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Opening extract from

Barney the Boat Dog: Runaway Horse !

Written by

Linda Newbery

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Barney
The Boat Dog

Runaway Horse!



For Caroline and Barney

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Runaway Horse!



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Illustrated by John Francis

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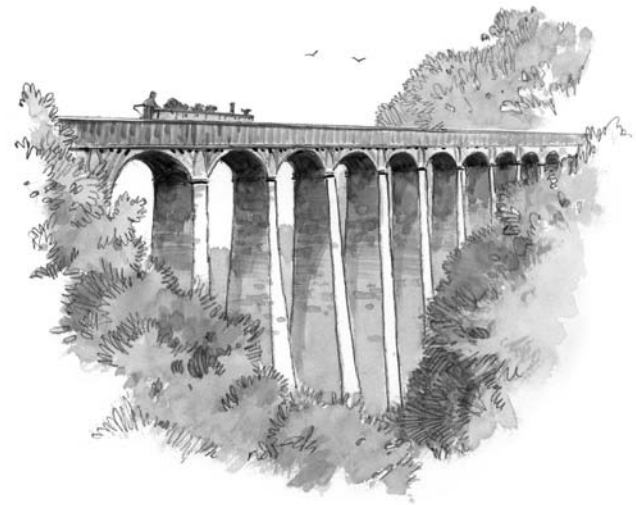
Chapter One



Barney and Jim had spent the whole summer exploring the waterways on their narrowboat, *Whistling Jack*. Now it was autumn; the leaves had turned golden and crisp, and were beginning to fall.

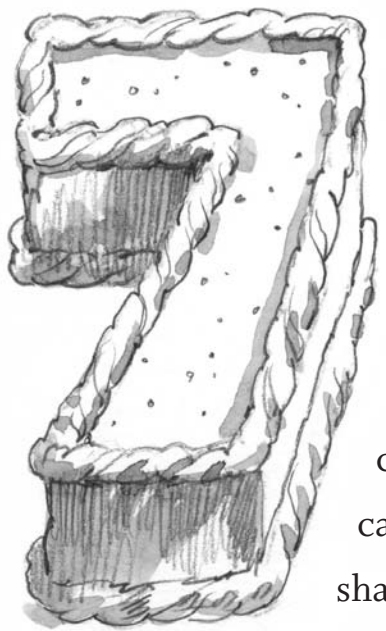
Barney loved his life on *Whistling Jack*. He and Jim could go anywhere a river or

canal took them. Usually the canals stretched through country fields and woods, but sometimes they'd be next to a railway with trains rushing past, or in a town, where the canal squeezed between high buildings and alongside busy streets. They might pass through a long, lonely stretch of moorland, with hills in the distance and buzzards calling overhead. Sometimes the canal went into a tunnel – Barney would *never* like those – or it was carried high on an aqueduct, across a valley. That felt very peculiar to Barney – like sailing through the sky. Looking down made him feel dizzy, but *Whistling Jack* chugged across the watery bridge as if there was nothing strange about it at all.



