

Love Conquers All

By Shirley Young

"By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:35).

Chapter 1



One rather dark, overcast morning, Barney, a very large black and white Persian cat, was sitting by his front gate with his two friends, Tompkins and Missy. Tompkins was a handsome, young, ginger and white cat whom Barney had watched over since he was a kitten. Missy was an exceptionally tiny kitten who had lived wild and alone up in the North Down hills before being rescued by Barney and Tompkins. She now had a lovely home with Mrs Daley.

Barney frowned as he looked up at the sky. "It's getting very black," he said. "I think we'd better go down to the Head Cat's garden now, before it starts to pour with rain."

Barney was the Deputy Head Cat for the district, and three mornings a week he went down to the Head Cat's garden for consultations with cats who came to seek his advice or talk over problems. Mr Deacon was the Head Cat and he had held the post for many years, but he was getting quite old now and his legs were very stiff, so he relied on Barney to do the work that he couldn't. Tompkins had recently been promoted to Chief Rodent Exterminator of the 15 acre garden Mr Deacon lived in, so he also went down to the garden to deal with the mice and rats that were getting out of control. Tompkins was well known for his mousing skills, which was why he'd been given the job. Little Missy had not yet even caught her first mouse but she went along as Tompkins' assistant and was learning the ropes from him.

As the three cats approached the gate to the garden, Speedy, the brown and white cat who was Mr Deacon's messenger and also acted as his Gate Keeper, suddenly appeared. "Good morning, Mr Barney. Hi Tom," he said to Tompkins, his friend. They were about the same age and good pals. He then gave Missy a smile and nod.

"Good morning, Speedy," answered Barney. "Pongo, from the fishmongers, will be coming to see me this morning and then later Mrs Polly, so let them through the gate, won't you? I shall be in the Rose Garden."

"Very well, Sir," replied Speedy.

"Well," said Barney, "I had better get going - and I expect the mice will be waiting for you, Tompkins!" he smiled. So as Barney went his way, Tompkins and Missy headed for the kitchen garden where the mice had been particularly problematic, eating the gardeners' produce.

Catching Mice and Getting Up to Mischief

As the morning wore on and the sky brightened a little, Tompkins got busy with his mouse catching and managed to bag four of them. Missy had been watching quietly, keeping very still while she sniffed the air, when all of a sudden she pounced and grabbed a mouse with her paw! Her first! She was so excited that she relaxed her grip and the mouse slipped out and ran away!

"Oh, well done, Missy!" shouted Tompkins encouragingly. "You almost got him! Next time, just hold on. Real mice aren't like the rubber mouse you've been practising on - real mice are quick and cunning, and they'll shoot off if you take your eyes off them for a minute or loosen your grip."

"Thanks Tompkins! I'll hold on better next time," said Missy appreciatively. "But I'm getting tired of mouse watching now. Can we do something else please?"

"Well," replied Tompkins, "since I've done quite well so far by catching these four, I suppose we could have a break." Then his face lit up with mischief. "I know what we could do!" he exclaimed.

"What?" queried Missy.

"Let's put these four mice down by the potting shed where the gardeners come for their cup of tea," said Tompkins. "When they see what we've caught, that'll show them that cats are a lot better than their silly old traps!"

"Oh yes!" squealed Missy. So the two cats stealthily carried the dead mice

around to the potting shed and mischievously laid them out in a neat row right beside the door!

They ran off laughing, but hadn't gone far when Missy suddenly stopped and looked around in wonder. "Tompkins, look at how big this garden is! I've never been down here before - can we do some exploring?"

Tompkins looked around thoughtfully. "I've never been further than this either," he replied. "OK. Follow me 'Assistant Explorer' and let's see what's here!"

Tompkins and Missy Go Exploring

The two cats set off cheerfully through the tidy garden, admiring the flowering bushes and trees around them. But as they walked further and further they eventually came to part of the garden that the Head Cat's owner had left to grow wild. Soon they found themselves plunging through what had once been a beautiful, large herbaceous border, but now the plants were tall, untrimmed and overgrown.

"Oh!" cried Missy with excitement, as the tall plants towered over her, "it seems like a jungle in here."

"Yes," replied Tompkins, in a purposely terrifying voice. "You'd better keep a sharp watch out for predators or they might creep up behind you and grab you!"

"Oh!" squealed Missy, turning to look over her shoulder much to Tompkins delight! So, after they'd walked on a bit, Tompkins decided to scare her and turned around suddenly and jumped at her, making a ghastly growling noise.

As he turned around and ran away, Missy shouted, "Oh you horrid cat! Just you wait!" and chased after him. Laughing and giggling, they ran until they suddenly burst out of the "jungle" and the unkempt bushes, and discovered a small grassy hillock in front of them. Filled with curiosity to see what was beyond it, the two cats eagerly ran up the slope and stood looking over.

"Wow!" exclaimed Tompkins. "Look, there's a small lake. Let's go down and see if there are any fish in it."

So, buoyed up with their big adventure, the two young cats raced down to the

edge of the lake where there was an ancient looking wooden jetty that had seen better days!

