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Opening extract from

Barney the Boat Dog: Very Brave Dog

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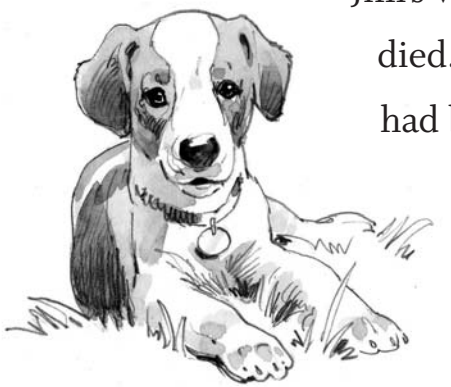
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Chapter One



Barney was a narrowboat dog. That doesn't mean that he was particularly narrow – in fact he was a little on the plump side. But *Whistling Jack*, the boat he lived on, *was* narrow. *Whistling Jack* was a long, low boat, thin enough to fit through the tightest lock gates and the narrowest stretches of canal.

It was just Barney and Jim now, since



Jim's wife Annie had died. Jim and Annie had bought the boat soon after their grown-up son left home and got married. First they moved to a smaller house, one with a canal running past the gardens. From there they could watch the narrowboats going past, and soon they thought of having a boat of their own. Jim had always wanted a boat, and Annie liked the idea too.

They named their boat *Whistling Jack*. *Whistling Jack* was the name of a wild plant they'd seen on an island holiday – tall-stemmed, with pinky-purple flowers. They

both thought the new name was just right, and *Whistling Jack* seemed to like it, too. Soon the boat was freshly-painted in bright new colours, and Annie painted pinky-purple Whistling Jacks on the door panels where other boats had roses and castles.

They kept *Whistling Jack* moored at the end of their garden, and every summer they used to set off in the boat for a few weeks: the three of them, Annie, Jim and Barney.

But then Annie died. Jim missed her so much that he couldn't bear to live in the house any more. Barney missed Annie too, but he tried to be as lively and bouncy as he could, for Jim's sake.

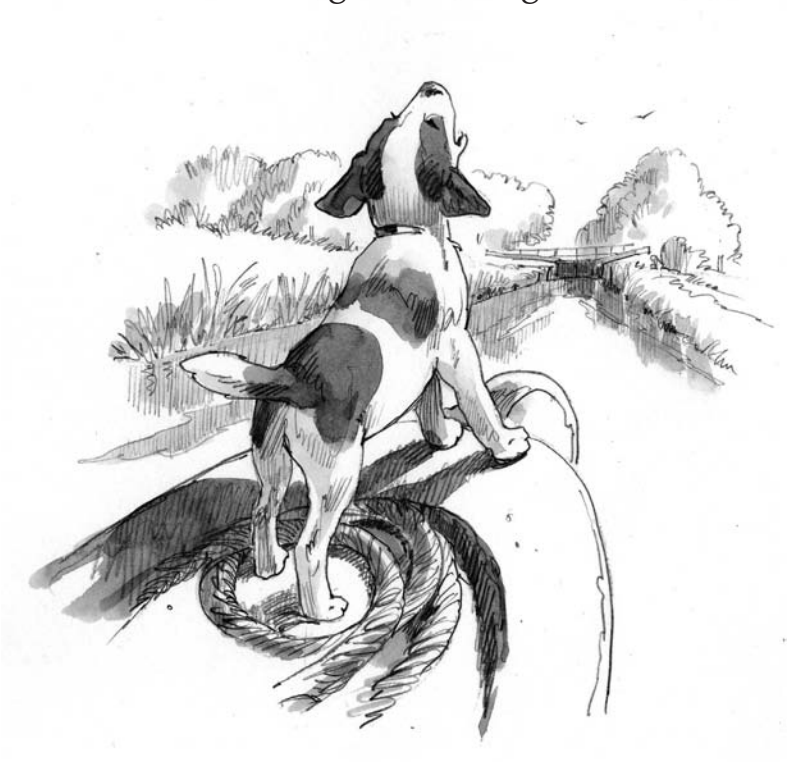
After several gloomy months, Jim sold

the house with all its happy and sad memories, and now *Whistling Jack* was home for himself and Barney.

Although it would have been better still if Annie had been with them, Barney loved his new life on the canals and rivers. *Whistling Jack* was a moving home. One week it might be in London on the Thames, chugging slowly past Big Ben; the next week it might be out in the country moored to a quiet riverbank with only ducks for company.



To show that he was a boat dog, Barney wore a collar with a disc engraved *Barney* on one side and *Whistling Jack* on the other, with a little picture of a narrowboat. As they approached a lock, he would stand at the prow of *Whistling Jack* and bark when he saw the lock-gates coming into view.



