

# The Investigators

By Shirley Young

## Chapter 1



**O**ne bright sunny morning, Tompkins, a handsome ginger and white cat, went out for his early morning stroll. As he approached the large village green in Littlebourne, he saw another brown and white cat called Speedy racing up and down the grass chasing a small red ball. Unfortunately, Tompkins and Speedy, who were about the same age, didn't get on well together and often ended up fighting, as young male cats are prone to do. On several occasions their fighting had become so fierce that Mr Deacon, the District Head Cat, had been forced to intervene and stop them!

### Reconciliation

But now, as Tompkins stood still and watched Speedy, he had to admire the swiftness and skill of Speedy's footwork with the ball. "He's not bad," Tompkins was just thinking, when suddenly Speedy hit the ball so hard that it went racing across the grass and down a slope, heading straight for the village pond, where it would have been lost and gone forever!

Without hesitation, Tompkins rocketed forward and caught the ball in his mouth just before it hit the water. Then he climbed back up the bank, carried the ball across to Speedy and dropped it down in front of him.

"Just managed to stop it," said Tompkins, and was about to walk away when Speedy said, "Thanks, Tompkins! I really appreciate what you did. My dad just gave me this ball and he would have been cross if I'd lost it on the first day! That was a great save by the way - I don't suppose you'd like to have a game, would you?"

Tompkins hesitated, but then realised that Speedy was holding out the proverbial "olive branch of peace", so he enthusiastically replied, "Oh yes! Thanks!"

"Let's start at this end of the green," suggested Speedy, "and we'll dribble the ball back and forth as fast as we can all the way to the other side. Then let's see if we can shoot the ball between those two fir trees at the far end."

"OK!" shouted Tompkins, and away they went, laughing and expertly dribbling the ball to and fro the whole length of the village green. But then, as they neared the trees, Speedy batted the ball with extra force and it flew off into the undergrowth. As the ball landed, it was accompanied by a loud squealing shriek. Harry the hedgehog had been dozing under some leaves and the ball had smacked right into him!

Harry raised his head, looking somewhat dazed, and when he saw the two cats staring at him, he turned on them angrily. "You young hooligans!" he shouted. "Can't a law-abiding hedgehog have a quiet nap without being banged on the head by you young cats! I don't know what things are coming to." And, without saying any more, he shuffled off through the long grass.

"Sorry!" called Speedy, but Harry didn't look back.

Then, before either of the cats could speak, the village Clock Tower began to strike ten. "Oh no!" exclaimed Speedy. "It's ten o'clock. The Head Cat will skin me alive if I'm late. Must be off, Tom," he said, shortening Tompkins' name to indicate that they were now friends. "See you another day."

"OK Speed," called Tompkins, smiling to himself as he followed Speedy's example. He was glad they were no longer enemies.

### **A Lesson in Friendship**

Speedy was actually the school caretaker's cat, but in the mornings he acted as a messenger for Mr Deacon, the Head Cat, who was very old. Deacon found it difficult to walk because his legs were extremely stiff, so when he needed to talk to the village cats he sent Speedy with a message to them.

After Speedy's departure, Tompkins walked back up the lane to Barney's house. Barney was a very large black and white long-furred cat who had watched over Tompkins since he was a kitten. Each morning they met together on the grass verge beside Barney's gate to discuss what to do that day, along with Little Missy, a tiny kitten they had rescued from living alone up on the hills, but who now had a lovely home with Mrs Daley. As Tompkins reached Barney and Little Missy, who were already there waiting, Barney said, "Hello Tompkins, we were just wondering where you were."

"Oh, I've been playing football with Speedy on the village green, but then he had to rush off to help Mr Deacon."

"I thought you two weren't on speaking terms," commented Barney.

So Tompkins explained how he had saved Speedy's ball and that they were now good friends. They even had nicknames for each other!

"I'm very happy to hear that," said Barney, smiling.

"But Tompkins," interrupted Missy, "Speedy's been nasty to you. You should have let his ball go into the pond. I would have given it a kick to help it on its way!"

"No, no, Missy," said Barney gently. "That's not the way to make friends. Acting like that only increases the animosity and continues the enmity. Tompkins did exactly the right thing. Now he's gained a friend and lost an enemy!"

"Speedy's all right really," continued Tompkins," and you should see his fancy footwork with the ball! He really - " Tompkins was about to go on when they saw Speedy himself rushing up the lane towards them as though a thousand dogs were chasing him.

## **Good News**

"What's up, Speed?" called Tompkins, jumping up in alarm.

"Hi Tom," puffed Speedy, but then turned to speak to Barney, the senior cat of the three. "Barney, the Head Cat wants every cat in the district to assemble in his garden at 11 o'clock sharp - and you know how he is about punctuality!"

"Certainly," said Barney, getting up. "Don't worry, we'll be there."

"What's it all about Speed?" queried Tompkins curiously.

"Don't know. He didn't say," said Speedy. "But I can't stop. I don't know how I'm going to get around to let everyone know in time."

"Can I help?" asked Tompkins.

"Oh, yes please!" replied Speedy. "Could you go up to Todd's Farm and tell Primrose and Daisy while I tell the other cats around the village? That will save me loads of time."

"Of course," said Tompkins. "No problem!" And he dashed up the hill toward the farm as Speedy ran off in the opposite direction.

### **Mr Deacon Makes an Announcement**

Shortly before eleven o'clock, Speedy and Tompkins came panting into Mr Deacon's garden, their task completed. Most of the village cats were already there and, once the final few arrived, they assembled in a semi-circle around the large flat tree stump that Deacon used as a platform when he addressed the cats.

They all sat quietly and expectantly as the Tower Clock began to strike the hour, wondering why they had been summoned. But they didn't have to wait long to find out! Before the final "gong" had sounded, the Head Cat came slowly and stiffly walking across the lawn toward the tree stump. He was accompanied by his two oldest friends and advisers - Solomon and Sheba. As Deacon took his place up on the stump, Solomon and Sheba sat on either side, facing the audience of cats.

