

## Tompkins Learns a Lesson

By Shirley Young

*"Charm is deceptive, and beauty does not last; but a woman who fears the LORD will be greatly praised" (Proverbs 31:30, NLT).*



One bright autumn morning Barney sat by his front gate finishing his breakfast. Mummy always put his bowls of milky porridge and fishy crunches beside the gate because she knew that Barney liked to watch the children walking down the lane to school. Sometimes they would stop to stroke him and tell him what a magnificent cat he was. Barney loved that!

Barney always liked to look his very best, so when he finished his breakfast he began to diligently groom his fur coat. He was just giving himself one last careful lick when his friend Tompkins came racing up the lane and flopped down silently beside him. After several minutes, Barney turned to stare at his young friend, who still hadn't said a word. Tompkins was just sitting there quietly, staring off into space with a dreamy look on his face. "Whatever can be wrong?" thought Barney worriedly. Tompkins was usually such a chatterbox!

"Good morning, Tompkins," he finally said, trying to get Tompkins' attention. "Are you all right?"

"What? Oh, it's you Barney," responded Tompkins vaguely.

"Well, who did you think it was?" asked Barney, now even more worried. "What's the matter with you?"

"Er, well, I mean I don't really know," stammered Tompkins.

"Tompkins! Will you please talk some sense and tell me what's on your mind!"

"Oh.... she's so beautiful Barney. You should see her. She's a lovely shade of pale grey and her eyes are so large and the most beautiful blue you've ever seen - just like the sky." Tompkins own emerald green eyes positively glowed.

"Who is so beautiful with the big blue eyes?" queried Barney, trying hard to be patient with his little friend.

"Miranda, of course," answered Tompkins as if Barney should have known. Barney sighed. He was beginning to get the picture. Tompkins was growing up and had apparently seen a female cat who seemed to be the very vision of loveliness. "Well, you'd better tell me all about this wonderful cat," he said.

Without needing any further prompting, Tompkins eagerly launched into his story. "Well, I just *happened to hear* that Mrs Daley had a new cat. You remember that her old cat, Violet, died, don't you?"

Barney nodded sadly. He had been very fond of Violet. She had been a lovely, friendly cat and had taught him the principles of mousing when he was young. He still missed her.

"Mrs Daley lives in the cottage on the other side of the lane, just past where I live," continued Tompkins.

"Yes, I know the place well enough," commented Barney.

"Well, when I heard that there was a new cat there I *just happened* to stroll past - and there she was lying along the wall. I told her my name and she told me hers." This was accompanied by a big sigh.

"Great!" muttered Barney, his eyes turning upwards. But then he saw that Tompkins was about to lapse back into his private daydream of Miranda, so he jumped up and suggested briskly, "It's a lovely day Tompkins, why don't we go fishing in that little pond in Blackberry Woods?"

Tompkins' ears perked up at this and he sprang to his feet. "Oh yes, Barney. Let's go!" It was only then that Barney realised he had made a grave error. To get to Blackberry Woods they had to go past Tompkins' house and around the bend past Mrs Daley's house, where the beautiful Miranda lived! But it was too late to turn back now. Tompkins was already striding off, so Barney quickly followed.

As they rounded the corner by Mrs Daley's cottage, they heard a voice call out, "Oh Tommee I knew you'd be back!" It was Miranda, of course. "I just knew you couldn't resist me!" she added, fluttering her eyelashes.

Tompkins ran happily over to the wall where Miranda was decoratively sprawling, but Barney stood a little way off while he considered the situation. He sighed heavily as he watched Miranda. He knew the type. He'd met them before. Poor Tompkins was about to learn a hard lesson.

"We're going fishing in the pond in the woods," Tompkins said eagerly.

"Oh, I just *love* fishing," exclaimed Miranda.

"Well, why don't you come with us?" invited Tompkins. Barney groaned inwardly and began to slowly move away.

"Oh, I'd just love to go fishing with *you*," she emphasized, "but does *he* have to come too?" she added, nodding at Barney's disappearing back.