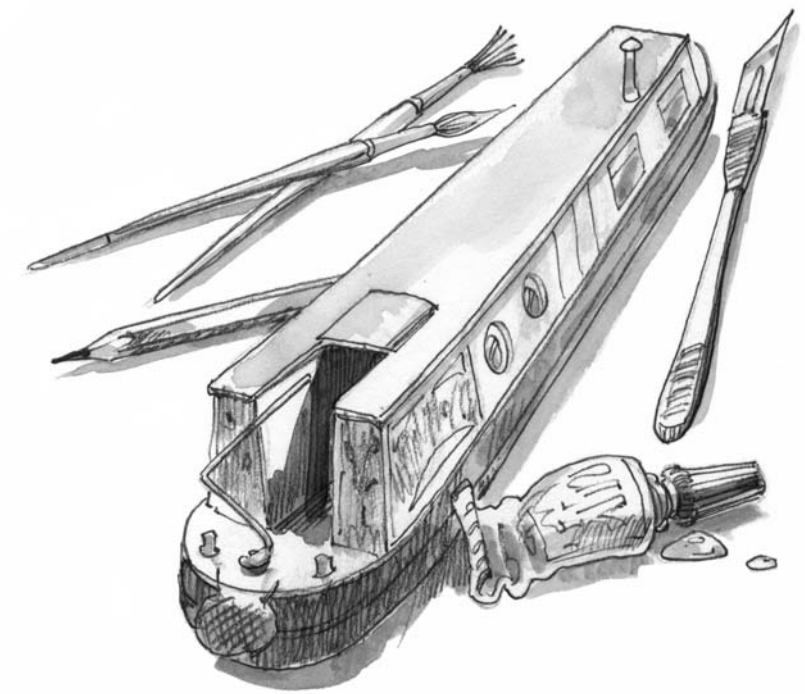
Today, Barney knew exactly where they were going. Jim had moored up at Puddleshore, and tomorrow they'd head on up the canal to Steepletown. Steepletown was where Jim's son Peter lived, with his wife Penny and their little boy, Freddie. Jim loved his small grandson, and tried to see the family whenever he could. Barney liked these visits, too; Freddie was full of fun and energy, always playing games of throwing and chasing.

Barney didn't follow *everything* that Jim said to him, but he understood quite a lot. He knew that tomorrow was a special day, and that Jim had been looking forward to it all week. At the canalside town of Puddleshore, Jim went to the baker's shop he always visited when they moored up here, and collected a birthday cake he'd ordered, in the shape of a big seven. Then he went to another shop for candles and a birthday card.



"There! That's everything," Jim told Barney, and they walked back to the boat, Jim carrying the cake very carefully in its box.

Back on board, Jim made himself a mug of tea, and settled down to finish the model boat he'd spent the last month making. He'd carved it from wood, and now he was finishing the painting and varnishing. It was a model of *Whistling Jack*, a special birthday present for Freddie.



Jim took out his paints, and his finest brush, and began painting the name in careful letters.

It was a sunny evening. The canal bank beckoned, and the light was golden through the leaves. Barney felt too full of energy to settle down and rest, and it wasn't dinner time yet. He gave a little *gruff* to tell Jim he was going ashore, then jumped down to the towpath and set off to see what he could find.

Their mooring-place was at the edge of the town. The bank stretched away invitingly, fringed with reeds. Ducks quacked as Barney trotted past, and another narrowboat chugged slowly along. A big collie standing on its roof thumped its tail at Barney and smiled a greeting,

and he whuffed back.

Passing the last of the canalside cottages, Barney came to a paddock with a horse in it – a big, strong horse, black, with a white blaze down its face. Seeing Barney, it came over at a smart trot, and leaned its neck over the fence to snuff at him.