"Good morning," began Deacon, "and thank you all for coming - especially as I know that some of you have other duties and responsibilities to attend to. But I thought you all might want to be here when I make a very happy announcement."

"As you know," he continued, "I am getting on in age, although I would hasten to add that I am NOT 100 years old, as I believe I am rumoured to be!" All the cats obediently laughed at his joke. "I would also like you to know that I have no intention of retiring - I will continue to serve you as long as I can."

"Good! Good!" came shouts from the back, as Deacon was a well respected Head Cat and considered to be fair in all his judgments.

"However, as you all realise, I am somewhat disabled in my legs and can't get about as I used to. So after some discussion with Solomon and Sheba, I have come to the conclusion that it is time to appoint a Deputy Head Cat - someone who is younger than me but someone who has also proved himself over time. So I have chosen someone who has overcome his own problems, grown in wisdom and judgment, and who has already helped, taught and assisted a number of you younger cats."

An expectant "Oooh" and "Aaah" went up from the audience as they waited and wondered who this new Deputy Head Cat was to be. The Head Cat smiled teasingly, keeping them waiting, and then said, "It is my greatest pleasure to announce that your new Deputy Head is BARNEY JACKSON!"

A loud cheer went up from most of the cats as Barney was very popular, though one or two kept quiet, wondering about the wisdom of Deacon's choice.

"Mr Barney, would you please come forward and say a few words," invited Deacon, giving Barney his title of Mr, as befitted his new position. But Barney didn't move. Frozen in position like a statue, he stood rock-like as though turned to stone, with his mouth hanging open and his eyes goggling.

"Er, Mr Barney," began Deacon again, "when you've quite finished your excellent impersonation of a fish, perhaps you might oblige us by coming forward." All the cats roared with laughter and turned to stare at Barney.

"Tompkins," added the Head Cat, "perhaps you might assist Mr Barney on his way with a push from behind."

Tompkins laughed and readily did as asked, giving Barney a mighty shove that sent him tottering forward to the tree stump. Still dazed, Barney climbed up next to the Head Cat as a shout of "Speech! Speech!" began.

"Ah yes, well, that is to say, what I mean is...." began Barney, lost for words. Finally he managed, "I would like to thank Mr Deacon and his advisers for their confidence in me. I will certainly do my very best to serve you all, and act fairly and justly without partiality or favouritism, following the example of our Head Cat. I shall also do my best to circulate around the village, so if you have a problem please come and talk to me.

As Barney rather quickly and thankfully stepped down, all the cats began to cheer again. When the cheers finally died down, Mr Deacon thanked everyone for coming and told them that the meeting was adjourned and they could all go home.

The cats slowly began to leave, chatting amongst themselves and stopping to congratulate Barney on their way out of the garden. After they had all gone, Mr Deacon asked to have a quiet word with Barney before he left.

"Why don't you use what I consider my private garden - the Rose Garden - for your consultations?" Deacon suggested. "My owner won't mind as his garden is huge - about 15 acres - and he rarely goes down to the Rose Garden. Then I will be available to help if a situation arises that is too difficult for you to deal with."

Barney quickly agreed, realising that this was a sensible idea. Then he thanked Mr Deacon again and left to follow Tompkins and Missy back up the lane.

## **Bad News**

The next morning, as Barney and his two young friends gathered at his gate as usual, they were surprised to see Speedy racing up the road again.

"Mr Barney!" Speedy called before he had hardly arrived. "The Head Cat wants to see you urgently. He also requested for Tompkins to come as well."

"Me?" queried Tompkins, jumping up. "Why does he want me? What have I done wrong?"

"Nothing that I know of, but that doesn't mean you haven't!" grinned Speedy. "But he's asked me to be present as well. I don't know what it's all about, but he looks very long-faced, as though it's something serious."

"Well, it's no good standing here speculating," put in Barney. "Let's go down to his garden right away."

As Missy got up to follow them, Barney turned and said gently, "I don't think you can come with us, Missy, since Mr Deacon didn't ask you to. Why don't you go into my garden, get your rubber mouse, and practise the crouch, watch, pounce and grab moves that I showed you."

"Oh, all right," she answered miserably, and wondered why she hadn't been invited to the Head Cat's garden. After all, Tompkins was going! And, being a very curious little kitten, she decided to quiz Tompkins closely when he came back to find out what was going on!

## Chapter 2



When Barney, Speedy and Tompkins entered the Head Cat's garden they found him hobbling to and fro in a very agitated manner. "Oh there you are!" he exclaimed. "Come with me down to the Rose Garden at once. We can be more private there."

As they went down into the Rose Garden, Barney, Speedy and Tompkins saw that there were six other cats present. They were Grumpy, who was a tabby cat with markings that made him look as if he had a permanent frown; Tubby, so called for obvious reasons; Pongo from the fish shop; Sooty from the coal merchants; and Suzy and Fluffy, who were sisters and belonged to the elderly Miss Jenkins.

When Grumpy saw the Head Cat and his companions, he burst out, "Well, I don't know what you think they can do about it! It's a crying shame. A cat can't sleep safely in his basket nowadays. The place is infested with thieves and robbers!"

"Grumpy, please be quiet," said the Head Cat firmly, "and don't exaggerate!" Then he turned to Barney and said, "It seems that in the last two or three nights these six cats have had their toys stolen. A very serious accusation to make, of course."

"And all of the food eaten out of our bowls!" interrupted Grumpy again. Deacon ignored Grumpy's comment and continued quietly, "Mr Barney, if any cats are doing this thieving, it's a disgrace to the cats in this village and will give us a bad name, so it's got to be stopped as quickly as possible. Unfortunately, I've got three district cats coming to see me over the next few days on other business and I'm not free to deal with this now, so I would like you to take charge of this investigation."

"Yes, Sir. I'll certainly do my best," answered Barney. "And did you want Tompkins and Speedy to assist?"