"Of course," answered Tompkins in surprise. "Barney is my best friend. He's watched over me ever since I was a kitten, and besides, he's really good at fishing and hunting."

"Great," commented Miranda dryly. But then, as the two cats began to follow Barney, she glanced sideways at Tompkins and said, "Well, since Barney *has* to come, perhaps we could *lose him* in the woods."

"*Lose Barney?*" exclaimed Tompkins in shocked innocence, "why you couldn't lose Barney in these woods. He knows every track and rabbit hole. He even knows where the local fox lives and where the badgers go," he added proudly. "Barney's been around for ages."

"That's for sure," commented Miranda.

### **Miranda Reveals Her True Character**

They reached the pond a little later and Barney and Tompkins crouched by the edge, their eyes alertly glued to the water as they watched the fish darting in and out of the pondweed. Miranda sprawled on the bank a little way off.

"Come on Miranda," Tompkins called. "You're missing all the fun. I thought you said you liked fishing."

"Oh well, yes," she answered lazily, "but I don't really like getting my paws and fur wet."

Tompkins said nothing but frowned in puzzlement. He couldn't understand how any cat could fish without getting its fur wet. Tompkins turned back to the task in hand just as Barney made a sudden strike and brought out a large fish on the end of his claws, which he then flung down on the bank.

"Oh well done, Barney!" shouted Tompkins leaping up and down. "I knew *you'd* catch one."

Barney smiled at Tompkins' enthusiasm and looked again at the fish. "It is quite a big one," he admitted. "There's enough for us all to share it."

But just then, to their utter astonishment, Miranda shot forward, snatched the fish, and dragged it off to where she'd been sitting. Then she began to claw at it and eat it all herself, laughing at her own audacity in between bites.

Barney and Tompkins stood with their mouths open until Barney finally said in a somewhat dismal voice, "I've had enough fishing today, Tompkins. I'm leaving." And he ran quickly off through the trees.

As Tompkins stood rooted to the spot, not knowing whether to follow Barney or stay with Miranda, she suddenly called out, "Oh good, he's gone! Come and sit here with me Tommeeeee."

Tompkins, with a frown, slowly walked towards her. "That was Barney's fish, Miranda. You shouldn't have taken it. It was very wrong of you, and in any case, Barney said we could all have some of it."

"Oh Barney, Barney, Barney!" she exclaimed. "I'm tired of hearing about Barney. Anyway, I was only joking, and the size he is, he doesn't need any fish does he?"

"It was no joke and if you mean that Barney is fat, *he isn't!*" retorted Tompkins hotly, defending his friend. "Barney is a Persian cat and they always have long fur - and that makes them look a lot bigger!"

"Oh sure," commented Miranda. "He looks more like bear cub to me!" she said, laughing uproariously at her own joke.

"That does it!" exclaimed Tompkins. "I'm off!" and he turned to go.

"Oh don't go Tommeeee," Miranda wailed. "Stay with me."

"Tompkins half turned and said with great deliberation, "The name is **Tompkins!**" Then he turned his back on Miranda and ran after his big friend.

### **Barney Educates Tompkins**

Tompkins caught up with Barney just as he was nearing Tompkins' driveway. "Barney," panted Tompkins, "why don't you come into the garden and we can sit under the big shade tree at the back."

"All right," agreed Barney, noticing Tompkins' unhappy face.

The two cats sat in silence for a while and then Tompkins began hesitantly, "I'm sorry Miranda took your fish, Barney. She shouldn't have done that."

"No, she shouldn't have," agreed Barney "but you don't need to apologize. It's wasn't your fault."

"No, but I invited her," said Tompkins miserably. "It's just that she's so beautiful and I thought she was a *nice cat as well*, but she doesn't seem to be. Do you know what I mean?"

"Of course," said Barney in a comforting manner. "You see, it's like this, Tompkins. Some cats, and believe it or not, even some humans, can look lovely on the *outside* but they're not always lovely or agreeable on the *inside*."