"You stay on the bank, Missy," ordered Tompkins. "It might not be safe." Then, with great caution, Tompkins walked gently and slowly onto the jetty and, since it seemed to be solid, lay down flat and dangled his paws over the edge, just above the water. "Don't speak, Missy," he said quietly. "And keep down low. We don't want the fish to see our shadows on the surface or they'll be gone!"

Playing Around

Silence reigned for some time as Tompkins waited and then suddenly he shouted, "Gotcha!", and with a fish hanging off his claws he ran to the bank where he flopped it down triumphantly.

"Oh, well done, Tompkins," shouted Missy, jumping up and down.

"Come on then," invited Tompkins. "Let's have a meal." So in contented companionship the two cats ate the fish and then proceeded to wash their faces, paws and white shirt fronts as Barney had always instructed them to.

"Tompkins," mused Missy when they were finished, "what's that funny little house over there, near the lake?"

"I think it's a Summer House," replied Tompkins. "Barney and I once saw another one similar to that and that's what he called it." Then, looking up at the sky, he said, "I think we should be going now, Missy. Just look at those big black clouds scudding across the sky. They're coming this way and I think it's going to pour with rain soon. Barney has probably finished with his consultations by now, so let's make tracks back to the top garden."

"Oh, not yet, Tompkins," pleaded Missy. "Let's just play one game of Hide and Seek before we go."

"Oh, all right," said Tompkins against his better judgment. "You go and hide while I count to ten and then I'll come looking for you." As Missy ran off, Tompkins turned his back and began counting out the numbers in a loud voice, "one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten! That's it!" he yelled. "Ready or not - here I come!"

Then, as he turned around, he grinned to himself. Missy had hidden behind a tree trunk that was very close to the Summer House. But he could see the end of her little tail sticking out the other side. So he crept up behind her very quietly, and was just preparing to jump on her from behind with another gruesome growling noise, when the sky was suddenly lit by a great flash of lightning. It was followed almost immediately by such a loud CRACK of thunder overhead that it seemed to shake the very earth! Missy screamed at the top of her lungs and, without showing any caution at all, dashed into the Summer House where she hoped to find protection. But then, as the thunder rumbled away, Tompkins heard another dreadful scream from Missy, which seemed to fade away into the distance.

Disaster!

As the rain poured down, Tompkins ran for the Summer House. But being somewhat older than Missy and more cautious, he stopped at the entrance. Then, crouching forward, he peered in until his eyes adjusted to the interior gloom. It was then that he saw the wooden boarded floor was rotten in many places and that there was a smallish hole in it, which Missy had obviously fallen through.

"Missy!" he shouted, "can you hear me?"

"Yes," came back a dim answer. Then, in a somewhat panicky tone, she shouted, "I want Barney! I want Barney!" Missy always thought that Barney could solve anything and everything.

"All right!" Tompkins shouted back. "But listen to me, and just for once do exactly what I tell you! Do you hear me?"

"Yes Tompkins," she sobbed.

"You must stay perfectly still!" Tompkins shouted. "Keep calm and DON'T MOVE! If you wriggle about you could dislodge more debris and it might come down on top of you. So DON'T MOVE, whatever you do!" he repeated. "I'll go now and fetch Barney. Don't worry, I'll be as quick as I can and then I'll be right back."

A little crying sound answered this, but Tompkins didn't hesitate any longer. Despite the rain and the thunder still rumbling in the distance, he raced off at his usual cracking pace.

Chapter 2



Tompkins reached the large top lawn just in time to see Barney escorting Mrs Polly towards the gate after their interview. "Barney! Barney!" he yelled at the top of his voice as he raced towards him. "You've got to come, it's an"

But unfortunately, at that very moment, Tompkins was cut off by the strident voice of Grumpy, who came marching into the garden. Grumpy was a tabby cat with markings that made him look like he had a permanent frown on his face. He was also known for his constant complaining and his rude, blunt manner of speaking.

"So there you are, Mr Barney!" he exclaimed, with a sarcastic emphasis on the 'Mr'. "I've complained about it before, but nothing's been done! I don't know how many times I've got to mention it, but I want some action!"

Tompkins didn't hesitate. He cut right across in front of Grumpy, interrupting him in full flow of speech. "Barney, it's an emergency! Missy has fallen down a hole in that Summer House near the lake and she's very frightened. We've got to get her out before more rubble falls down on top of her!"

"Oh, the poor little darling!" cried Mrs Polly very distressed, since she had kittens of her own.

"How far down is she, Tompkins?" rapped out Barney.

"I don't know. I couldn't see because I didn't want to walk on the floor. It looks very unsafe."

"Good thinking, Tompkins," said Barney. "She may be deep down, so we'll possibly need a rope. Do you know where there is one?"

"Yes. I saw one this morning in the gardeners' potting shed. It looks like an old washing line with a loop on each end."

"Good, that sounds perfect. But we may need help to pull her up. You're the fastest, Tompkins, so run and fetch Tarzan and Gus. Tell them it's an emergency and to get here as quickly as possible."

"Yes Sir," called Tompkins over his shoulder as he raced away.

Barney then turned to Mrs Polly and asked, "do you know where the Summer House is?"