"Yes, please," Deacon replied, smiling. "Since Tompkins won back the title of 'Fastest Cat in the Kingdom' for our village and Speedy was close behind, I thought that no one would be able to escape from them if there's a chase involved in catching these robbers!"

"That they won't, Sir! We'll get 'em! You can depend on it!" cried Speedy fervently, as Tompkins nodded in agreement.

"I'm pleased to hear it," smiled the Head Cat. "But I must be off now as I've things to arrange, but please do keep me informed on how the investigation is progressing, Mr Barney. We must put a stop to this thieving as quickly as possible. I hope all of you cats involved will co-operate with your new Deputy Head, just as you would with me."

"Oh yes, Sir!" cried Fluffy and Suzy in unison, but Grumpy just said, "Humph!"

### **Barney Takes Control**

"Now," began Barney as Deacon walked off, "perhaps each of you who has been burgled can tell me exactly what's missing."

"I've lost my green frog and I want it back!" burst out Grumpy. Tompkins and Speedy smothered a titter. They had both seen the horrible large green plastic frog with protruding eyes and didn't know why Grumpy was making such a fuss about it!

"It lies beside me every night in my basket, so it was stolen right from my very side!" Grumpy explained. "Not to mention all the food being eaten from my bowl!"

This was too much for Speedy, who gave an obvious snort of laughter - fancy being upset by that! But he was quickly quelled by a look from Barney.

"And what about you, Pongo? What have you had stolen?"

"Well, as you know, my Dad is the local fishmonger, so he bought me a rubber shark and just for fun he painted big white teeth on it. And it's gone!"

Sooty, who was a gentle, elderly cat, but very deaf, said, "You mean they're not your own?! You have rubber teeth? I never realised it! And they've been stolen? How are you going to eat, Pongo?"

"What? No, No! Of course I don't have rubber teeth!" said Pongy. "It's my shark."

"Shark? Oh dear! They're very dangerous. You should be careful, Pongo," warned Sooty.

"It's RUBBER!" shouted Pongo at full volume.

"Er, yes, thank you," interposed Barney when he saw that Tompkins and Speedy were about to explode with suppressed laughter. "And what have you had stolen, Sooty?"

"My bag of coal!"

"Cats don't go about with bags of coal!" exclaimed Grumpy.

"Grumpy, please leave this to me," interrupted Barney before more confusion could take place. "Did you say you have had a bag of coal stolen, Sooty?"

"Yes, Sir. My Mum sewed me a little bag and filled it with catnip and then embroidered 'COAL' on the side, since I'm the coal merchant's cat. My food also disappeared, because I know I didn't eat it all before I went to bed."

"I see. And what about you Tubby? What do you have missing?"

"My red and purple mouse!" (Even Grumpy looked astonished at this).

"Red and purple?" stuttered Barney. "I've never seen one that colour."

"Well, my Mum ran out of grey knitting wool so she made me a red and purple striped one, and it's got big green eyes," Tubby finished triumphantly.

"Indeed! Er, well, it's certainly distinctive. We should be able to identify that when we find it."

"And that's not all," Tubby continued. "My Mum washed my pink and blue rabbit and hung it up on the outside line by the ears to dry. And it's gone missing as well. Pulled off the line, it was!"

"Pink and blue rabbit, you say," blinked Barney, thinking how colourful Tubby's toys seemed to be! "I suppose the wind could have blown it away," he commented.

"Oh, no. I looked everywhere, and it's gone. It's most distressing. That was my favourite toy."

"Fancy a cat of your age having a coloured toy rabbit!" snorted Grumpy.

"Well, it's better than your ugly green frog!" retorted Tubby.

"Gentlemen, please!" interrupted Barney. "We'll never get anywhere if we start bickering among ourselves. And Grumpy, please keep your comments to yourself! OK," he continued. "We'll do our best to recover these stolen items for all of you."

"Thank you, Mr Barney," said Tubby.

"Now, what about you, Suzi and Fluffy?"

"I had my chocolate coloured velvet hedgehog stolen, and Fluffy's little doll has gone!"

"Yes, Mr Barney," put in Fluffy, "she's ever so pretty. She's all dressed in pink and even has a matching pink hat! Her name is Lady."

"Er, oh, really!" stammered Barney, "She sounds most fetching! Well, Miss Fluffy, we'll certainly do our very best to try and retrieve her for you."

"Oh, thank you, Mr Barney," she said, with such innocent admiration in her eyes that Barney felt his heart starting to do some rather peculiar flip-flops. Speedy and Tompkins threw each other a knowing look, but bit their lips.

"Well, thank you all for coming," finished Barney. "We'll get onto the case as swiftly as possible."

"I should hope so! I shall be expecting my frog back immediately! And I shall personally stay on watch at night. Then when I get my paws on whoever took it, I'll shake the living daylight out of him!" exclaimed Grumpy.

"Oh, no you will not, Grumpy!" exclaimed Barney sternly. "If it's a cat or cats who took these items then they will be brought here before the Head Cat for proper justice - and he will decide the appropriate punishment."

"Humph!" replied Grumpy and stomped out of the garden after the other cats who were now leaving.

### **The Investigation Begins**

Barney cleared his throat and quickly stopped himself from staring at Fluffy as she left. "Now down to business," he began briskly as he turned to Tompkins and Speedy. "It seems that all these unauthorized entries through other cats' cat flaps have taken place at night, so I'm afraid that the three of us are going to have to start a little night duty. I shall also be asking Gus and Tarzan to join us. I've known them ever since we were kittens and used to wrestle together, so I know they would never steal another cat's property. Now, we're going to have to be careful not to jump on innocent cats who might just be returning home after a night out, BUT if you see any suspicious activity, then follow that cat or cats and watch where they go - whether to their own home, or into someone else's!"