Tompkins looked puzzled so Barney explained further. "What I mean is, you can tell what a person or a cat is like by what they say or do. For example, are they selfish and mean, and do they say nasty things about others, or are they unselfish and kind, and do they say nice things about others? Of course, some can be lovely on the outside *and* the inside. And some may not look so nice on the outside, but are really beautiful inside with lovely warm character. You've just got to learn to watch and judge carefully, bearing in mind that they can change over time."

"Yes, I see," nodded Tompkins. "Do you think Miranda will ever change and be beautiful on the inside?" he queried.

"Well, it's possible," replied Barney. "If she isn't spoiled and if she is taught the right way to behave, then she might change for the better."

"I hope so," Tompkins sighed, not sounding very hopeful at all.

Barney looked at Tompkins' rather sad little face and suddenly jumped up. "Tompkins," he said briskly "do you remember when I first took you up onto the chalk Downs near that old ruined castle when you were just a kitten and I caught that big rabbit for us both?"

"Oh yes!" responded Tompkins, animation returning to his eyes. "That was a wonderful day. I really enjoyed it."

"Well look," suggested Barney "it won't be dark for some time, so why don't we go up there now?"

"Oh YES, YES!" cried Tompkins leaping up and heading off for the lane as fast as his legs could carry him, all thoughts of Miranda temporarily forgotten. Barney chuckled to himself and hurried to catch up with Tompkins.

Soon the two cats were trudging up the lane past Barney's house and all the way to the top where a five-barred gate closed off a narrow track that led up onto the hills. The two cats squeezed through the bars and were soon walking up the track.

This area of the Downs had been designated as a Place of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Consequently there were no buildings, just plenty of wild flowers, bees, birds, bushes and trees. But, naturally, wildlife was the main thing of interest for the cats! So, as they steadily climbed the steep slopes, they nosed around trying to disturb any interesting wildlife they could find. However, most of the self-respecting mice and voles had disappeared as soon as they'd heard the two cats pushing their way through the long grass!

As Barney and Tompkins drew closer to the ancient ruined castle, the sky was suddenly filled with big black clouds and large raindrops began to fall, accompanied by rumbles of thunder. "Come on!" shouted Barney. "Quick! Let's get into the old castle courtyard. We can take shelter there."

### **Barney and Tompkins Make a Friend**

The two cats hurried through the remains of a stone archway and into the

former large courtyard. As they dashed to take shelter in the only covered area, they were startled to hear a loud howling, spitting noise emanating from the corner. And then, to their utter amazement, a tiny little face peered at them from around a pile of fallen rocks. As they watched, the tiniest, skinniest and most bedraggled looking kitten they had ever seen came out into full view. The kitten may have been small but she was full of spunk and courage. Her back was arched and her tail stood erect as she prepared to face intruders.

Seeing that this was no worthy competition, Barney called a halt and said in his most fatherly voice: "It's all right little Missy. We don't mean you any harm. We were only seeking shelter from the rain. Tell you what we'll do. We'll sit down here and you sit down there and we won't come any closer. Then we can talk."

So, as Barney and Tompkins sat down and kept quite still, the little cat gradually relaxed and sat down too. Finally Barney spoke, "Now then, I'm Barney and this is my friend, Tompkins. What's your name?"

There was a momentary silence and then in a very quiet voice the kitten said miserably, "I don't have a name."

"Don't have a name!" exclaimed Tompkins. "Every cat has a name!"

"Shush!" hissed Barney. "You'll frighten her." Then Barney continued in his most fatherly manner, "Well, that's all right little one. Tell us where you live instead, and who your owners are."

"I live here," she answered rather shamefacedly. "I don't have an owner." But then her face brightened a little. "I was born in a house, I mean a proper house," she emphasized proudly, "but they didn't want me, so they tied me up in a black sack and threw me out with the rubbish," she continued, struggling not to burst into tears.

