

Barney Disappears

By Shirley Young



This is the third story about Barney, the fat black and white cat who lives with his Mummy and Daddy (Mr and Mrs Jackson) and their young teenage daughter, Emma.

Barney, as we've already learned, was a very nosy, inquisitive cat. He could never resist poking into cupboards, sheds and other dark places. He always wanted to see what was in them even though it was none of his business. He was always sniffing about under the stairs and down in the cellar in the hope that he might encounter a nice fat mouse on his travels. But no such luck! No sensible, discerning mouse ever came near Barney's house. They all knew him and stayed well clear!

One fine day towards the end of August, after Barney had realised that no juicy mice were lurking in the vicinity of his house, he decided to explore further afield. He thought he would go to Cuckoo Woods, which were on the other side of the village green, to see what he could find.

"Now don't be long, Barney," Mummy called as he trotted out of the door. "It's your favourite Coley fish for dinner tonight. And don't be getting into any mischief or looking into things that don't concern you!"

But Barney deliberately closed his ears to this admonition and set out at a fast pace until he reached the shade of the great beech trees in the wood.

It was already late afternoon and the shadows were lengthening. It grew darker and darker as Barney penetrated further into the wood. He peered about looking into piles of old leaves, sharpened his claws on the base of a tree trunk, and sniffed at rabbit holes. However there were no

mice or voles to be found. The air was very hot and still, and there was a strange quietness in the wood. Even the birds had gone silent.

Barney decided to go to the old woodman's hut he had found in the woods before, thinking there might be some mice there. But as he was heading towards it he suddenly spied a large shed or barn through the trees. There were big letters stencilled on the side of the shed that read:

**PROPERTY OF THE COUNCIL
KEEP OUT!**

But of course Barney couldn't read and, since the door stood partially open, he just couldn't resist taking a peek inside. Cautiously, at first, he put his whiskers into the open crack of the door and then edged it carefully open until he was able to squeeze his fat body through the gap and enter the shed.

It felt very hot and airless inside. There was one small oblong window high up on the side of one wall. It let in a little light, but it was just a single pane of glass and didn't open.

Barney looked about. The shed contained a large power mower, two grass edger's, an electric hedge trimmer, brooms, buckets and all sorts of equipment that belonged to the county council.

In the far corner Barney noticed a big pile of sacks. He poked and sniffed under the sacks in case there was a mouse lurking there, but he found nothing. Shelves were fixed around the walls holding various pots of paint, brushes, and small bags of different things.

Barney was tired after his long walk, and felt sleepy in the heat of the shed, so he decided to curl up on the pile of sacks and take a quick nap.

Outside, it grew darker and darker, and on the far horizon a flash of lightning lit up the sky, followed by a muffled rumble of thunder. A storm was coming! But Barney was unaware of it because he was now fast asleep.

Meanwhile, as Barney slept, two workmen returned to the shed. They replaced the equipment they had been using, but because it was dark inside the shed they didn't see the cat fast asleep on the sacks in the far corner. So they went out, padlocked the door tightly, and went home. Barney was locked inside.

The storm gradually drew closer and closer until at last it was right overhead. Suddenly a zigzag of lightning ripped across the sky, quickly followed by a CRASH and WOMP of thunder.

The noise woke Barney with a start. It gave him such a fright that he shot three feet into the air like a rocket, his fur standing on end!

CRACK went the thunder again. Barney frantically leapt up onto one of the side shelves, clawing about for a way to escape. He blundered along and knocked over a bag of fine white chalk that was used for marking out white lines. The top of the bag burst open and chalk dust flew everywhere, covering Barney and turning him from a black and white cat into an ALL WHITE CAT.

Barney meowed piteously and ran for the door. He beat wildly on it with his front paws but it wouldn't open. Barney knew he was trapped.

When the storm finally died away, Barney huddled himself down on the sacks and decided to wait. Someone would surely come and open the door for him, he thought. But unbeknownst to Barney, the next day was a Bank Holiday and the workmen would not be coming!

Later that same evening, as the Jackson family were getting ready for bed, they began to grow a little anxious about Barney. "I can't understand why Barney hasn't returned for his supper," said Mummy. "It's so unlike him to miss his meals."

