

Barney Creates Chaos

By Shirley Young



It was late summer to early autumn when Mr and Mrs Jackson decided to take a short holiday with their daughter Emma before she returned to school. They were unable to take their cat Barney with them, so they arranged for a neighbour to come in and feed him twice daily.

Barney had a very comfortable bed in the kitchen and since there was a cat flap in the back door he was able to come and go as he chose. But Barney felt very upset and lonely. He couldn't understand why he had not been taken on holiday too. He would have been a very good cat. (Or so he thought!)

Barney missed his beloved Emma and Mummy and Daddy. They always talked to him and treated him like one of the family. But the lady who came in to feed him was often in a hurry. She put down his food quickly and was then off, leaving him by himself. So Barney felt miserable and lonely.

After a while Barney decided to go outside and see if he could find anyone who would talk to him and make a fuss of him. He went around to the front of the cottage and set off up the narrow lane. As he came to the driveway of *The Lodge*, a largish house on the corner of the lane, Barney suddenly heard a tiny meowing sound. He stopped and looked around - and there to his astonishment he saw a tiny scrap of a kitten sitting on the lawn in front of the house with his milk bowl. The kitten was bright ginger and white and his name was Tompkins. Barney smiled to himself and approached cautiously; he didn't want to scare the little chap.

When the kitten saw the fat black and white cat coming towards him, he crouched down in fear, not sure what to expect. But Barney only wanted to make friends. The little kitten looked as lonely as he felt. Gradually Barney

drew closer and closer until at last their noses were touching. The little kitten then relaxed, realising that the big cat meant him no harm.

"Hallo, little fellow," said Barney in a hearty voice. "My name's Barney".

"I'm Tompkins," the kitten whispered. "I love your black and white fur suit," he added shyly. "You look so handsome in it!"

Nothing could have pleased Barney more than this statement! Barney always kept himself spotlessly clean and took great pride in his appearance. Smiling kindly, Barney glanced down at the kitten and then stared at him in disbelief. Tompkins' face and whiskers were covered in milk. There was food clinging to his white shirt front and there was mud all over his paws.

"Tut, tut!" said Barney shaking his head, "we can't have you looking like that. You'll give us cats a bad name. Cats have a good reputation for cleanliness, you know. We're not like dogs! Look, I'll show you." Barney bent his head and began to lick the kitten all over with his rough tongue. He washed him so hard that he almost knocked Tompkins off his feet! Soon Tompkins was thoroughly soaked and looked like a drowned rat.

"There!" said Barney, well pleased. "You'll soon dry off in the sun and your fur will fluff up again. Let's lie down underneath the apple tree and have a doze." And so the day passed pleasantly and Barney felt very pleased to have a new companion.

The next morning, when Barney awoke at home, he remembered the kitten and decided that the little cat needed someone to take a fatherly interest in him. "And who better than me to teach him," he thought. "After all, I've been around for a good many years and have all the 'know how'. I'll soon teach him everything a smart cat should know." So after breakfast Barney again set off up the lane. As he drew near to *The Lodge* he saw that Tompkins was already outside watching for him to come.

"Hallo Tompkins," he greeted him, "do you know how to catch a mouse?" Tompkins shook his head, ashamed that he had never even seen a mouse.

"Well never mind," Barney said kindly. "I'll soon teach you. There's not much I don't know about catching mice! It would be a smart mouse who got away from me!" he boasted. "The first thing is for you to learn how to POUNCE! Mice run fast, so you've got to be quick. Look, I'll show you. See that piece of string waving in the wind at the end of the garden? Well, let's pretend it's a mouse and I'll show you how to pounce on it. You watch closely now and see how I judge the distance exactly right and then pounce on it and grip it with both paws and teeth." Barney ran to the end of the garden and crouched down, his eyes intent on the moving piece of string.

Now Mr Porter, Tompkins' owner, was a very keen gardener and the string that Barney was about to jump on was tying up some prize chrysanthemums. Mr Porter was planning to show these extraordinarily large blooms in the village Flower Show.

As Barney waited to spring, he became very conscious of Tompkins watching him with big admiring eyes. So he began to show off and suddenly launched himself at the piece of string - totally misjudging the distance! His large black body hit the sticks and canes supporting the flowers. CRACK went the canes. SNAP went the flowers, their huge heads falling to the ground. Barney's fat body then landed PLOP right on top of the flowers, flattening them into the ground.