This was too much for Tompkins. He sprang to his feet shouting, "They can't do that! They can't treat cats like that! They ought to be reported!"

"Sit down, Tompkins!" commanded Barney, "and stop frightening her." But strangely enough the little cat was not frightened by Tompkins. On the contrary, she felt quite comforted to have someone on her side.

"Tell us how you came to be here," encouraged Barney.

"Well, you see I have very sharp claws," she said proudly, holding them out for inspection, while Barney and Tompkins nodded approval. "And when a big lorry came and I was thrown into the back with other sacks, I began to claw at the bag until I made a big hole in it and could get out. Then when the lorry slowed down at a corner, I jumped out and ran and ran. I didn't know where I was going, but I ended up here and I've stayed here ever since."

"Well done!" exclaimed Barney and Tompkins in unison. "You're a very brave cat," added Barney, "and much to be commended."

The little cat felt very pleased at this and began to regard the other two as her friends. She had never had a friend before but it made her feel more confident and she said quietly, "Mr Barney, I do have a name, now."

"You do?" queried Barney.

"Yes," she said shyly, "I liked it when you called me little Missy, so I've decided that my name is "Missy" from now on."

Tompkins sprang to his feet in his usual buoyant manner and ostentatiously bowed in Missy's direction, saying formally, "How do you do little Miss Missy. So glad to meet you. Tompkins at your service, Madam."

Then for the first time they heard Missy laugh. Barney looked at Missy laughing and noticed again how very small and thin she was. He made a quick decision and stood up. "Listen Missy," he said, "Tompkins will stay here with you for a bit while I go hunting to see what I can find to eat."

Barney sped off at top speed and Tompkins began to entertain Missy with stories of his and Barney's past adventures, which made her laugh and sometimes stare wide-eyed in amazement. However, it wasn't long before Barney returned with a large dead wood pigeon, which he dumped at Missy's feet.

"There!" he said. "You start eating that." But even though Missy was starving, she hesitated and said, "It's a very large pigeon - perhaps we could all share it."

"No, No!" exclaimed Barney. Tompkins and I have had our food. That's for you." So they sat and watched happily as Missy ate with obvious enjoyment.

After a while she stopped and looked up. "Oh thank you, Mr Barney. That was lovely but I'm sorry I can't eat any more."

"That's all right," smiled Barney "we'll just leave it there and you can finish it off whenever you get hungry again. But, look, it's beginning to get dark, and Tompkins and I will have to go home or our families will start to worry about us. They don't really need to of course, but that's just the way humans are."

So Barney and Tompkins stood up ready to leave, but then Barney turned back to Missy. "Missy," he said, "I've just had an idea. Do you know the lane that goes down into the village at the bottom of this track?"

"Oh yes," she said.

"Well listen, I live about halfway down that lane on the right hand side, and in the mornings my Mummy puts my bowls of food out by the front gate. She always gives me rather a lot, so why don't you come down each morning and help me finish it up. That would please her." (Of course, prior to this, Barney had seemed to do very well at finishing up all his food!)

"Oooh, I'd love to," she replied, "but I'm afraid to come down."

"Afraid!" exclaimed Tompkins. "What's there to be afraid of?"

"Well, it's because of the nasty dog who lives at the big house at the top of the lane. He stands at the large Iron Gate at the front of his house and barks loudly at me whenever I try to come down the lane. It scares me so much that I always run back up here," she explained.

"Oh you mean old Basha Bulldog!" laughed Barney. "You don't have to worry about him. He won't hurt you. His bark is much worse than his bite."

"Yes," chimed in Tompkins, "that's because he's lost half his teeth!"

Barney and Missy began to laugh when they heard that. Tompkins joined in and soon all three cats were rolling about the grass laughing. But suddenly Barney recalled himself and said, "We shouldn't really laugh at Basha. He's a good old dog. He has to bark, you see, because his Master expects him to bark at cats and postmen. Tell you what we'll do. When Tompkins and I go back down the lane, I'll talk to Basha and explain that you're our friend and ask him not to

bark. I know he'll oblige, so come down in the morning and don't be frightened."