Inside *Whistling Jack*, Jim and Barney had everything they wanted. The boat was not quite two metres wide, so everything had to fit neatly into its place. There was a tiny kitchen (galley, it was properly called) with a cooker, a fridge and cupboards. Behind that was a sitting room and a table. Next came a mini-bathroom with a toilet and shower, and finally the bedroom, which had two bunks: the lower one for Jim, the top one for Barney. Barney slept curled up on a blanket, and his bunk was at just the right height for him to look out of the porthole



window and see what was happening outside.

Everything Jim owned had to fit into the cupboards or in the spaces underneath the bunk and sofa. He even had a garden – flower pots in painted canalware on the roof and decks, filled with geraniums and petunias and ivy.



Annie had loved her plants, and now Jim looked after them, watering them each morning, and evenings as well when the weather was really hot. Every few days Jim and Barney needed to stop for water or fuel, or to buy food at one of the canalside stores.

On warm evenings in summer, when Jim had moored up, they could sit out on the deck while Jim did his crossword or read a book, and Barney looked at the other boats going by.



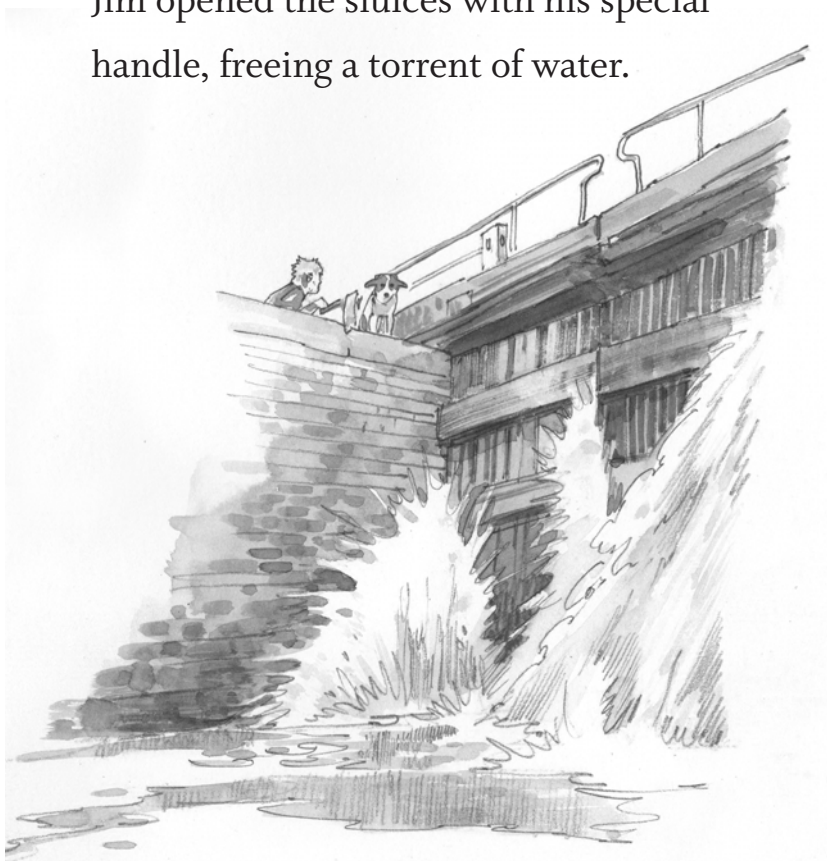
On cold winter nights Jim closed the doors snugly, drew the curtains and turned on the radio, and brewed cocoa on his little stove.

Barney liked summer best, when he could lie on the roof and daydream, and when people walked along the towpath and admired *Whistling Jack*'s bright paintwork and the pots of flowers. Sometimes they exclaimed to each other: "*Whistling Jack*! That's a funny name!" or "Oh, look at the little dog on the roof!"

Barney liked attention. He knew that people thought he was clever, especially when he raced from one lock gate to the other waiting for the water to rush through. "You'd think he understood

how it works!" people said.

Huh! Of course Barney understood. He'd seen it happening enough times. He knew more about it than most people did. He still found it exciting, though, when Jim opened the sluices with his special handle, freeing a torrent of water.



Whistling Jack, waiting in the space between the two gates, would be lifted up by the water if they were travelling upstream, or lowered gently to the next level if they were travelling down. Barney liked to leap ashore as they pulled in to the lock, and he always knew exactly when to jump on board again, when the water reached the right level and Jim was ready to open the gates at the other end.

Often, they met people in hired holiday boats who got into all sorts of trouble at the locks. They'd lose their handles, or forget to tie up their boat when they got off, or have all the sluices open at once and then wonder why the water level wasn't right.

Barney didn't know how people could

get themselves into such a muddle. It was simple, really, when you'd seen it done as many times as Barney had.