"This evening," Barney continued, "I want you two to be down by the village green as soon as it gets dark. Keep out of sight and surreptitiously patrol the centre of the village, keeping your eyes open for the movement of any cats. Speedy, you'll need to be especially careful because you've got so much white in your coat that it will show up in the dark."

"Yes, Sir," nodded Speedy. "Don't worry, I'll take care."

"And since Gus and Tarzan live a little way out of the village, I'll ask them to vigilantly watch around the outskirts," continued Barney. "And, of course, I will also be about. Now, I think we'd all better go home and get some rest so we'll be alert and fresh for tonight. And remember, NOT A WORD TO ANYONE ABOUT THIS! We don't want to alert the thieves. Oh, and Speedy, I'll just go and have a word with Mr Deacon to see if someone else can temporarily run messages for him since you can't work both day and night."

"Oh, thanks, Mr Barney," replied Speedy, and quickly made off home.

### **Tompkins Gives Missy the Brush-off**

As Tompkins walked back up the lane, he was trying to work out a way to avoid Missy when she suddenly jumped out in front of him. "There you are, Tompkins!" she exclaimed. "Why have you and Barney been gone so long? What did Mr Deacon

want? And why did he want Speedy as well? Why didn't he want me? What's going on? Tell me!"

"I'm sorry, I can't tell you, Missy. It's private and confidential, so stop badgering me about it!" retorted Tompkins - and he raced off, knowing that Missy could not keep up with him.

Missy stamped her little feet in frustration and glared after Tompkins' retreating back.

## **The Night Watch**

That night, Tompkins made his way down to the village green, taking good care to keep under cover. He went around to the back of the stone clock tower and hid there. As he watched, he saw a figure coming towards him. It was Speedy - looking most peculiar. "Speed, is that you?" whispered Tompkins. "Whatever have you been doing to yourself?"

"Well, Mr Barney said the white in my coat would show up in the dark so I went down to the pond and smothered myself in black mud. Unfortunately it's drying and bits keep falling off."

Tompkins laughed loudly. "You should just see yourself! You look like an escaped panda cub from the zoo. You'd better be careful or you'll get yourself arrested!"

"Oh, very funny!" exclaimed Speedy.

Suddenly an angry voice spoke out of the darkness. It was Barney. "Whatever do you two think you're playing at! I could hear you halfway down the green. I told you to be quiet and keep under cover. This is a serious business we're about, not some silly game. So if you can't behave yourselves, I'll get someone else to help me! And Speedy, what's that muck you've got all over yourself? You've left clumps of it all along the path. Even a blind cat could follow it! Now go and wash it off," ordered Barney, "and Tompkins, get to work!"

"Yes, Sir," answered Tompkins and Speedy together, and quickly went to do as Barney asked. He had never spoken to either of them in that severe tone before so they felt quite chastened, even though they knew that he was just doing his duty.

## Chapter 3



**B**arney and the four cats he had commissioned to help - Tompkins, Speedy, Tarzan and Gus - kept watch vigilantly through the night, but there was nothing to report. And neither was there anything to report on the following two nights.

By this time, however, little Missy was becoming increasingly frustrated. Out of habit she had continued to go to Barney's gate every morning but neither Barney or Tompkins was ever there. So on the fourth morning when she reached the gate to find no one there (again!), she decided to look around Barney's garden. And her diligence paid off, because she eventually found Barney curled up under a horse chestnut tree, fast asleep. As Missy stood looking down at him, wondering whether to wake him or not, she heard Barney snoring and decided not to disturb him. She sat down beside him instead and began to do some hard thinking.

She reasoned that it was most unusual for Barney and Tompkins to sleep during the day and that this had only started since the morning they had gone down to the Head Cat's garden with Speedy. Then it struck her. Of course! They were sleeping during the day because they were up to something at night! "Well," she thought, "if they won't tell me what it is, I shall find out for myself!" So, with a somewhat smug smile on her face, she hurried off home and climbed into her own basket, where she fell asleep.

Missy was awakened late that evening to the sound of her Mummy, Mrs Daley, putting some food and milk into her bowls. Missy yawned and stretched, then she stood up and walked across the kitchen floor and rubbed herself against her Mummy's legs.

"Oh, so you're awake at last," said Mrs Daley, stroking the kitten. "Since you haven't eaten since breakfast this morning I thought you might like some food for the night." And after giving Missy's head a final pat, she switched off the light and went to bed.

Missy quickly gobbled down some food and lapped her milk, and then went quietly out through the cat flap. She knew that Barney had told her never to go out

at night because she was still too small to defend herself against predators, but she stifled her conscience and went out anyway.

She hurried up the lane until she was opposite Tompkins' house. Then she crouched down in the long overgrown grass verge and waited. She didn't have to wait more than a few minutes before Tompkins came striding down his pathway and out into the lane, just as she thought he would. Missy followed him at a discreet distance, taking care to keep under cover.

At the fork in the lane, she saw Tompkins turn left, down towards the village green. Tompkins walked a lot faster than she did and Missy was already struggling to keep up, so she knew that she had to hurry or she would lose sight of him. She began to run as fast as she could and completely forgot about keeping under cover. She had just about reached the fork in the lane herself, when she was suddenly startled by a great SCREECH and the flapping of large wings above her! Missy flung herself into the ditch and peered up through the undergrowth to see a large bird, with talons extended, hovering in the air above her. She gasped in fright and her heart began to thump wildly, but she forced herself to keep very still and eventually the owl swooped off across some neighbouring fields.

Missy let out a sigh of relief, but then her little body began to shake with shock and she wondered if she should return home. She was very frightened and realised that Barney was right - it WAS dangerous for her to be out on her own at night - but her curiosity was greater than her fear, so she decided to carry on. Keeping well down, she turned left onto the village green and then crept under the long uncut hedge that bordered it. As she peered out through the darkness, she could just make out Tompkins talking to Speedy behind the clock tower, but they were too far away for her to hear what they were saying.

### **Catching Thieves**

"Speed, I've got an idea!" Tompkins was whispering. "That big school building where you watch for mice is quite tall, isn't it?"