Suddenly there came a furious shouting and banging from the house. Mr Porter was at the window, his face purple with rage and his arms waving wildly. Barney knew (from past experience!) that it was time to be off! "Bye Tompkins," he yelled, streaking off down the drive. "See you tomorrow." Tompkins was left gasping with admiration. He wondered if he would ever be skilled enough to flatten a whole flower patch in one leap.

The next morning when Barney awoke, he completely forgot about the flower incident. "I think I'll go and give young Tompkins a second lesson in mouse catching," he thought. "He needs someone like me to teach him, to show him how things should be done." So Barney picked up his favourite toy and went out. It was a small red rubber ball that had been well chewed.

When he arrived at *The Lodge* he found his young pupil, Tompkins, eagerly awaiting his arrival. Barney dumped the ball down in front of him.

"Now Tompkins," he said, "you've got to remember that once you've caught a mouse it may still be alive and will try to get away from you. So you've got to be able to control it with your front paws. Now watch me carefully. I'll use this ball to demonstrate Mouse Control."

Barney raced off down the lawn dribbling the little ball to and fro expertly between his front paws, just like a 1st division footballer. Tompkins watched in awe. "What a privilege it is to watch a Master mouse-catcher in action," he thought.

Seeing the rapt look of admiration on the face of the kitten, Barney again began showing off. (Barney never learnt from his past mistakes!) He raced along faster and faster and banged the ball with his right paw. It rocketed away from his control, rolled down a slope, and shot through a small hole in the hedge into the next door neighbour's garden.

Not realising that this was a complete miscalculation on Barney's part, Tompkins cried out, "Well done Barney! What a good shot! You put that ball right through that little hole! But how will you get it back?"

"No problem!" answered Barney with more assurance than he felt. "Leave it to me." Barney wriggled his big body down the slope to the hedge. He stuck his whiskers, head and neck into the hole, but found he was too fat to get any further and couldn't reach the ball. So he began shoving forward, but this only got him more and more stuck. Pieces of the hedge began breaking off.

Barney decided that the only thing to do now was to try to back out again. But this was easier said than done. So Barney began to dig with all his might, his paws sending leaves, twigs and soil flying in every direction. Eventually, after creating a huge hole in the hedge, Barney managed to disentangle himself and flopped back down on the bank utterly exhausted

and embarrassed. If he hadn't had a black fur face, it would have been bright red!

"Fancy letting myself get stuck in the hedge - and right in front of Tompkins too!" he thought. "It's too much! And I still haven't retrieved the ball." Barney felt humiliated. *He* was supposed to be teaching Tompkins, not the other way around! Grumpily he got up. "I'm going to rest under the apple tree," he said, turning away.

Tompkins eagerly followed his hero, only thinking what a marvellous big hole Barney had made in the hedge and what a privilege it was for him to have a cat like Barney take such an interest in him.

As the two cats approached the apple tree, they were spied by a flock of starlings that were feeding on the apples. The starlings didn't like cats, so with a lot of squealing and noise, and a whirring of wings, they flew up and away. Unfortunately the vibration caused by the birds loosened one of the apples and it fell down with a thud! Right on Barney's head! Barney felt his eyes go crossed, thought he saw stars, and promptly passed out.

Some time later Barney came round to find Tompkins gently licking his head and trying to restore him. "Oh Barney, I'm so glad you're all right again," exclaimed Tompkins. It was all the fault of those naughty birds. They dropped an apple on your head!"

Barney gritted his teeth together. "Just wait till I get my paws on those birds! I'll soon teach them a lesson!"

"What about me? Am I going to have any more lessons today?" enquired Tompkins, who was anxious to learn everything he could from such a great cat as Barney.

Barney's head throbbed with pain and he was going to suggest leaving further lessons until the next day, when Tompkins said, "Can you even climb trees Barney"?

"Of course, nothing to it!" bragged Barney, before he realised where this was leading.

"Oh show me! Show me!" cried the excited Tompkins.