"Oh yes, Sir. I had to fetch my two youngsters back from there once. They shouldn't have been there at all, of course."

"Never mind that now," said Barney. "I want you to hurry down there, but **DON'T GO IN!** Stay by the entrance and just keep chatting to Missy in your motherly voice so she can hear you and knows that someone is there."

"Yes, Mr Barney," replied Mrs Polly. "I'll go at once."

'Raiding' the Potting Shed

As Mrs Polly bustled off, Barney turned to Grumpy, "I'm sorry I can't deal with your complaint right now. As you probably heard, we've got an emergency on our hands and I must go and find this rope."

"I'll give you a hand. Lead the way!" said Grumpy, to Barney's astonishment.

As the two cats neared the potting shed Barney looked around to make sure there were no gardeners about. And seeing none, they went inside. There on a shelf was the rope that Tompkins had mentioned, with one of its loops hanging over the edge.

Barney jumped up and began pulling. Then with Grumpy's help, the two cats pulled the rope free and it fell to the floor, accompanied by a great clatter of pots, tools and a tin of nails which spilled out all over the floor!

"Quick!" hissed Barney. "We've got to get this out of here, before any gardeners appear." Barney and Grumpy hauled vigorously on the rope, and pulled it behind them as they ran away from the potting shed. They finally reached the wild part of the garden, rope still snaking along behind them, and then struggled on through the tall undergrowth, eventually coming out into the area near the lake.

As the two cats dropped the rope, Grumpy exclaimed, "Whew! I doubt I've got any teeth left after that!"

Barney didn't stop to reply but ran forward to the Summer House, where he heard Mrs Polly saying, "Don't you worry, my dear, we'll soon have you out of there. Oh! Here comes Barney now and Grumpy's with him. They've even got a rope. You just keep still now sweetheart. It won't be long before you're all tucked up in your nice warm basket at home."

Coming Up With a Plan

Barney crouched down near the entrance and peered in. "Missy!" he shouted. "It's Barney!"

"Barney! Barney!" Help me!" cried Missy in an almost hysterical tone.

"Keep calm, Missy. Everything's going to be just fine," said Barney soothingly. "Just stay still for the moment." Then Barney turned as he heard the sound of paws racing across the grass towards them. It was Tompkins with Gus and Tarzan.

"We came as soon as we heard," gasped Gus, completely out of breath after running fast to try and keep up with Tompkins.

"What can we do to help?"

"Thank you both for coming so quickly," Barney replied. "Gus, get the other end of this rope and loop it around the back of that tree trunk, will you? It'll help to hold it. Tarzan, you and I are the heavy weights, so we'll have to pull from the back. Grumpy - you, Tompkins and Gus will have to be in the middle, with Mrs Polly at the front, just to feed the rope across the floor to the hole."

"Hang on a minute, Mr Barney," interrupted Grumpy, and this time without any sarcastic inflexion on the word 'Mr'. "We need to be able to see how far down Missy is, and she needs to be able to see one of us, if we're to give her instructions to get her up from there."

"I know," answered Barney, "but we daren't risk standing on that floor."

"We may not have to," replied Grumpy. "Look, I'm the longest bodied cat here and not nearly as heavy as some of you! So why don't I lie down at the entrance and just slide the top half of my body and front paws across the floor to guide the rope - and then see if I can look down the hole. It would make the whole thing easier."

"But Grumpy," exclaimed Barney. "If that floor gave way under you, you'd go head first down into the earth. Then we'd never get you out."

"That's a risk we'll have to take," insisted Grumpy, and then muttered to himself, "Who cares about me anyway?"

"All right," agreed Barney after a pause, "but with one proviso. Gus here will hang onto your back legs. Then if the floor gives way, he can hold you and we'll all help him pull you back up."

"OK. But don't you pull my legs off, Gus Owen, or I'll be wanting to know the reason why!" grunted Grumpy in his usual gruff tone.

Grumpy Takes the Lead

So, with all the other cats in their respective positions and one end of the rope looped around his paw, Grumpy began to gently and carefully slide himself forward until he reached the hole in the floor. Looking down, he saw Missy's two little eyes staring back at him.

"I can see her, Barney!" he yelled. "She's quite a long way down." Then to all the cats' utter astonishment, Grumpy's tone changed completely as he called down, "Hello Missy, my little Flower, it's your Uncle Grumpy here. Can you see me?"

"Yes," came back the faint reply.

"All right then. This is what we're going to do. We're going to lower a rope down to you which has a big loop in the end. OK?"

"Yes, Uncle Grumpy."

"Here it comes then." Grumpy slipped the end of the rope off his paw and then glancing back at the others, said, "OK, feed the rope forward, lads! Gently, slowly. That's it. It's going over the edge now. Keep it coming. Down it goes. It's half-way. A bit more, a bit more. STOP! It's right above her now."

"Now listen to Uncle Grumpy, my little Flower. This is very important. Do exactly what I tell you. OK?"

"OK, but I'm frightened Uncle Grumpy! Help me!" whimpered Missy.