"Yes, it's three storeys high. Why?" replied Speedy.

"Well, if there's a way in, why don't we go up to the top floor and watch out of the front window. We'll be able to see the whole village green from there as well as some of the surrounding area."

"Good idea!" exclaimed Speedy. "And I know a way in - it's around the back. Follow me!"

So, as Missy watched through the gloom, she saw Tompkins and Speedy disappear around to the back of the school building. "Oh, is that all it is?" she thought with a sense of disappointment. "Tompkins is just helping Speedy catch mice in that old building at night. What's so special about that? Why couldn't they have told me?"

Missy felt like crying. This had been a wasted and frightening journey, and she was now so tired that she couldn't move a muscle. There was no way she could walk another step - she knew she would have to rest before she went home. So she curled up into a little ball underneath the hedge and closed her eyes. Within seconds she had fallen into a deep sleep. She didn't even hear the clock tower as it regularly chimed and struck the hour. But when it began donging four times at four a.m., the sound woke her.

As Missy stirred and opened her eyes, she wondered where she was and then remembered how foolish she had been to come out at night to follow Tompkins. She was just wondering whether to go home or stay where she was until daylight when she suddenly perceived two shadowy cat figures creeping along the other side of the village green, beside the parade of shops.

Their movements caught her attention because the two cats seemed to be acting suspiciously and kept glancing furtively behind themselves, and then from side to side in a rather sly manner. As she continued to watch, she saw them arrive at the corner of Love Lane, where they turned down to the right and out of sight.

Just then, the sound of low voices close to her almost made her jump out of her skin! She quickly realised that it was just Tompkins and Speedy - and breathed a quiet sigh of relief as she tried to hear what they were saying.

"Sorry, Speed, maybe it wasn't such a good idea after all," she heard Tompkins whisper.

"Don't worry, we'll just have to keep on trying," replied Speedy. "We certainly haven't seen any suspicious looking cats acting in a strange or secretive way tonight, that's for sure."

"I have!" exclaimed Missy, jumping out in front of them.

"Missy!" gasped Tompkins. "Whatever are you doing here? You know Barney told you never to go out at night on your own! There might be predators about!"

"I can take care of myself," she answered rather truculently, now that she felt safe with Tompkins and Speedy.

"No you can't!" exclaimed Tompkins. "You couldn't even fight off a caterpillar!"

"Never mind that now!" hissed Speedy. "Where did you see these cats, Missy?"

"On the other side of the green. There were two of them and they turned down Love Lane, but I couldn't see who they were."

"Come on, quick! Let's get after them!" urged Speedy and shot off at top speed across the common.

"Missy, get back under the hedge and stay there until I come and collect you," ordered Tompkins. Then he raced off after his friend.

As Tompkins and Speedy raced away, Missy realised that something very unusual was going on, and she was so caught up in the excitement that she disobeyed Tompkins and trotted after them as fast as she could go. She was completely unaware that there were two large eyes watching her from the huge rhododendron bushes in the centre of the common.

## **The Chase**

When the two mysterious cat figures heard the pounding of paws behind them, they quickly dived into someone's front garden and crouched down amongst the tall plants. Consequently, Speedy and Tompkins dashed past, all the way to the bottom of the lane and the river. Thinking that their pursuers were well past and out of the way, the two cats came out of hiding and began to run back up the lane, but at that moment Tompkins turned and caught sight of them.

"They tricked us, Speed! Look, there they go! Quick! After 'em!"

Meanwhile, Missy had crossed the village common and was just coming to the corner of Love Lane when she heard the first two cats racing back up the lane. She quickly dived into a dark shop doorway out of sight.

By this time a thick early morning mist was beginning to cover the ground and as Tompkins and Speedy rounded the corner they skidded to a halt. "Oh, would you believe it!" exclaimed Speedy. "We had them in our sights and now they've disappeared into that mist and we don't even know who they were."

"I do!" cried Missy, jumping out in front of them again.

"Who were they?" demanded Speedy quickly, before Tompkins could start to remonstrate with Missy for her disobedience.

"It was Rascal and Podge," said Missy, "Mrs Polly's two young cats. I saw them clearly under the corner street lamp."

"Well, at least we know where they're headed," declared Tompkins. "They'll be going back to the greengrocer's shop where they live with their mother. Quick, let's get after them." Then, as he and Speedy raced away, he shouted, "Come on Missy, try to keep up the best you can." Soon all three cats were running as fast as they could down the long village common.

As Tompkins and Speedy steadily gained on the two younger cats, they were gradually able to discern them through the mist. And when Rascal and Podge reached the large rhododendron bushes in the centre of the common, they watched as a large black shape jumped out at two young cats. It was Barney! WHAM, BANG! Rascal was knocked one way and Podge the other!

"Quick, Tompkins, Speedy!" ordered Barney as the other two came up, "grab them and don't let them get away! We'll escort them to the Head Cat's garden for trial."

Just then, little Missy caught up with them, gasping for breath. "Barney, Barney," she cried "it was me! I saw who it was! I 'cracked' the case," she added, repeating a slang expression that she had picked up from Speedy. But Barney didn't smile. "I shall talk to you later, Missy," he said in a stern voice. "But for now, you had better come with us."

By this time the sun was beginning to rise in the east and, as they arrived at the gate to the Head Cat's garden, Gus and Tarzan joined them, returning from their nightly patrols.

"So it was you two!" exclaimed Gus when he saw Rascal and Podge. "We might have guessed!"

"We ain't done nuffinck!" retorted Rascal. "These bullies just picked on us."

"Yeah," murmured his brother, Podge.

"We'll see about that," replied Barney, "when you're given a fair trial before the Head Cat, Mr Deacon. Now get into the garden!"

### **Tarzan Finds the Stolen Goods**

"Tarzan," requested Barney, "would you mind going round to the greengrocer's shop to tell Mrs Polly what's happening with her two youngsters? Oh, and while you're there, you might have a quick look round in those old sheds at the back of the shop - just to see if any of the stolen goods are there."

