

Barney and Tompkins Go to the Fair

By Shirley Young



One beautiful summer morning the Jackson family sat around the kitchen table talking while Barney the cat sat in the corner of the room busily grooming his immaculate black and white suit. He prided himself on being the "best dressed" cat in the neighbourhood! However, Barney always liked to know what was going on as well, so while he licked away at his fur he listened intently to what was being said at the table.

"Dad," began Emma, "Did you know that there's going to be a Fair and a Circus on the Village Green today since it's a holiday?"

"OH DAD!" yelled Mickey, her younger brother. "CAN WE GO? CAN WE GO?"

"Michael!" said Daddy putting down his teacup. "I'm not deaf. You don't have to shout. But the answer is YES. Your mother and I have already planned for all of us to go and I have tickets for the circus later on."

"YIPPEE!" yelled Mickey again, but then seeing his father's face, he said more quietly, "Can Barney go with us? After all he is one of the family."

Barney's ears shot up when he heard this. "How exciting!" he thought, but he was soon downcast again as Daddy replied, "No, of course not. A Fair is no place for a cat."

"That's right," added Mummy. "A Fair is a dangerous place for small animals. He might get trodden on in the crowd or hurt in some way."

"Besides," Daddy continued, "I've got an important job for Barney to do while we're gone." Mr Jackson rose from the table and walked across to the back door. "Come on Barney," he called, "I want to show you something."

Full of curiosity Barney followed Daddy up the garden to the shed. "Do you see that small hole, Barney?" he said, pointing. "Some mice have been getting in and chewing up things in my shed, but I don't want them nesting in there and multiplying. So be a good cat and stay on watch today. See if you can catch them for me, because I know you're a good mouser," he added, patting Barney on the head.

As Daddy went back to the house Barney obediently began sniffing all around the shed. Yes, there were undoubtedly mice about! On any other day he would have been excited at the prospect of catching them, but today he felt grumpy and bad tempered because Mummy and Daddy had said that he couldn't go to the Fair. Why couldn't he go? It just wasn't fair! They were all going and he could catch those silly old mice anytime. Barney didn't really know what a Fair and a Circus were but he thought they must be something very exciting.

As he sat there muttering to himself he heard the family going off down the lane and the two children gustily singing, "Heigh-ho Come to the Fair." As the sounds died away Barney jumped up. "I *will* go to the Fair and Circus," he told himself rebelliously.

Having wrongly decided this, Barney set off after his family but hesitated as he came to the fork in the lane which led down to Tompkins' house. Barney had made friends with the little ginger cat when Tompkins was a kitten and they had shared several "adventures" together. As Barney was debating whether to stop by Tompkins' house and invite him to the Fair, he saw the little cat dancing up the lane, the brilliant sunshine beaming down onto his bright coat.

"Hi Barney!" shouted Tompkins. "What ya doing? Where are you going?"

"I'm off to the Fair and the Circus," announced Barney importantly.

"Oh! Can I come too?" the little cat cried excitedly.

"Of course," Barney smiled. Tompkins always cheered him up and he basked in the admiration that the little chap showed him.

"What's a Fair? What's a Circus?" Tompkins queried excitedly as he trotted along beside his hero.

"Er, well now, let me see, how can I explain it?" stammered Barney, who didn't have a clue what either of them were. "But they're on the Village Green," he added knowledgeably. "You'll soon see."

As the two cats approached the Village Green they heard the sound of music playing and stopped in wonder to stare at a big, round, colourful machine that stood in the middle, twirling round and round. There seemed to be horses on it, with children riding on them and going up and down at the same time. As the music continued to blare out, and the "thing" kept whirling around, Barney, who was watching intently, felt as if his head was going round and round with it and might soon drop off.

"Shall we have a ride on that?" squealed Tompkins, who was thoroughly enjoying himself as he watched the Merry-go-Round.

"Oh no!" said Barney quickly. He thought he might be sick if he went on that thing. "It's just for children's amusement," he improvised. "They're not real horses. They're just *pretend* horses. Let's go on and see the rest of the Fair."

Tompkins looked a bit disappointed but readily agreed and trotted off happily beside his big friend. Suddenly both cats, as one animal, skidded to a halt, mouths hanging open. There in front of them was a large cage up on wheels. And inside the cage was the BIGGEST, most ENORMOUS cat they had ever seen! The "cat" was tawny brown with a big hairy mane around his head and neck. And he was striding menacingly to and fro in his cage as he glared down at them!

"Oh! He's BIG!" whispered Tompkins.

"He's big all right," muttered Barney.

"Will you fight him?" queried Tompkins hopefully.

"F-F-F-Fight him?" stuttered Barney in dismay.

"Oh I know you could beat him," said Tompkins confidently, having seen Barney in action on more than one occasion, but especially remembering the time when a Pekinese dog had got into his garden. WOW! Did Barney go!

"What are you standing there grinning about, Tompkins? Let's get away from here! I'm not fighting anyone today - after all, it's a holiday. One doesn't fight on holidays Tompkins. It's not the done thing," Barney blabbered. Tompkins looked disappointed at not being able to watch the anticipated spectacle, but meekly followed on.