"That's what we're doing, but you've got to help yourself too. SO DON'T PANIC, OK? Now, do you see that big loop? I want you to very gently and carefully get into the loop, without jarring anything around you. Put your back feet onto the large bottom part of the loop and stand upright. Then grip the rope above you with your front paws and your mouth. Don't open your mouth. Just hold on and we'll gently pull you up. Now you try that."

As Missy carefully climbed into the loop, Grumpy kept up his encouraging instructions from above. Finally she was in place.

"All right, Missy. Well done! Now don't let go. And remember, don't open your mouth. Just hang on. OK.....up we come!"

"OK lads!" he yelled. "Start hauling! That's it. She's off the bottom. She's coming up. NOT SO FAST! NOT SO FAST! The rope's swinging. She's banging against the side. Slow it down. That's it. HOLD IT! HOLD IT! The rope's got stuck on a rough edge. It won't move. Give it a quick jerk - we might be able to free it."

As Barney and the others did as instructed, the rope came loose. But then it began to swing wildly and Missy, losing her nerve, opened her mouth and screamed - and then having let go, she fell with a PLONK back to the bottom.

"She's let go Barney! She's fallen back down! I think she's hysterical!" shouted Grumpy as he heard the uncontrollable sobbing and looking down, saw that she was trembling and shaking in the darkness. Barney left the rope and rushed forward, but although he shouted down to her to be calm and try again, Missy just kept alternately screaming, sobbing and quivering from shock.

"It's no good," said Barney. "We'll never get her up in that state. There's nothing for it, but for me to go down and grab her by the scruff of the neck with my right front paw and haul her up."

"Have you gone stark raving mad, Barney Jackson?!" exclaimed Grumpy in his usual forthright manner. "How do you think a cat of your size is going to get through that hole? You'd bring the whole floor down on top of her, and besides

we'd never be able to haul you up together with her. You must weight a ton! Be sensible!"

"I suppose you're right, Grumpy. I just wasn't thinking straight. We'll have to come up with something else."

"I'll go down!" said a voice behind them. It was Tompkins!

"What?!" exclaimed Barney in panic. "No! no! Tompkins. It's too dangerous. I won't let you do it." Tompkins was so precious to Barney that he couldn't even contemplate losing Tompkins as well as Missy.

"The lad's speaking sense, Barney," said Grumpy more quietly. "He's fit, half our age, and half our weight. He's the only one of us who could do it."

Tompkins to the Rescue

Barney bit his lip till it almost bled. Finally he said, "All right. But listen Tompkins, when you walk across this part of the floor to the hole you'll have to tread very gently and listen carefully! If you hear the slightest cracking noise or dirt beginning to fall you're to jump right back outside. And cling to the rope! Do you understand me?"

"Yes, Barney. I'll do as you say."

"Good lad!" encouraged Grumpy. "And remember, when you get to the bottom, take your right front paw off the rope, swing it round behind you and grab Missy. Don't try to speak. Keep your other three paws and your mouth on the rope. We'll do the rest."

"I understand," murmured Tompkins, trying hard not to show any fear.

"Right," said Barney, not liking the situation one little bit. "I'll get to the back of the rope. You keep us informed of everything that's happening, Grumpy."

"Will do! OK, first we need to pull the rope up, so we can feed it out again as we lower Tompkins down the hole." So, between them, the cats slowly pulled the rope up and got back into position.

"Now," said Grumpy, "I need to scooch myself back a bit so Tompkins and I aren't both putting our weight on this part of the floor at the same time." Grumpy puffed a little as he carefully pulled himself backwards. "OK. I've done it. Now you can tread carefully forward to the hole, Tompkins."

Tompkins did exactly as he was told, and fortunately there was no sound of the floor groaning or giving way. He then stepped into the rope, as instructed, and shouted, "Ready!"

"Right lads," yelled Grumpy. "Tompkins is going over the edge and I'm just going to move closer to the hole so I can see what's happening. Right! Now feed the rope forward. Gently, slowly! That's it! He's going down. Keep it coming. Don't hurry. He's halfway. A bit more. A bit more. STOP. He's there!"

"Missy, this is Uncle Grumpy," shouted Grumpy down the hole. "Listen to me and don't say a word, OK? Now, don't resist Tompkins when he grabs you. Just hang limp and keep perfectly still."

"Right Tompkins," continued Grumpy. "Now swing your paw and grab Missy! Good lad. Hang on to her tightly and keep your other paws and your mouth on the rope. And DON'T MOVE, Missy. We're going up!"

"Right lads! Start pulling! They're coming up. Gently does it. Don't go too fast - we don't want the rope to swing. Keep hauling. They're nearly here. Hold on Tompkins. You've nearly done it! Hold on!"

Then as Tompkins' head appeared at the top of the hole, Grumpy said, "OK Tompkins, I'm going to reach out and grab Missy. When I've got her, put your free paw back on the rope and hold on. Only another minute or two!"

Grumpy leaned forward and stretched out his long paw. Then he grabbed Missy from Tompkins and without hesitation turned and threw her out onto the grass. Mrs Polly quickly ran to her and began to lick her all over, comforting and soothing her.

Danger!

"Now you, Tompkins," urged Grumpy, and again he reached out and grasped

Tompkins by the back of the neck, hauling him out onto the floor. And just at that moment, a terrible cracking and splintering noise began.