Rascal and Podge threw each other an anxious glance as Tarzan replied, "Yes, of course," and hurried off. And they kept very quiet as Barney hurried them toward the centre of the lawn and the large flat tree stump that the Head Cat used as his rostrum.

Once they were standing in front of it, Barney asked Tompkins, Speedy and Gus to guard Podge and Rascal while he went to find Mr Deacon. But when he saw Missy's face fall, he quickly added, "You too, Missy! All of you stand guard and make sure they don't try to run away!" And even though he was still upset that Missy had disobeyed his order to NOT go out at night, he smiled to himself as he saw her puff up her chest in pride and grin from ear to ear.

### **Mrs Polly Arrives on the Scene**

After they'd been waiting for about five minutes or so, plump Mrs Polly came huffing and puffing into the garden. "Why you young rascals," she shouted to her sons. "I'm so ashamed of you! You've quite ruined my good name in the village. Now take that! And that!" And as mother cats will, she promptly biffed each one of her offspring with her paws.

"Aw Mum!" they cried.

"Don't you 'Aw Mum' me, or you'll get another lot," she responded crossly.

"Er, thank you Mrs Polly," called Barney, hurrying back across the lawn. "The Head Cat is detained at the moment, but he will be with us as soon as he can, when I assure you that your sons will both be given a fair trial."

As they were speaking, Tarzan came hurrying back. "Mr Barney," he announced, "I've found the stuff that's been stolen. It's hidden under an old sack in one of the sheds. I recognised Grumpy's frog and one or two other things."

"Well done, Tarzan!" exclaimed Barney. "We'll have to fetch it all and place it in front of the rostrum before the Head Cat comes."

"We didn't steal nuffinck!" shouted Rascal. "It was put there by someone else. It was planted on us!"

"You be quiet!" ordered his mother and biffed him again with her paw!

"Right," said Barney. "I'll stay here with Mrs Polly and Missy, and guard these two, while you four go to the shed and bring back the stolen items."

It wasn't long before Tarzan, Gus, Speedy and Tompkins returned carrying the toys, which they placed in front of the rostrum.

"Thank you," said Barney. "I know that you all did a lot of running about last night, but would you mind going and contacting all the cats who have been robbed and ask them to come here as quickly as possible?"

"Yes, Sir," they replied, and ran off to the village to find everyone who had been burgled.

## Chapter 4

*"You shall not steal" (NKJV, Exodus 20:15)  
(Do not take what belongs to others)*



**A** little while later, as all the claimants began to arrive in the garden and sit in a semi-circle around the rostrum, the Head Cat and his two advisers, Solomon and Sheba, came across the lawn.

Deacon climbed stiffly up onto the tree stump and faced his audience while his advisers sat on either side. "Thank you, Mr Barney, for all you and your assistants have done - and for retrieving these items. And thank all of you, too, for coming here so quickly. We will now begin the trial."

"Oh dear, oh please, Sir, may I speak before you begin," came a timid little voice. It was Fluffy.

"Of course, Miss Fluffy. How can I help you?"

"My dolly was stolen too, but she's not here in the pile of other things. She's all dressed in pink with a matching pink hat and her name's Lady - she's ever so pretty."

"How charming!" commented Deacon, smiling down at her. "Tarzan, would you please go back to the greengrocer's shop where you found the other things and look around carefully? I imagine this doll is quite small so it might have been overlooked."

"Yes, Sir. I'll go straight away."

It wasn't long before Tarzan returned carrying the little pink doll. Since he was locally called "Macho Cat" - because he liked to swagger in an exaggeratedly masculine manner on the village green for the admiration of the female cat population - Gus couldn't control himself and gave a loud snort and snigger as he saw Tarzan enter carrying the pink dolly. Barney, too, had to bite down hard on his tongue!

"Thank you, Tarzan," said Deacon. Then he called out in a loud voice, "Silence please everyone. The court is now in session." As silence fell over the assembled group, he said, "Rascal and Podge, I shall be asking you both a question and I want to warn you now, that if you lie and are found guilty the sentence will be a lot stiffer. But if you speak the truth, leniency may be applied."

The two cats looked at Deacon solemnly as he asked, "Rascal, do you plead guilty or not guilty?"

"Not guilty, Sir," replied Rascal.

"And you, Podge, do you plead guilty or not guilty?" continued the Head Cat.

"Not guilty, Sir," he answered, glancing at his brother.

"Very well, we will continue with the trial," began Mr Deacon, but then he caught sight of Tarzan still hovering near the rostrum and looking as if he wished to speak. So the Head Cat turned to him instead and said, "Tarzan, do you have something to say that is relevant to this trial?"

"Yes, Sir. On my way to the greengrocer's shop I passed by the *Bottle and Jug Pub*, and their dog Brandy was sitting in the doorway with his friend Boxer from the *Dog and Duck Pub* across the road. They called me over as they had something they wanted to tell me. They're quite friendly dogs really, except if you trespass on their properties!" he interjected. "Anyway, Brandy said that he'd heard a trial was taking place regarding some cats stealing things, and he wanted you to know that about three or four nights ago two cats tried to break into the cat flap in the back door of the *Bottle and Jug* premises. Brandy was on duty as usual and Boxer was watching from across the street as Brandy chased them off."

"And did either Brandy or Boxer recognise these cats?" queried Deacon.

"Yes, Sir. They said they didn't know the names of the cats, but that they were definitely Mrs Polly's two youngsters. They were quite sure of that because they had often seen them with her." At this, Mrs Polly gave a loud exclamation.

"It's all lies!" burst out Rascal. "They probably mistook two other cats for us."

"Silence!" thundered Deacon. "You will speak only when you're asked to - or you will be held in contempt of court!" Then, as Solomon motioned to the Head Cat, Deacon bent down sideways to confer with him. After a short pause he straightened up and stared down at the two cats before him.