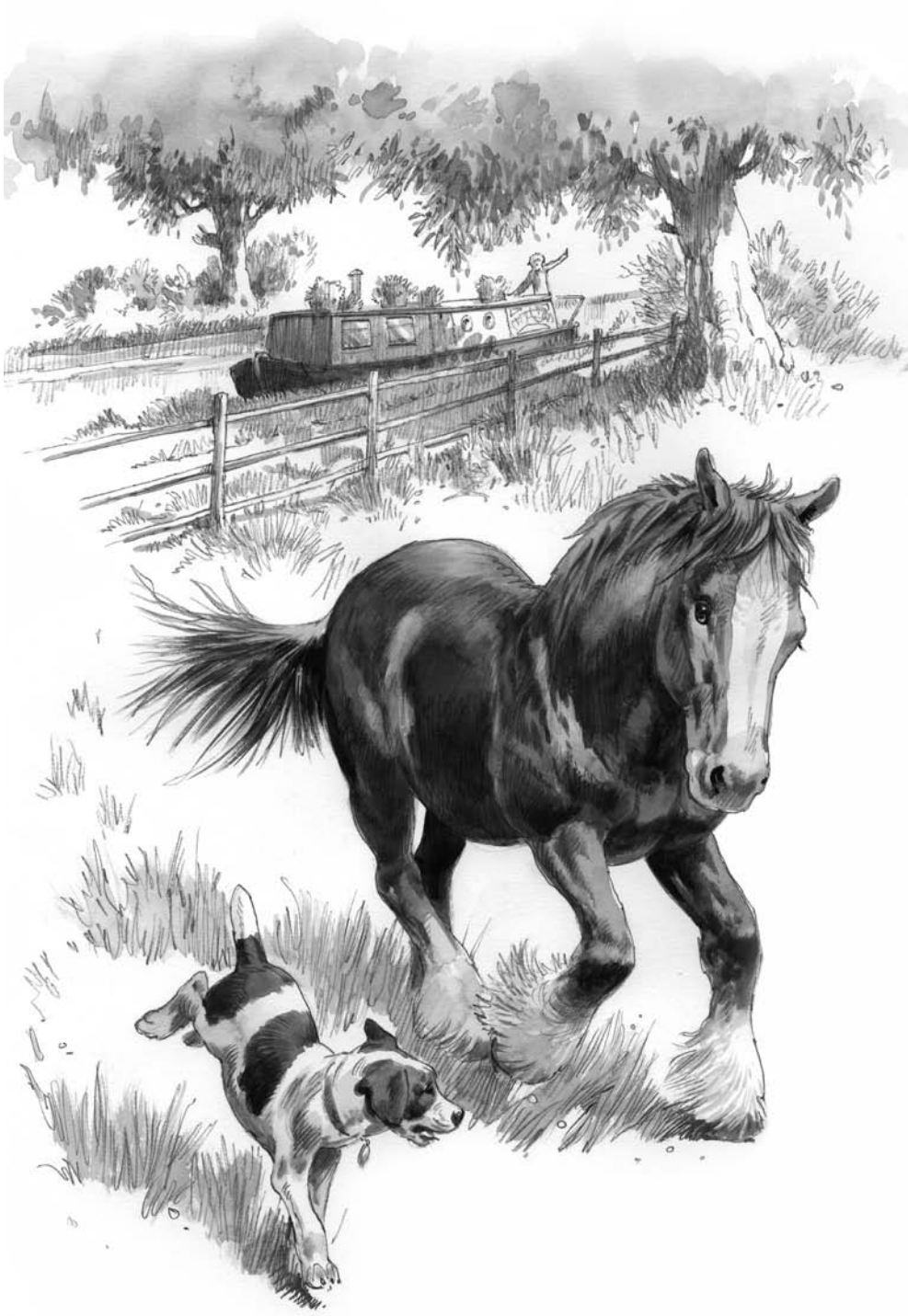
Barney was glad the fence was there. He wasn't sure about horses – he saw them in fields often enough from *Whistling Jack*, but had never been this close to one. It was



so *big*! Its head was larger than the whole of Barney, and its hooves – almost covered by thick fringes of hair – were the size of Jim's dinner plates. It smelled warm and horsey. Below a thick forelock, its eyes were brown and kind, and it snorted at him in a friendly manner.

With a little duck and a yip, Barney showed that he wanted to play. He dashed along the length of the fence, and the horse arched its neck and pranced after him. Soon Barney was through the railings and dashing round the field, with the horse bucking and cantering behind. Round and round in mad circles he raced, till both he and the horse were dizzy and panting.

"Barney!" came Jim's voice from the boat. "Dinner time!"



With a bark of farewell, Barney set off at a run. Just before he reached *Whistling Jack*, he looked behind him and saw the horse standing by its fence, feet squarely planted, head high, eyes watching him.

He knew that the horse wanted him to stay longer, playing their game of chase. It must be lonely, standing in a field with nothing to do but eat grass.

But a few moments later, Barney was gulping down his meat and biscuits, and had forgotten the horse altogether.