Timbers started to fall, and dirt, dust and filth flew into the air. Grumpy could hardly see, but he felt Tompkins beginning to slip back down the hole, so he tightened his grip on him, determined not to let go. Then he shouted, "Hold my back legs Gus Owen! And don't let go! I'm holding onto Tompkins!" he yelled. "Now, start pulling me backwards, as carefully and quickly as you can."

As Grumpy shouted, Barney ran forward and grabbed hold of him as well. They now needed to stop both Grumpy and Tompkins from falling head first down the growing hole in the floor. Gus and Barney kept a tight hold on Tompkins' legs as they pulled him away from the hole, while Grumpy held on to Tompkins securely. As Grumpy neared the entrance, Tompkins in tow, Barney reached out and grabbed Tompkins, and then with all his strength heaved him out onto the grass. Gus gave a final tug and pulled Grumpy clear from the entrance, just as the rest of the floor gave way with a frightening, rending crash! As the cats peered into where Grumpy and Tompkins had just been, there was nothing to be seen but a great gaping hole!

There was shocked silence for a moment and then as Grumpy began to desperately wash the dirt off his face and out of his eyes, Barney ran to Tompkins. "Tompkins! Tompkins! My dear boy!" he cried. "Are you all right?"

Tompkins sneezed several times and then in panic cried, "Barney, I can't see! I've gone blind!"

"Quick!" responded Barney. "Come with me. Down to the lake. Here, grab hold of me, Tompkins. That's right. OK, you're there now. I want you to hold your breath, then plunge your head and shoulders down into the water and out again quickly. Good! Do it once more. That's it. Most of the debris and dirt is now gone from your face."

Tompkins stood there dripping water, with his eyes still tightly closed, terrified that he was blind. Then Barney said quietly, "Come on now, Tompkins, don't be afraid. Open your eyes. Look at me!"

Tompkins hesitantly opened his eyes and then shouted with relief, "Barney! Barney! I can see you! I can see everything!"

"Of course you can!" replied Barney, mightily relieved. "Come on now. Let's walk back to that tree where Grumpy is sitting with Mrs Polly and Missy.

A Job Well Done

On wobbly, shaky legs Tompkins staggered back across to the tree with Barney, and gratefully sank down onto the ground. But then he said, "Barney, my legs feel all funny! They won't stop shaking!"

"It'll pass off in time," comforted Barney. "You put a terrible strain on them clinging on to that rope and holding Missy. I think you should just curl up now and have a sleep for a while. Don't worry about anything. I'll be here. I'm very proud of you! I won't leave you!"

Tompkins gave a weak smile, closed his eyes and promptly fell asleep.

"Mr Barney," said Mrs Polly quietly, "Missy is asleep now and I'm afraid I have to go to see to my two youngsters."

"Of course," Barney replied. "And thank you for all your help today. You've been marvellous!"

"I'll be off now then," nodded Mrs Polly and bustled off across the grass.

Tarzan and Gus then came up to Barney. "Barney, we have to go now too, but we're going to take that rope back to the potting shed first so that the gardeners won't even know that it's missing."

"Oh thanks!" smiled Barney. "And thank you both for all you've done. We couldn't have managed without your help."

"We'll see you tomorrow then, Barney," they said and plodded off, with the rope wiggling along behind them.

Chapter 3



After their departure, and with the two younger cats fast asleep, Barney and Grumpy sat in silence for a while and then Barney said, "I expect you'll be wanting to go too, Grumpy. It's getting late and it's a long walk for you back along the river to Lock Keeper's Cottage."

Grumpy eyed Barney closely, then said in his usual blunt style, "What do you think you are, Barney Jackson, some sort of super cat? You've had a bad shock yourself today, so how do you think you're going to manage to get these two home all by yourself?"

"Well, I'm hoping that when Tompkins wakes up he'll be able to walk, even if we take it in stages to get home, and I'll carry Missy in my mouth."

"No you won't, because I will! I know where she lives, and from there I can take a short-cut through the woods and down to the river. It won't take me too long."

Barney looked at Grumpy with renewed respect. "Thanks, Grumpy," he said, "that'll be a big help, and I can't thank you enough for all you did today. You know you saved Tompkins' life by hanging on to him like that. I shall never forget it!"

"Humph!" Grumpy uttered.

Grumpy Opens Up and Everything Becomes Clear

Barney looked up at the sky. It was growing dark and, as the big black clouds of the day scudded away, the moon peeped out and illuminated the lake and the garden while stars began to speckle the sky.

In the silence and semi-darkness Barney said in a low tone, "Grumpy, there's something I don't understand. Why did you keep calling Missy 'little Flower' today? Is it someone's name?"

"My sister's," answered Grumpy shortly.

"Oh, I didn't know you had a sister," commented Barney.

"Did have," replied Grumpy. And then suddenly loquacious, as if the darkness gave him courage, he went on in a low voice, "There were three of us in our litter. I was the firstborn, the biggest and strongest. The other two - a boy and girl - were both small, especially the female, little Flower. That was her name. She was an extremely small kitten and a tortoiseshell, just like Missy. Missy reminds me of her."