"Rascal, Podge," he said, "I want both of you to pick up these stolen items and take them across to their owners."

"Yes, Sir," they responded, thinking that the trial must be nearly over, and went to do as he asked. As the two cats ran back and forth with the toys, Deacon and his advisers watched closely. When Rascal and Podge had finished, they returned to stand in front of the rostrum.

"Thank you. A very interesting exercise," commented the Head Cat. "It seems that you both knew exactly which toys belonged to which cats!"

"Oh, you tricked us!" burst out Podge.

"Be quiet," hissed his brother.

"Well," began the Head Cat, "since you both ran off last night in a very guilty fashion when you realised that you were being pursued, and since all these stolen items were found at your dwelling, and since two witnesses, Brandy and Boxer, have both declared that they recognised you trying to break into the *Bottle and Jug* premises, and since you have clearly shown the court that you knew which items belonged to which cat, I would suggest that the evidence is heavily stacked against you. However, to be merciful, I will give you both the opportunity to re-state your plea - guilty or not guilty?"

As the Head Cat stared down severely, Podge sighed and replied, "Guilty, Sir".

"And you, Rascal?" asked Deacon.

"Er, guilty, Sir," Rascal replied, hesitating slightly until he saw his mother's raised paw directly behind him.

"Good. Now perhaps we may continue," continued Deacon.

## Restitution

"Mrs Polly," queried the Head Cat, "do your two cats have any toys of their own?"

"Oh yes, Sir," replied Mrs Polly. "Our Daddy is very generous. He fairly dotes on my two youngsters and has bought them all sorts of toys! He even makes toys for them, like the time when he tied old Brussel Sprouts on strings to the washing line so they could jump up and down and hit them."

"How very ingenious. Thank you, Mrs Polly. Now this is what I want both of you to do," commanded the Head Cat addressing Rascal and Podge. "You have stolen seven toys from six cats, two belonging to Tubby. You will therefore go home, accompanied by your mother and Gus, Speedy, Tompkins and Barney, who will oversee the operation, and you will bring back seven of your very best toys, which you will then give to the cats you stole from. Tarzan, you may take a rest. The court will now be adjourned for 15 minutes while Rascal and Podge do as I've asked."

"WHAT? That's not fair!" burst out Rascal.

"SILENCE!" shouted Deacon indignantly. "What do you know about being fair? Was is FAIR, JUST, LAWFUL, PROPER AND HONEST to go sneaking into other cats' homes in the dead of night, stealing their property and their food? You apparently don't know the meaning of the word! You have both broken the Cats' Code of Conduct, caused anguish and worry to other cats, and have become a disgrace to yourselves, your mother and the whole village cat population. If you know what's good for you, you will keep quiet and go at once with Mr Barney and do as you're told! If you don't, the penalty for your actions will be made heavier!"

Rascal and Podge hung their heads in shame and left the garden quietly with their mother, Barney and the others. They returned before the 15 minutes were up carrying toys, which they placed in front of the rostrum.

When the Head Cat resumed his position and again declared the court to be in session, he ordered Rascal and Podge to turn around and face the cats they had stolen from. They were then instructed to apologise in loud, clear voices to each one in turn for stealing from them. This they did so that all the court could hear.

"Now," continued Deacon, "you will take each of the cats one of your own toys as compensation. Except for Tubby. Give him two because you stole two items from him." Rascal and Podge did so rather grudgingly, even though they knew they had no choice but to comply.

"Finally," said the Head Cat, looking both Rascal and Podge directly in the eye, "since you have so many of your own toys, I'd like to know why you felt the need to steal from others? Was it plain avarice, greed or covetousness - just wanting more and more?"

"No, we was just bored, Sir," explained Podge.

"Bored?" queried Deacon. "What has that got to do with stealing?"

"Podge is right. He's telling the truth," burst out Rascal, suddenly becoming quite loquacious. "We've got no garden, see, at the back of our place. Just a concrete yard and some old sheds, so we've got nowhere to play and when we go on the village green, bigger cats run us off and won't let us play there. So we got fed up, and just for some excitement and fun thought we'd go out at night to see if we could break into other cats' places and take their things. We didn't really want them. It was just a bit of fun..." he tailed off.

"A bit of FUN? Stealing is not FUN!" exclaimed Deacon. "And I hope you've both learned your lesson and will never do anything like this again. However, I will have Mr Barney look into the matter of older cats bullying you younger ones on the village green. And I also take your point about boredom. So, I'm going to sentence both of you to three months community service where you will be able to contribute something useful to the village. Each evening at 6 p.m. sharp you will report to Speedy in the large old school building where he will set you mouse watching duties. He doesn't have a lot of time for catching mice any more as he serves as my messenger, and you know the old saying, 'when the cat's away, the mice play', so I think you will both find yourselves fully occupied. You will have complete freedom and the run of the whole building at night. You may even come to enjoy it! Your case will be reviewed in three months time and I hope to hear well of you. The court is now dismissed!" finished the Head Cat. "You are free to go."

"Oh, thank you, Sir!" exclaimed Podge and Rascal, greatly looking forward to their new assignment. They dashed excitedly out of the garden, Mrs Polly following after them in hot pursuit.

The rest of the cats left the garden feeling that justice had been done, and even Grumpy smiled and seemed quite pleased with his shiny new red ball. After having a few final words with the Head Cat, Barney had a quick wash and brush up and then sauntered in an overly casual manner towards Tompkins and Speedy, who were talking together in a corner of the garden.

"Er, Tompkins," began Barney in an airy fashion. "I thought I should just go down and see Fluffy, just to reassure her, you understand - oh, and of course her sister, Suzi, as well - and let them know that they are quite safe now and that there will be no more break-ins so they needn't be worried. It's just part of my duties you understand, so they can sleep soundly at night. Fluffy is quite a nervous cat, you see. As I said, it's only right I should do so as part of my duties....." Barney blabbered on.

