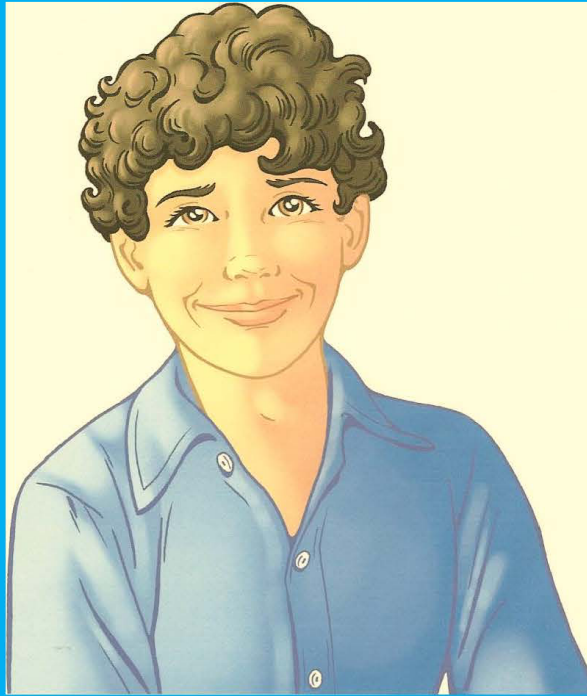


THE BARTON SERIES

SOUNDS LIKE BARTON



BY

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(Ages 8 and over)

SOUNDS LIKE BARTON

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A Helping Hand

It was warm, yet still, a comfortable afternoon when school was dismissed at the usual time of 2:40 pm. Ten minutes later, at 2:50 pm young Barton A. Sandiford was happily walking along the road on his way home when a young boy called out to him.

At the time, the boy was happily playing with his little sister in the flower garden which was situated at the front of their house.



He had noticed Barton approaching from around the corner of the road. This was about one hundred metres from the house where both the boy and his sister resided with the rest of their family. Barton and the boy had lately become good friends and the two enjoyed each other's company whenever they met and had the time to socialise.

Barton warmly greeted the boy and his younger sister. The two boys chatted for a while before Barton continued on his merry way towards home.

Barton was quite pleased to see his friend in a happy mood. He recalled that just a few weeks ago all was not well with the boy.

As young Barton ambled along the way, he thought about the boy's predicament during that unfortunate period. It was a time when his newly

acquired friend and his family were going through some rather troublesome difficulties.

Barton recalled that it was the middle of the school week, the day being **Wednesday**. The bell had just rung at the usual time of twenty minutes past eleven, announcing the luncheon interval. The school clock showed **the minute hand pointing to 4 and the hour hand was one-third of the way in its movement from the number 11 and towards the number 12**. Barton's digital watch showed **the time as 11:20**.



After carefully washing his hands, Barton sat down on one of the many available school benches that were located around the school compounds. He was just about ready to start his lunch and looking forward to the surprises which Mom usually packed in his lunchbox. Besides the savoury sandwiches and cold, refreshing juices, Mom would usually include tasty fruits, and from time to time, a few pieces of candy as well.

Most of the other children were also settling down to eat their lunches, and a few others, who were already complete, were engaged in playing games or having a conversation or just casually walking about.

Some of the children would eat most or all of their lunch during the early morning break, as they either felt hungry or tried to extract the maximum playing time at the luncheon interval.

At this time, the mood of the school would now magically transform from the quietness of classroom work to the noisy, yet enjoyable tones associated with these lunchtime pleasures. This was not unusual nor was it unexpected. All the students looked forward and enjoyed the relatively long break of an hour for eating, playing, resting, or socialising.

As Barton munched on his lunch, he noticed a little boy standing just about five metres away from him and leaning against a tree. The boy looked at the other children who were about and as they engaged in various activities. However, he did not seem intent on joining any of them. Barton thought that the boy looked lonely, though he did not appear unfriendly. Yet, there was something else about the boy that sparked a flame of concern from the observant and intuitive Barton.

So, amidst his munching, Barton decided to call out to the boy.

“Hello,” said Barton, “my name is Barton. Would you like to join me?”