"Oh I see!" exclaimed Barney. "And where are they now?"

"Dead," replied Grumpy shortly. "They were always up to mischief - and one day they ran out into the road and a truck came around the corner - and BANG they were both gone!"

"Oh, I'm so sorry," said Barney with genuine compassion.

"Ah, that's not all," Grumpy went on. "Two weeks later, our mother was not too well and was taken to the vet. I sat on that front porch for several days watching down the street for her return, but she never came back. Then after that, our owner, who was a widower, was taken into an Old Folks Home, and since they didn't allow cats, I was sent off to a Cats' Home."

"Dreadful place it was too!" Grumpy continued. "So I thought I was fortunate when an old sailor came along and said he would take me home as his pet. But I couldn't have been more wrong! He was nice when he was sober but he was an alcoholic and often drunk - and then he used to kick me from one end of the house to the other."

"Finally," Grumpy said, "I couldn't stand it any longer so I ran away. I walked and walked and finally found myself going along the tow path beside the river, where I eventually collapsed outside Lock Keeper's Cottage. The lock keeper and his wife saw what happened and came running out and carried me indoors. They looked after me, and I've lived there ever since. They are very kind and I have a good home with them. But they are always busy with those boats honking to go through the lock so they don't have a lot of time for me. It's also somewhat isolated along there and I don't see many other animals or cats. So I'm mostly on my own now," he finished.

"Then that's just where you're wrong, Grumpy Griffin!" exclaimed Barney with sudden warmth for this other cat. "You're not on your own. You're one of us now, part of our little family - me, Tompkins and Missy. After all, you're never going to live down the title of 'Uncle Grumpy' now! You'll be stuck with that for ever!"

Grumpy smiled in the darkness and murmured, "Thank you, Barney," as though he had something stuck in his throat and needed to swallow hard. "I appreciate that. You know, when Mr Deacon appointed you Deputy Head Cat, I thought he was losing his judgment, but after today, I can see that he made exactly the right choice. You handled this emergency very well - Mr Barney."

Barney Determines to be More Patient and Kind

Just then Missy yawned and opened her eyes. "Barney, I had a horrible dream. I dreamt I fell down a big hole in the earth. It was frightening."

Barney and Grumpy just looked at each other, and then Barney said softly: "Well, why don't you go back to sleep and dream something nice this time?"

As Missy closed her eyes and fell asleep again, Grumpy whispered, "You know Barney, I think it might be best for me to carry her home now, while she's still half asleep. It'll be easier that way."

As Barney nodded, Grumpy stood up ready to leave.

"Come and see us tomorrow, Grumpy," Barney called. "It's my day off."

"I'll be there," answered Grumpy, and lifting Missy gently up by the scruff of her neck, he set out across the grass.

As Barney watched him go, he noticed that Grumpy was limping slightly on one of his back legs and yet he hadn't complained about any pain. He was a tough old cat, Barney thought. Then meditating on what Grumpy had told him, Barney suddenly realised that Grumpy had been hurt so many times in his younger life that he had built up a shell about himself - and that's why he answered other cats gruffly, in an attempt to prevent further emotional suffering. So Barney determined that he would be kinder and more patient with Grumpy in the future and try to include him in their activities so that he felt wanted.

Heading Home

As Barney sat there alone in the moonlight, his eyelids started to close and he began to fight to stay awake. He knew that he had to be alert and on the lookout in case there were any predators about. Tompkins was too exhausted to defend himself if they were attacked by a fox or a night owl.

Just then Tompkins came to and sat up with a jerk. As he opened his eyes and stared around, the day's trauma came flooding back to him. "Oh Barney, you're still here!" he exclaimed. "You should have gone home. I would have been all right."

"I told you I wouldn't leave you," replied Barney simply, then said, "how do you feel now?"

"Oh fine! I'll soon run home now," answered Tompkins getting up.

"I think it would be best if we tried walking first, before running," suggested Barney. So slowly, the two cats made their way back the way they had come. When they reached the cultivated part of the garden again, Tompkins suddenly sank down on the ground between two beautifully manicured flower beds.

"Oh Barney, my legs are so stiff - just like Mr Deacon's legs," he exclaimed in a worried voice. "You don't think they are going to be like this forever, do you?"

Barney sat down beside him and smiled. "Tompkins, I think Mr Deacon's legs are stiff for a totally different reason, so you've no need to worry. You'll be back to normal soon. Just give it some time."

"But Barney, I've got to take on Abercrombie in the *Fastest Cat in the Kingdom Race* again this year. We don't want him winning back the title for his village."

"Tompkins," smiled Barney, "that's months away. Your legs will be fine long before then."

"I hope so," replied Tompkins, not sounding very convinced. "Let's go on again."

So stage by stage the two cats finally arrived at their respective homes and toppled into their baskets, where they fell fast asleep.

Chapter 4



It was late the next morning when Barney awoke, and feeling very hungry, he quickly hurried out to the front verge beside the gate where his Mummy always put his breakfast bowls. As he squeezed through the bars of the gate he was surprised to see Grumpy already sitting there.

"Hello Grumpy," Barney greeted him, "how long have you been here?"