"Yes, of course," replied Tompkins nodding. And then, with a mischievous grin, he added, "Oh, and Barney, perhaps you should go and reassure Grumpy as well. I'm sure he'd appreciate it!"

Barney threw him a look, tossed his head, and walked off as Tompkins and Speedy bit down hard on their lips to keep from laughing.

"Well, Tom," said Speedy finally, "I'd better be off too. After being up all night, I'd like to get some sleep before I have to be at the school building by 6 p.m."

"OK, Speed. Hope everything goes all right. See you tomorrow."

### **Tompkins Gets a New Job**

After Speedy left, Tompkins suddenly realised that he hadn't seen Missy for some time. When she'd realised that Barney was not too pleased with her, she had thought it best to keep a low profile, so during the trial she had crouched beneath the over-hanging branches of a bush and watched and listened from a distance. But now, as Tompkins glanced around, he was astonished to see Missy at the other end of the lawn happily chattering away to the Head Cat, who was relaxing on the grass in the sunshine.

Tompkins hurried forward. "I do apologise, Sir, if Missy has been bothering you," began Tompkins.

"Not at all," Deacon interrupted smoothly. "We've been having a most delightful conversation. But I'm glad you came across, Tompkins, because I've been wanting to speak to you."

"Really, Sir?" queried Tompkins somewhat apprehensively.

"Yes," continued the Head Cat, "as you probably know, my Dad....I mean owner....is a very wealthy man. That's why he lives in that big house and has this large garden. However, since I can't get about very quickly nowadays, the two gardeners have been complaining about mice having the run of the place, and even a rat or two. I overheard them say that the rodents are especially destructive down by the kitchen garden. It seems the gardeners' traps haven't been too successful and the mice have been eating the produce!" Deacon added with a smug smile. "So since Barney has told me of your alert watchfulness and speed of action in mouse catching, I'd like to appoint you to the post of Chief Rodent Exterminator in this huge garden. Would you care to take the job, Tompkins?"

"Oh yes, Sir! Thank you Sir!" cried Tompkins without hesitation. Then, being Tompkins, he just couldn't resist doing a few leaps into the air. "I'd love to do it!"

"Good, good. I like your enthusiasm, Tompkins," smiled Deacon. "So whenever Barney comes down for his counselling sessions, you can come with him and begin work. Don't worry about the gardeners, they'll probably be very glad to see you."

"Oh, and I'll come too!" squealed Missy excitedly. "I'll soon give those dirty filthy mice the old "one two"! Wham! Bang! and they'll soon be gone!"

"Missy!" gasped Tompkins horrified, but the Head Cat just threw back his head and laughed, as he realised she must have been listening to Speedy and the slang expressions he had picked up from some of the school children.

"Yes, yes, of course you must come too," agreed Deacon, still chuckling.

"B- But Sir," stammered Tompkins, "Missy has hardly ever caught a mouse in her life. She's still practising the moves on a rubber one that Barney gave her."

"Well, why not let her practise on real ones?" suggested the Head Cat. "If you teach Missy everything that Barney taught you, then I'm sure she'll eventually grow into a very able assistant for you. And I might add that you will then have to

look to your laurels!" he said grinning. "Sometimes, it's the female cats that turn out to be the best hunters!"

"I will, Sir!" cried Tompkins emphatically.

"Oh thank you Mr- Sir- Big Cat," cried Missy, not knowing the correct form of address. Deacon smiled and gave the little kitten a friendly pat on the head.

"Well, if you will both excuse me now," Deacon said, rising, "I must go, as I have another appointment. But I'll look forward to seeing you both whenever Barney comes down next." And with that, he slowly hobbled off towards the house.

In jubilation, Tompkins and Missy gleefully flew across the lawn and out into the lane, just as Barney was jauntily returning from his reassurance mission.

### **Missy Gets in a Muddle**

Missy was so excited that she forgot all about the fact that Barney had been a little angry with her, and she ran to him and began jumping up and down in front of him like a little puppet on a string.

"Barney! Barney! I've been ap--app--appointed," she finally managed.

"Appointed as what?" queried Barney with a puzzled frown.

"Um, I think it's assistant to the Big Cat!" she cried, getting things totally mixed up.

"WHAT?!" Barney exclaimed, with a look of total bewilderment on his face. "Tompkins, what's been going on?"

"Don't panic, Barney!" laughed Tompkins. He then explained to Barney that he had been appointed as Chief Rodent Exterminator in the Head Cat's garden, and that Missy, when fully trained, would be able to help and assist him.

"Congratulations, Tompkins!" exclaimed Barney with genuine warmth. "Mr Deacon couldn't have picked a better cat for the job. I know you'll do well. And now I understand. Missy has got to learn mousing and practise so that she can eventually assist you."

"That's what I said," muttered Missy.

"No you didn't!" retorted Tompkins. "Anyway, what were you chattering about to the Head Cat before I came up to you?"

Missy stopped in her stride, pulled herself up to her full tiny height, and said with great dignity, repeating Tompkins' own words back to him, "It's none of your business, Tompkins. It was private and confidential!" And so saying she ran off, chuckling to herself.

"You little minx!" shouted Tompkins. "Really Barney! The way she's going on and pushing herself forward, she'll soon be appointing herself as Head Cat!"

"Don't be too hard on her Tompkins, she's only little, with a lot to learn," replied Barney. But then, deciding to tease Tompkins because he had teased him about Fluffy, he added, "But who knows, maybe one day she will be Head Cat. Then you won't be able to call her "a little minx". You'll have to stand in her presence and answer, 'Yes, Madam or No, Madam' and do exactly as you're told! Chop-chop!"

"I'll WHAT?!" exploded Tompkins, his face a picture of outrage.

Seeing his expression, Barney burst out laughing.

Tompkins spluttered for a moment and then, when he realised that Barney was teasing, he began to laugh too, and the two cats continued chuckling as they left Deacon's garden side by side and headed home.

*The End*