"All right," agreed Missy as the cats turned to go. "And if you don't come down," shouted Tompkins, half turning, "I'll come up and fetch you!"

### **Barney Takes Missy Under His "Wing"**

The next morning as Barney sat beside his gate, he kept glancing up the lane to see if Missy was coming. Finally he spied her as she appeared around the bend, and was struck again by how pitifully thin she was. He also noticed that she walked very slowly as if she had no energy.

"Good morning, Missy," Barney called, getting up. "Did Basha bark at you?"

"Oh no," replied Missy. "He even said 'good morning' to me in a very civil voice."

"There, I told you he'd be all right once he knew you were our friend. Now come and sit down and finish up this food for me."

Missy's eyes glowed as she looked at the lovely food, and needing no second bidding, she munched away as Barney watched contentedly.

For the next two or three weeks Missy came down regularly every morning and ate half of Barney's breakfast. He was pleased to notice that she was gaining weight and that she was now walking with more of a spring in her step.

One morning, just as she'd finished eating, Tompkins arrived, and unusually for him, sat down quietly, and just smiled at her. Barney looked at Missy licking her lips and carefully examined her appearance. She looked so disheveled that it made him wince. She had long bits of grass sticking out of her fur, food splashed all over herself, and her coat was matted and dirty.

Trying to think of a tactful way to broach the subject, Barney said in a loud whisper to Missy, which he knew Tompkins could hear, "Shall I tell you a secret?"

"Oooh, yes please, Mr Barney," she replied, eyes shining.

"Well, you wouldn't believe it to look at him now, but when Tompkins was a kitten, he was an absolute mess! You should have seen him. He used to get food all over his face. He used to get mud down his white front and on his paws, and one day he even had a piece of tuna fish sticking out of one of his ears!"

Missy giggled.

"Well of course I couldn't let him go about in that disgraceful condition, letting down cat standards, so I decided to give him a bath," Barney continued. "Then I gradually instructed him in careful cat hygiene. Now he's turned into quite a handsome young cat, but don't tell him I said that. We don't want him getting a swelled head!"

Tompkins chuckled inside himself but said nothing, guessing where this conversation was leading.

"Oh no, I won't tell him," Missy responded in all seriousness, "but what's a bath, Mr Barney?"

This was just the opening that Barney had been waiting for and so he responded eagerly, "Let me show you." And without further ado, Barney's little red tongue began flashing in and out as he lathered and soaked Missy from head to toe. He worked so vigorously that more than once he knocked her off her feet. After a while he stopped and stepped back to survey his handiwork.

"Yes," he said "I think that about does it. I've got all the grass and burrs out of your fur and untangled all the matted knotty bits, so you should soon look a lot better."

Missy glanced down at her soaking wet fur and rather bedraggled appearance, and then glanced sideways at Barney and Tompkins and realized that she didn't look anything like them in their immaculate fur suits.

Guessing what she was thinking, Barney said in a cheerful voice, "Don't worry about your fur being wet for a while. It will soon dry if you lie in the sun and then the fur will fluff up and you'll look lovely."

Unfortunately it was at this precise moment that a rather unwelcome voice called, "Tomme, Tomme! Oh there you are. I thought I might find you here. I thought *just you and I* could go over to Banky Meadows and we could..... ." Her words trailed off as she caught sight of Missy.

"Whatever is that?" she asked rudely, nodding in Missy's direction. "Is it a rat?" She then laughed uproariously at her own poor joke. "I'm surprised at you, Barney, inviting that sort of creature here!"

Missy realized that Miranda was referring to her and jumped up sobbing. She ran off up the lane and, without hesitation, Tompkins quickly raced off after her. He knew that Miranda had hurt Missy's feelings and wanted to comfort her.

"Tomme, come back!" yelled Miranda, but Tompkins didn't stop.