"Hours!" exclaimed Grumpy with his habitual frown, but then added, with a slight smile, "well maybe two minutes."

Barney laughed. "Would you like some of my breakfast? My Mummy always gives me far too much."

"Well, I admit I have been eyeing that cream," Grumpy replied.

"Help yourself," invited Barney, "I'm going for the fish crunches."

When the two cats had finished eating and washing, Barney said, "Well, I think I'd better go down and check up on Missy and Tompkins, just to see how they are today."

"You won't have to," answered Grumpy, "because here they come!"

As Barney turned to look, Missy, seemingly quite recovered from her previous day's experience, ran forward shouting, "Barney! Uncle Grumpy! Yesterday I fell down a big hole in the ground, but I was ever so brave and I was ever so calm."

"Oh really?" commented Barney with a slight lift of the eyebrows. He then turned to Tompkins, whom he noticed was still walking somewhat stiffly. "How are the legs today, Tompkins?" he enquired.

"Oh, still a bit stiff, but not as bad as yesterday evening thankfully," Tompkins replied, glad to sit down.

Grumpy Sets Missy Straight

Missy, seeing that she was not the centre of Barney's attention, went and stood right in front of Grumpy, staring up into his face. She then repeated her assertion about how brave she had been the previous day, painting herself as the heroine of the whole drama.

"Is that so?" commented Grumpy in an unusually gentle voice. He then bent down to her and said softly, "Now listen to Uncle Grumpy, my little Flower. Who was it that went down on that rope yesterday to rescue you?"

"Tompkins," she muttered.

"That's right. No one forced Tompkins to go down. He volunteered. He risked his life to save you, so don't you ever forget that - all the days of your life!"

Missy hung her head and mumbled, "I won't." Then she turned to Tompkins and said, "Thank you for saving me, Tompkins. You're a true friend."

"Humph!" replied Tompkins in a perfect imitation of Grumpy's voice and manner. Then Tompkins added, "And thank you, Grumpy, for holding onto me or I would have gone crashing down with that floor when it collapsed!"

"Humph!" replied Grumpy in retaliation.

"By the way, Grumpy," said Barney smiling, "I noticed that you were limping yesterday evening. Was that because of Gus pulling too hard on your back legs?"

"No," grinned Grumpy. "I've had that for years. It was caused by that old sailor kicking me about." But then, with an unusual twinkle in his eye, he added, "But if you should see me with Gus Owen in the next day or two, don't be surprised if you notice me limping extremely badly!"

"Grumpy Griffin!" exclaimed Barney, "I do believe you're just an old rascal!"

"Who me?" Grumpy queried with feigned innocence.

Barney laughed, but then said, "Seriously Grumpy, at the next Cats' Annual General Conference I was thinking of putting forward Tompkins' name for the

Cats' Annual Valour Award. Would you second me on that?"

"I most certainly would!" exclaimed Grumpy. "I never saw a braver cat."

Embarrassed and slightly overcome with emotion, Tompkins turned away, just as Speedy came hurrying up the lane.

Speedy Arrives with a Request

"Good morning, Mr Barney. Good morning all," he called. "I heard all about what happened yesterday. The BIG NEWS is all over the village. All the cats are talking about it and it seems that Tom here is the big hero! Now I suppose all those silly young female cats will be trailing around after him!" he added, teasing his friend.

"They already do!" replied Tompkins coolly, with his nose in the air.

"You wish!" countered Speedy.

"Er, Speedy," interrupted Barney, "did the Head Cat send you up here to fetch me for some reason?"

"Oh, er, no Sir," replied Speedy, suddenly remembering why he was there. "It's you, Grumpy, that the Head Cat wants to see - and he asked if you could come at once as his owner is taking him to the vet in a short while, so he doesn't have much time. It was a good thing I saw you go past the gate and guessed you were up here."

"Why does he want to see me?" queried Grumpy with a frown.

"I don't know. He seldom tells me why he wants certain cats. He just asks me to fetch them."

"Oh, I suppose I've been speaking out of turn again," muttered Grumpy, getting up. "I'd better go down and face the music."

"Come back afterwards," called Barney as Grumpy set off down the lane with Speedy.

"I will" he answered.

Chapter 5



When Grumpy entered the Head Cat's garden he was surprised to see Mr Deacon standing there with a big smile on his face. "Oh, I'm glad you're here, Grumpy, and thank you Speedy for fetching him so quickly. Oh, and Speedy," he added as Speedy made to turn away, "please stay as this concerns you as well."

Then to Speedy's astonishment the Head Cat said, "Grumpy, take a good look at Speedy, will you? Don't you think he's rather on the thin side?"

Grumpy turned and scrutinised Speedy, looking him up and down. "Thin!" he exclaimed in his usual forthright manner, "why he's downright skinny! Looks as if he could do with a good meal."

"Oh no, he has good Mummy and Daddy owners and gets plenty to eat," replied Deacon, as Speedy, with his mouth hanging open, stared from one cat to the other.