As the two cats padded quickly past the cage, the big lion looked disdainfully down his long aristocratic nose. "Fancy the authorities allowing *cats* in here," he thought. "It quite takes down the tone of the place!"

After safely leaving the lion's cage behind them, the two cats turned into a big open area. Crowds were milling about, laughing and talking and taking part in various games that were set up on stalls.

"Why are they throwing balls over there? What are they doing? What are they aiming at?" shouted Tompkins over the noise of the crowd as he leapt up and down trying to see what was going on.

"I don't know - I can't quite see from here," replied Barney, "but I'll soon find out. I'll jump up on that fence and have a look."

People were paying money to have a go at knocking down certain objects with balls in order to win a prize. But, unfortunately, just as Barney landed on the fence, a badly thrown ball went wildly off course and struck him a glancing blow on the side of the head, knocking him backwards off the fence. Barney groaned as he landed in a heap on the ground.

"Barney! Barney!" cried Tompkins, rushing to his hero's side. "Are you all right? What were they throwing balls at?"

"CATS OF COURSE! Why do you think I'm lying here?" Barney snapped irritably. He was feeling sick and his eyes felt as though they were spinning round and round in their sockets.

"Poor Barney," said Tompkins sympathetically and sat down close beside his friend.

After a short while Barney began to feel better and struggled to his feet. "I'm sorry for snapping at you Tompkins," he said. "I wasn't feeling myself. But we've got to get out of here, and quickly. It's a dangerous place for cats." Tompkins wholehearted agreed.

"Come on then," said Barney more cheerfully, "let's sing the famous 'Cat's Hunting Song' to keep up our courage."

"Oh yes!" shouted Tompkins jumping up and down. "I love that song. It's my favourite." (Actually, it was the only one he knew!)

So the two cats set off together singing:

*"Onward, forward valiant cats
Beware you mice and thieving rats.
We'll track you down where 'ere you go
By day or night, we're never slow.*

*Don't think that you can run away
Or live to steal another day,
Our claws are sharp, our teeth are strong,
It won't be long till you're all gone.*

*Hooray for cats, the friend of man
Who from his presence vermin ban.
We'll clear the barn, we'll clear the house
Of every rat and fleeing mouse!"*

As they finished, Tompkins cried, "Shall we sing it again Barney?"

"No, I don't think so," replied Barney. "We're well out of range now of those cat-hating fanatics. We should be safe now."

But the words had hardly left Barney's mouth when the two cats sustained yet another awful shock! There, to the right of them, behind a high chain link fence, stood the most ENORMOUS, GIGANTIC creature they had ever seen. It was grey and wrinkly with small eyes. But its nose seemed to be so long that it swept the ground, and it was using it to pick up food and stuff it into its mouth!

"W-What's that?" whispered Tompkins fearfully.

"Don't know," muttered Barney.

"Let's go back," suggested Tompkins in a trembling voice.

"No we can't do that," said Barney, thinking of the big cat in the cage. "Now listen to me, young Tompkins, whenever there's a crisis, always KEEP CALM and DON'T PANIC. This is what we'll do. We'll walk calmly and steadily on. Don't run, don't make a noise, don't attract his attention and don't even glance his way. Got it?"

"Got it!" said Tompkins, quickly positioning himself on the other side of Barney so that he would be further away from the 'thing' behind the fence.

As the two cats crept past, the elephant went on placidly eating his food and totally ignored them.

"Phew," said Tompkins, his legs shaking, "I'm glad we're past that creature 'thing'."

"Me too," agreed Barney. "Look, it's beginning to get dark. I really think we should be heading for home."

As they started to walk to the edge of the Village Green, Tompkins spied a very large see-saw, which was big enough for adults to have fun on. There was no one on it so Tompkins ran forward and climbed onto one end.

"Come on Barney," he called "You get on the other end." But before Barney could get there, a very large man seated himself astride at the other end, and as the see-saw at the man's end went down, Tompkins shot up like a rocket! He arced through the air, flying over a hedge, turning somersaults at the same time. Poor Tompkins landed with a sickening thud in a neighbouring field and lay still, stunned.

Two men who worked for the circus were standing in the field holding a large net between them. "Wow! Did you see that?" one of them exclaimed. "That cat came flying over the hedge doing somersaults. We could use him in the circus!"

"Yeah," the other man agreed. "Quick, let's grab him before he runs off!"

While Tompkins was still lying dazed on the ground, the two men ran forward and flung their net over him, carrying him off.

Meanwhile, Barney had rushed to the hedge and had peered through just in time to see the two men carrying Tompkins off in a net. Tompkins was struggling wildly as the men carried him around to the back of some caravans.

Barney rushed frantically up and down the hedge looking for a hole big enough to squeeze his fat body through. Finally he found one and pushed through into the other field. Cautiously he waited under the hedge, planning his next move. After thinking for a bit, he decided it would be best to wait until it was completely dark before he tried to rescue Tompkins. That way, no one would be able to see him with his dark fur, but he would be able to see them clearly.