So not being able to resist showing off as usual, Barney went down to the far end of the lawn and then began a fast galloping run towards a large oak tree. The force of his run took him a good way up the main trunk to the first large bough. "There!" Barney called down. "See, it's easy!"

"Go higher! Go higher!" shrilled Tompkins, dancing up and down with excitement. "Go right to the top!"

Barney privately felt that the kitten was getting a little too pushy, but he could hardly stop now or it would look as if he were scared. So Barney, who never learned his lesson about showing off and doing silly things, climbed higher and higher until the last Tompkins saw of him was his big fluffy tail disappearing up among the leaves.

Unfortunately Barney had forgotten that although he was good at climbing **up** trees, he was terrified of coming **down**. So when Barney reached the top and looked down from the great height, he was frozen rigid with fear. He just couldn't move. All he could do was desperately cling on with all his strength as the narrow branch waved back and forth in the wind.

"Come down now! Come down!" yelled Tompkins from below, but Barney didn't appear. Tompkins was puzzled and after a while he began to get worried, so he started meowing at the top of his voice. Mr Porter heard the noise and opened the front door of the house to find out what was going on. "What's wrong little Tompkins?" he asked, and then seeing that the kitten was staring up at the tree, looked up and saw Barney swaying to and fro on a branch at the top of his oak tree.

Mr Porter's face changed. "I don't believe it!" he exploded. "It's that cat again, the one who smashed down my prize flowers!" he shouted at no

one in particular. "Just wait till I get my hands on you, m' lad!" Scooping Tompkins up under his arm, Mr Porter stomped off into the house. Since he was partially disabled, he could not climb up the tree himself to get Barney. So he shut Tompkins in the front sitting room and then picked up the 'phone' in the hall and dialled 999 for the Fire Service.

About half an hour later Barney's family were returning from their holiday. Daddy swung the car around the corner into their lane, and suddenly had to slam on the brakes, for there, blocking the narrow lane, was a large red fire engine! As they all stared across to the front garden of the large house to see what was happening, a scene of complete commotion and chaos met their eyes.

Two small terrier dogs were racing round and round the bottom of an oak tree, yelping like Red Indians around a wagon train. A man was shouting and wildly waving his arms in the air. Firemen in large black boots were carrying a ladder, when one accidentally stomped on a large flower bed, sending the irate man into further fury.

"Look! Look!" suddenly yelled Emma from the back seat of the car. "It's Barney! He's stuck up the top of that oak tree!"

Daddy groaned loudly. "I might have guessed it! Trust Barney to be at the centre of all of this!"

In a flash Emma was out of the car and running. "Barney! Poor Barney," she called. "Everything's all right now. Emma's here! Don't be afraid".

Mummy and Daddy followed more cautiously.

"Are you the owner of that animal?" demanded Mr Porter of Daddy. "I'll have you know that cat has flattened my prize chrysanthemums, made a great hole in my hedge, which has let the neighbour's terrier dogs come through, and now has got himself stuck up my tree! Then on top of it all, the firemen are stomping about all over my flower beds in their big boots." The poor man looked as if he were about to explode.

"We're dreadfully sorry that Barney should have caused so much trouble," began Mummy soothingly. "And we'll certainly pay for any damage," added Daddy. Just then one of the firemen handed down the trembling, shaking Barney to Emma. She cradled her pet in her arms and rocked him gently to and fro like a baby. "Poor Barney. Poor baby," she crooned.

"I'll give him 'poor Barney,'" muttered Mr Porter.

Hearing this, and thinking it was time to beat a hasty retreat, Daddy quickly bundled them all off to the waiting car. Barney was so humbled and relieved to be rescued, and back with his Emma, that he told himself he would NEVER be a bad cat again. He resolved never to boast, show off or do silly things again, even for Tompkins! He now knew it only ended in trouble.

Meanwhile Tompkins had been watching all the excitement from inside the house, up on the sitting room windowsill. He thought it had all been absolutely marvellous. He had never seen anything like it. Only Barney would have had the courage to climb right to the top of the tree and then deliberately stay there just for the fun of attracting so much attention. (This is what Tompkins wrongly believed).

Even a big red machine with flashing lights had come especially to see Barney!

As Tompkins watched his hero being carried away down the drive, he smiled to himself and thought, "I hope I grow up to be like the great Barney!"

The End

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