table. In front of him was a trifle with masses of whipped cream on top. This was too good to resist. Without hesitation, Barney stuck his face and tongue into the cream and began licking. And then suddenly he heard an angry shout. The two women were now flying down the hall towards him brandishing pots and wooden spoons in their hands.

"They obviously aren't pleased!" Barney thought. And with one flying movement he was off the table and out of the door, where he raced right into the path of a dog that had just been let off his lead! The dog, who couldn't believe his luck, immediately gave chase! Barney's stomach flip-flopped in fear and his heart raced, but he didn't stop running. Now there was only one thought in his head, and that was to get back home to safety - no more thought of running away to the woods.

People gaped and stared as they saw the fat cat racing along, face and whiskers covered with cream, closely followed by a yapping dog and two angry women waving their arms. But Barney never paused. He ran and ran until he left his pursuers behind. Gasping for breath, he reached his home, bolted through the back door and skid across the kitchen floor into his bed.

Daddy, Mummy and Emma had just started their evening meal at the kitchen table and jumped up in surprise, stunned. They all stared at Barney as he shivered and shook. "Poor old chap," said Emma, "it looks as if he's had an awful fright."

"Most likely he's been a bad boy and helped himself to someone's cream," said Daddy, "just look at his face!"

Barney continued to tremble. The shock of the dog, together with the chase on top of all he had eaten, had just upset his digestion, and now his stomach felt most peculiar. In fact he felt quite 'green.'

He began to think back over all that he had eaten that day - his breakfast fish, milk, chicken, sausage roll, marmite sandwich, chocolate drops, ice cream and whipped cream. As all of this was passing through his mind he saw Mummy kneeling down beside him and heard her say: "Poor Barney, you don't look at all well. Would you like Mummy to make you one of your favourite egg custards?"

At the words 'egg custard' Barney's stomach turned. In one swift movement he was out through the cat flap and into the garden where he was violently sick. A little later, as he lay sprawled on the lawn chewing blades of grass (something that cats do when they aren't feeling well), he began to think back over his behaviour that day and knew that he had been a very bad cat. Not only had he been greedy, but even worse, he had stolen the piece of chicken and the whipped cream, and now he was paying the penalty!!!

Barney promised himself that he would be good from now on and thought, "I won't ever be greedy again. Maybe the vet is right. Maybe I am too fat. What if I were to have a heart attack?!! Perhaps I should go on a diet."

And with that thought wafting around his mind, Barney dozed off to sleep wondering what a grapefruit tasted like!

The End