"His problem is overwork," continued Deacon. "I blame myself. I should have realised it before. Speedy has been trying to hold down three jobs. As you know, he acts as my messenger, and does an excellent job I might add! He also has to be at the school in the evenings to oversee the mouse watching duties, and he is my official Gate Keeper as well. And, of course, that's far too much. Speedy needs more time to himself, for relaxation and rest. Therefore I would like to offer you the post of Official Gate Keeper, Grumpy. Would you care to accept?"

"Yes Sir. I most certainly would! I'd be delighted! But why me?" queried Grumpy.

"Well, for two reasons," answered the Head Cat without hesitation. "Firstly, as I have said, Speedy needs to be relieved of one of his jobs. Secondly, we have been having some trouble with two or three young hooligan cats - not from this village I hasten to say. Mr Barney followed them one evening and he said they came from that disused field down the road where there are a couple of caravans."

"I know the place, Sir," put in Grumpy. "There are a couple of vicious dogs there too."

"Really? Thank you for telling me, Grumpy. I'll have to put out a warning to all the cats about that. Anyway," continued Deacon, "these cats have been getting into this garden and acting like little vandals. They have climbed trees after birds and knocked down a nest, trampled down some plants and have been digging in the flower beds. And, as you can imagine, the gardeners are not at all happy, and the problem is we're getting the blame for it! It's got to be stopped, Grumpy. They must not get in here!"

"Don't you worry, Sir. I'll stop 'em all right! They'll wish they'd never come here!"

"Er, no "rough stuff," Grumpy. "I just thought that since you are older and have quite an air of authority about you, you'd be able to restrain them." Then with an unusual twinkle in his eyes, the Head Cat added, "Just give them one of your professional scowls, Grumpy. That should do it!"

Speedy gasped and held his breath, expecting Grumpy to stomp out of the garden, but Grumpy just threw back his head and laughed. "I'll do that, Sir," he said, "and with your authority!"

"Very good. Very good," replied Deacon. "But now I have to go. My owner is insisting on taking me to the vet again. It's about my legs. A complete waste of time, of course. There's nothing they can do."

A look of serious concern immediately crossed Grumpy's face. "Watch out for that vet, Sir. If he tries any "funny stuff", you run for it!"

"Er, yes. Quite," said Barney. "I'll see you both tomorrow then - 10 o'clock sharp."

"I'll be here," answered Grumpy as the Head Cat walked slowly away.

Happy at Last

As Grumpy and Speedy made their way back to the lane, Speedy said, "Oh thanks, Grumpy, for taking over the Gate Keeper's job. I'll have a bit more time to play football now."

"Listen lad, why don't you just go home and lie down, and rest in the sun for a

while, instead of more running about," suggested Grumpy kindly.

"Yes, I might just do that, Grumpy. See you tomorrow."

As Speedy ran off, Grumpy turned and slowly plodded back up the lane. A slight smile played around his mouth. He felt pleased that he had been entrusted with the responsibility of helping in the village cat community, but more than that he felt happy because he now had friends to whom he could go and tell the good news.

When Grumpy came back over the brow of the hill, Missy dashed towards him. "Uncle Grumpy! Uncle Grumpy!" she cried, "what did the Big Cat want? Why did he want you? Why didn't he want Barney? What did he say? Tell me! Tell me!"

"Missy!" admonished Barney in a loud voice, "how many times have I told you that when the Head Cat wishes to talk to another cat, it's their private business. He doesn't expect you to know everything! Now stop badgering Grumpy and sit down."

Firm and Appreciative Friends

As Grumpy sat down next to Tompkins, Missy placed herself directly in front of him, staring up into his face with big expectant eyes.

Grumpy grinned to himself and said, "Well, I have got some good news to relate. I think I'll tell you Barney, and you Tompkins, but I don't think I'll let the little Flower here know." And placing one of his front paws in front of his mouth, as if to shield what he was going to say from Missy, he proceeded to "whisper" the news of his appointment as Gatekeeper in a volume that could have been heard on the other side of the lane.

"I heard you! I heard you!" squealed Missy, dancing about.

"Oh, so you've been eavesdropping have you?" exclaimed Grumpy with a mock scowl.

"Congratulations Grumpy!" said Barney with genuine warmth. "I know you'll do a good job, and if anyone can keep those little vandals out of the garden, you can."

"Oh don't you worry about that, Barney. I'm already planning something that'll give 'em such a fright they'll never come back!"

Barney laughed but thought it better not to ask questions! He then changed the subject.

"It's a lovely day. Does anyone feel like going fishing?"

"Oh yes!" yelled Tompkins. "Let's go to that pond in Blackberry Woods. You'll come too won't you, Grumpy?" he asked. Tompkins was beginning to become quite fond of this unpredictable old cat who had saved his life.

"I'd be delighted!" responded Grumpy, standing up.

"I expect I'll catch more fish than anyone!" shouted Missy, her imagination escalating with a much higher opinion of her ability than was actually warranted!

"Well, don't go falling into the pond!" scolded Tompkins. "We can't be expected to rescue you every day!"

"Oh, I won't, Tompkins. I'll be ever so good."

"That'll be likely," he muttered, and they all laughed.

So, in happy harmony, the four cats set off across the field, loudly singing the famous Cats' Hunting Song.

The End