Feeling very angry at being ignored, Miranda turned on Barney. "I thought that you, of all cats, would have had more sense than to welcome creatures like that to your gate. The way you're going on, you'll soon have all the local riffraff turning up!"

This was too much for Barney. Staring Miranda in the eyes, he rose slowly. His back was arched and his long fur stood on end, making him look even larger, while his big fluffy tail waved threateningly.

"Now you listen to me Miss Miranda," Barney began, advancing menacingly. "This is my grass, my path and my gate, and I make welcome here whomever I choose - and at the moment I don't choose to welcome *you!* If you change your ways and start being kind and civil to others then you'll be welcome to come back - but *not until then!* DO I MAKE MYSELF CLEAR?"

As Barney glared, drawing closer and closer to her with teeth bared, Miranda backed off. She suddenly remembered that Barney had the reputation of being the best heavyweight cat fighter in the village. So, just as he was almost nose to nose with her, she decided it was time to get out and turned tail and fled.

Barney let her go. He didn't consider her a very worthy opponent, so he went back and sat down, trying to calm himself. He was very glad, though, that Tompkins had thought to go off after Missy in order to console her.

### **Miranda Gets Her "Comeuppance"**

The next morning Barney sat by his gate, anxiously looking up the lane wondering if Missy would come. After a while he was pleased to see her cautiously advancing, her eyes flashing to and fro, as though to see whether "that other cat" was anywhere about. With her fur all fluffed up, Barney thought she was beginning to look quite pretty, and it could now be seen that she was actually a tortoiseshell cat.

Barney jumped up. "Hello Missy," he called. "It's all right, there's only you and me here. And by the way, you look very pretty today."

"Oh thank you, Mr Barney," she said shyly, but very pleased. "And thank you for letting me share your breakfast each day," she added as Barney nodded towards his bowls, encouraging her to go ahead and start eating. It was while she was busy doing this that Barney's Mummy came out of the gate carrying a basket of apples. She patted Barney on the head and said, "I'm just taking these apples down to Mrs Daley. We've had such a lot from our tree this year, but I won't be gone long." Barney sat and watched as his Mummy set off down the lane.

Missy soon finished eating and Barney was just beginning to give her an elementary lesson in the Cat Hygiene Code, when they suddenly heard Tompkins shouting, "Barney! Barney!" - and almost immediately the ebullient Tompkins came rocketing up the lane.

Barney and Missy jumped up in alarm. "Oh, is it a fire?" Missy whispered to Barney in a frightened undertone. She had seen a grass fire up on the Downs and had been very scared when she'd heard the crackling noise and smelt the smoke.

Tompkins skidded to a halt in front of them, gasping for breath.

"Whatever is it, Tompkins?" Barney exclaimed anxiously.

"She's gone! She's gone!" shouted Tompkins.

"Who's gone?"

"Miranda! She's gone!"

"Tompkins! Do you mean to tell me that this is what the panic is about? You really frightened Missy. She thought it was a fire."

"Oh sorry, Missy," Tompkins responded quickly, in a hurry to blurt out the rest of his information. But before he could open his mouth, Barney interrupted him.

"Tompkins," he said severely, "I don't understand why you can't learn to walk about sedately like every other cat. Why do you always have to frantically race about everywhere?"

"Well you get there quicker that way," explained Tompkins, as though Barney wouldn't have known this.

Barney took a deep breath. "Look, why don't we all sit down and then you can try and tell us *calmly* what this is all about."

"Well," began Tompkins eagerly, "When I was *sort of* passing Mrs Daley's gatepost, *I just happened to hear* her talking to your Mummy and she said that..... "

"Tompkins!" interrupted Barney again, still slightly annoyed with him. "How many times have I told you not to hang around gateposts, listening to other people's conversations? It is most impolite and downright nosey!"

"Oh I know, but that's the only way you find out things!" Tompkins retorted. "Besides, poor Basha Bulldog is stuck behind that big gate all day and he likes me to tell him everything that's happening - so I only do it for him!" Tompkins said, excusing his bad behaviour.