Barney waited impatiently until it got dark and then he crept across the field and up to the caravans. Light was spilling out of the open doors and he heard the clinking of glasses and people laughing. He quietly went past the doors and then his sharp ears picked up a pitiful noise. It was Tompkins mewling and crying!

As Barney peered through the darkness he saw a small tent-like enclosure made out of very fine netting. Tompkins was lying in a heap on the ground inside. Keeping low, Barney crept up to the small tent. "Psst! It's me!" he whispered.

Tompkins sat up and rushed to the side of the tent. "Oh Barney, I knew you'd come and rescue me," he said happily.

"Well of course I would," whispered Barney, who was beginning to claw and bite at the netting. Unfortunately it was made of tough fibre and Barney couldn't tear a hole in it. As he paused to think what to do, Tompkins said, "Barney do you think we could"

"Shush!" warned Barney. "Someone's coming! Quick, go back and lie down."

As Tompkins threw himself on the ground in a dejected pose, Barney melted into the darkness. A man soon appeared carrying a lantern in one hand and a plate of food in the other.

"Well my young pussycat," he said, "We can't have you starving, can we? We've got a lot of work for you to do." The man bent down low and began to unfasten a small flap-like door at the bottom of the tent so that he could push the food through to Tompkins.

Out of sight Barney was watching closely. When he saw that the flap was wide open he yelled, "RUN FOR IT TOMPKINS!"

Tompkins shot out through the hole as Barney leapt onto the back of the bent man, biting and pulling at his long greasy hair. "OUCH!" yelled the man. "Help someone! One of the animals has escaped from the Circus!"

As soon as Barney saw that Tompkins was well away, he jumped down from the man's back and raced off after his little friend.

Tompkins didn't stop running until he came to the fork in the lane which led off to his house. Then he sat down and waited for Barney. The bigger cat arrived shortly afterwards, puffing and panting.

Barney flopped down beside Tompkins and gradually recovered his breath, but before he could speak, Tompkins looked at him with fearful eyes. "Barney," he said hesitantly, "You don't think those men will come after us do you, or that that huge creature 'thing' will come and get us in the night?"

"Now don't be silly, Tompkins!" said Barney sharply. "Those men have no idea where we are and that grey 'thing' is kept behind a strong fence. Besides, someone is watching it. It isn't free to roam about as we are. Anyway, I overheard someone saying that the Fair and Circus are packing up tonight and moving on in the morning, so they won't be bothered about us."

"Oh that's good," said Tompkins with a sigh of relief. "I'm sorry for being silly."

"No, it's me who should be sorry," said Barney in an unusually humble way. "I should never have gone to the Fair and I should never have taken you with me. I'm very sorry you were so frightened, Tompkins. And to think that I almost got you kidnapped!" Barney's voice began to tremble.

Seeing his old friend's distress, Tompkins said kindly, "It's all right Barney. After all, I knew you would come and rescue me."

"Well of course I would," said Barney more heartily. "After all, you're my best pal! Now you go home and have a good sleep and I'll see you tomorrow."

Tompkins jumped up, all fears forgotten, and danced off down the lane on his little spring-like legs. Just think! He was the 'great' Barney's *best* pal!

Barney watched the little cat affectionately until he was out of sight and then sat down under the hedge to think. He knew that he had been a *very bad cat again!*

"Oh," he groaned to himself, "why don't I listen?" Daddy had said that the Fair was no place for cats and Mummy had added that it could be a very dangerous place for small animals - and she had been so right! Barney could still feel the sore place on the side of his head where he had been hit by the ball. And worst of all, dear little Tompkins had been kidnapped. Barney knew that if he hadn't been able to rescue Tompkins he would never have forgiven himself.

"Well, in future I shall really **try** to be a good cat," he decided. "I know what I'll do," he thought, "I'll go and catch all Daddy's mice for him and lay them out in rows on the lawn." (Barney imagined that there were dozens and dozens of them!)

Just then he heard the sound of voices and footsteps coming along the lane. His family was coming home! Barney jumped up and ran for his garden, where he threw himself down in front of the mouse-hole.

A little while later, lights went on in the house and Daddy opened the back door. "Barney," he called, "Are you there?" But when Barney gave no answering meow Daddy walked out into the garden and up toward the shed. Then, through the gloom, he spied a dark furry hump in front of the mouse-hole.

"Barney, is that you in the same place I left you this morning? You are

such a good cat. I knew I could trust you to keep watch for those mice."

Feeling very guilty, Barney continued to stare down. "I know," said Daddy, "why don't you invite that little ginger friend of yours around here tomorrow and then the two of you can have fun hunting the mice."

Suddenly Barney's great eyes glowed up at him in the darkness and he rubbed his furry body against Daddy's trouser leg to say "thank you" and "I'm sorry for being a bad cat".

Just then, Mummy appeared in the lighted doorway. "Barney," she called. "I'm just going to open a tin of 'Cat's Best' and it's your favourite kind - rabbit!"

When he heard the word **rabbit**, Barney was gone in a flash. He skidded into kitchen, happily gobbled up his meal, and then settled down for a nap on Emma's lap, dreaming of all the mice that he and Tompkins would catch the next day!