Emma ran to the back door and opened it. "Barney.....Barney," she called, but there was no welcoming rub of fur against her legs. Barney didn't appear.

"Well," said Daddy eventually, "we can't stay up all night waiting for him. He'll probably be back by the morning. He's very likely crouched down watching some mouse hole."

So everyone went to bed. But when morning came and there was still no sign of Emma's beloved cat, they all began to get worried. "Daddy," said Emma as they sat around the breakfast table, "since today is a holiday, can we all go out and search for Barney? He might be stuck somewhere or hurt."

"Of course we can look for him," replied Daddy comfortingly. "Does anyone have any ideas about where he might be?" The three of them sat thinking for a few minutes and then Emma said: "Some of the village children have said that they often see Barney heading across the village green toward Cuckoo Woods. Do you suppose he could be up there?"

"It's a possibility," said Mummy. "He might have got himself stuck in a rabbit hole. You know how nosey he is - always peering into everything." "And fat too!" added Daddy with a chuckle. "He could well be stuck!"

An hour later, the three of them were slowly scouring through Cuckoo Woods for Barney. They decided to start the search at one end of the wood and go through it carefully until they reached the top end, which bordered onto the recreation ground. Every so often Emma would call, "Barney, Barney," and then they would all stop and listen to see if they could hear Barney's answering meow. But there was no reply, only silence, apart from the sound of the birds.

Meanwhile, Barney was feeling very sorry for himself inside the shed. He was thirsty, hungry, hot and dirty. He had tried to wash the white chalk off his coat but it only made him thirstier than he was already. He sat still, envisioning bowls of water, and saucers of cream and fish.

"Oh why was I a bad cat?" he thought. "Why didn't I listen to Mummy?" He now clearly remembered her last words to him: "And don't go getting into any mischief or looking into things that don't concern you," she had said. But he had not taken any notice, even though he knew he should have!

Just as he was about to sink into despair, his acute ears picked up a sound. He thought he heard a distant voice calling his name. Barney raced across to the door and started to thump on it with his paws, but no one came.

As the Jackson family neared the end of their search of the wood, Daddy sighed. "I don't think we're going to find Barney here," he said. "We might as well go home."

"Hang on a minute!" exclaimed Mummy suddenly. "What's that there through the trees?" She pointed with outstretched arm. "Oh that," replied Daddy casually. "I believe that's just an old barn or shed that the County Council use for keeping their equipment in. It's generally locked."

Emma immediately started to run in the direction of the shed. "BARNEY! BARNEY!" she called loudly. Then suddenly she heard the sound that she had been most longing to hear. "MEOW, MEOW". It was accompanied by a loud thumping.

"Mum! Dad!" she yelled. "It's Barney! He's in here. Quick!"

Mummy and Daddy ran to the shed and in minutes Daddy was standing on tiptoe and peering through the narrow window high up on the wall. "There is a cat in there," he said slowly. "But I don't think it's Barney. It doesn't look like him. It's a white cat!"

Emma's face fell but she said stubbornly. "It IS Barney! It is! I know his voice!"

"Well we can't leave him there in this heat - whoever's cat he is," replied Mummy, "but how do we remove the padlock?"

Daddy, who had stopped peering in the window and was looking about in the undergrowth, returned with a rusty fence paling. "Stand back!" he said. "I'll make it right with the Council later." Then he whacked the padlock and sent it flying into the bushes.

Emma tore open the door. At the same moment Barney hurtled out and flung himself up into Emma's arms with such force that he almost knocked her off her feet!

"Barney! Barney!" she cried in relief, tears running down her face. Barney replied by half meowing, half purring. In a frenzy of delight he clutched at her jersey with his claws and showered her face and long hair with white chalk dust.

Mummy and Daddy laughed and closed the shed door. "Well, let's get the old chap home," they said kindly.

Later that evening, after Barney had been fed and watered, Emma brushed his long fur coat for him. Barney finished off the grooming with his little red tongue until once again he looked his old immaculate self.

As he settled down in his bed, he was very thankful to be home again, warm and safe. Then, as he grew drowsy before falling off to sleep, he decided that he would NEVER be a disobedient cat again. He had suffered enough fright and greatly worried his family. He would be a good cat from now on!

The End



Property of Council
Keep Out

GARNEY

SVR