"Oh, sure!" Barney sighed weakly, and shook his head at the irrepressible Tompkins, while Missy tried not to laugh.

"Well, *as I was saying*, I heard Mrs Daley telling your Mummy that Miranda had been a very naughty cat. Because she couldn't get her own way about something, she jumped up on Mrs Daley's dresser and purposely knocked down a number of her special plates, which smashed. So Mrs Daley said she just couldn't put up with her any longer and has sent her off to a Cat's Home."

"Mmm," murmured Barney thoughtfully. "Perhaps it's all for the best. She certainly won't be spoilt there and they may give her a bit of discipline, which will be good for her. Then perhaps her behaviour will improve." (You can find out what happened to Miranda in *The Transformation of Miranda*, the next story in the Barney series.)

"It needs to," answered Tompkins. "Anyway, I also heard Mrs Daley saying that it isn't that she doesn't like cats. In fact, she said that she *loves* cats, but she wants one that is quiet, obedient and cuddly, one that will sit on her lap and ....." The words died on Tompkins' lips as he caught Barney's meaningful look. In unison both their heads turned to look at Missy.

Barney made a sudden decision and rose. "Come on," he said, "We're going for a walk."

"Do you mean me too?" queried Missy.

"Of course," Barney encouraged. "You're our friend now."

### **All's Well that Ends Well**

Missy felt very pleased to have Barney and Tompkins as friends and supposed they were going on some big adventure together. So she walked along excitedly between big Barney on one side and the cheerful Tompkins on the other as they set off down the lane. Since Tompkins had to greatly slow his pace to match Missy's, he contented himself by occasionally leaping vertically into the air at a passing butterfly.

As they came to Mrs Daley's cottage, they saw that Barney's Mummy (Mrs Jackson) was still talking to Mrs Daley. When she caught sight of Barney, she said, "Oh hello Barney. I didn't realise you'd followed me down here." Then turning back to Mrs Daley she said, "This big fellow is my cat, Barney, and the ginger and white one is his young friend, Tompkins."

"Oh I know," smiled Mrs Daley. "I often see them walking past on their way to the woods. But who is this other little scrap of a kitten?"

"I don't really know," replied Mrs Jackson. "I think she must be a stray. She seems to come down from the hills every morning and shares Barney's breakfast. When I first saw her she looked half starved so I started putting out a little extra food each day. She now seems to be filling out a little and is not nearly so disheveled looking." Barney smiled at the compliment to himself.

"You're a pretty little tortoiseshell cat, aren't you?" said Mrs Daley, bending down and looking closely at Missy. Then she picked her up and began to gently stroke her, carrying her across to the old wicker chair that stood beside the porch. As she sat down with Missy on her lap, Missy felt completely at home and immediately took a liking to Mrs Daley. She began to purr contentedly and soon fell asleep.

"Come on," whispered Barney to Tompkins. "Let's go. It's better that she stays here. We'll come and see her in the morning."

As the two cats set off back up the lane they congratulated themselves for doing a good work and finding a home for little Missy.

"You know, Barney," began Tompkins in an unusually thoughtful manner. "Missy is getting to look quite pretty on the *outside*, but I think she is even prettier on the *inside*! She's got a lovely nature."

"You're quite right, Tompkins," Barney agreed.

As they approached Tompkins' driveway, Tompkins said, "I have to go in now, Barney. My Daddy told me not to be gone long because he's going to take me to the vet. I don't know why, because there's nothing wrong with me."

"Oh you know these humans," replied Barney. "They fuss about nothing. And they're just so fascinated with our fur coats that they just can't keep their hands off us. That's all it is."

Tompkins nodded wisely.

Then, with the light of mischief in his eyes, Barney said in a perfect imitation of Miranda's voice, "See you tomorrow Tommeeee!" Then he turned and ran like the wind up the lane!

"Just you wait!" yelled Tompkins laughing, as he went obediently indoors.

*The End*