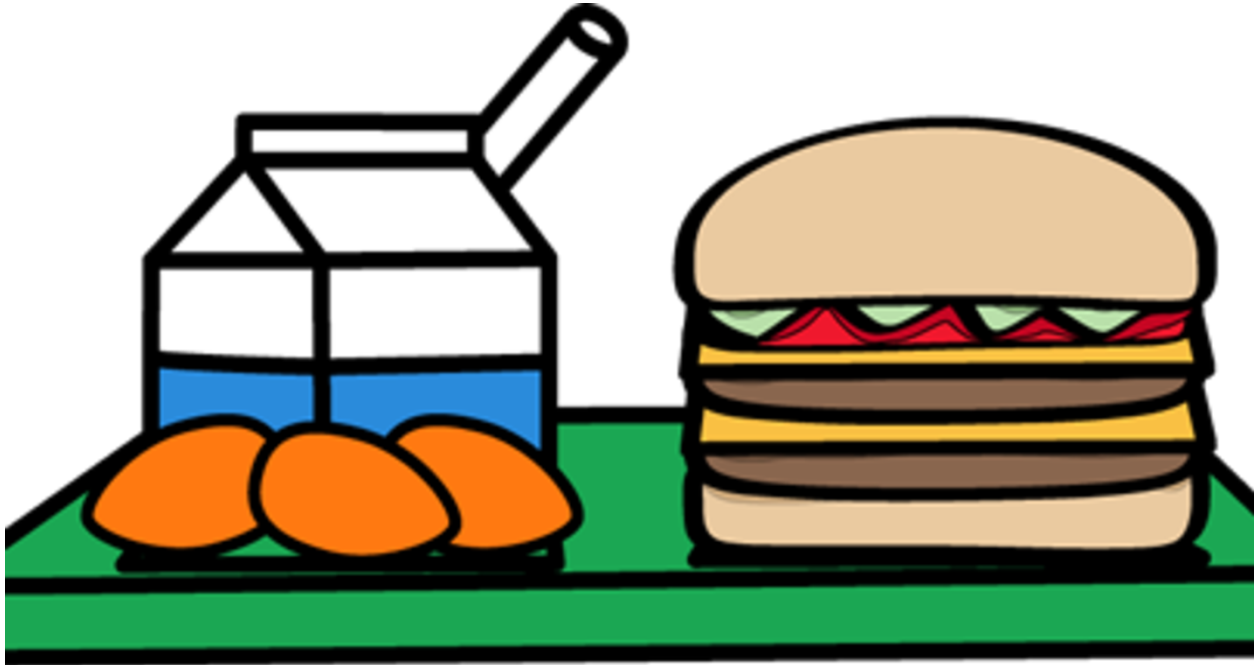
Barton was a popular and well-liked boy at school. He was a good sportsman, did very well in his schoolwork and was amiable and helpful.

The boy immediately responded to Barton’s kind invitation and walked across to where Barton sat. He looked at Barton and smiled as he placed his hand outward to introduce himself. The two boys began talking, with Barton, taking bites of his sandwich in between their conversation.

“I have forgotten my lunch at home,” said the boy, and he laughed at his forgetfulness.

“I am not very hungry, though,” he said to Barton, as he turned to look at some of the children at play.

Barton, however, insisted on sharing a sandwich with him and after a slight hesitation, the boy graciously accepted the offer.



Barton proceeded to give the boy one of his sandwiches, half of his banana, and some of the orange juice that Mom had packed in his lunch kit.

The thankful boy sat and munched contentedly, meanwhile showering much praise on Barton's Mom, the maker of the tasty sandwich.

"This sandwich is quite delicious, Barton," he said. "I would also like to extend my sincerest thanks to you and her as well."

Barton usually brought three sandwiches to school and so after eating two of them, he still had **one** left.

The little boy was very thankful and repeated his words of gratitude, as he sipped the last of the cold orange juice.

"Tasty to the last drop," he laughed.

Soon after he had finished eating, the boy began to talk with Barton in even more friendly tones. He spoke with Barton as though he had known him for a long time. The boy seemed to be greatly at ease with the senior, Barton.

Barton observed that the boy's shirt and pants looked oversized and seemed to be quite worn. The boy, though, didn't seem to mind and was just happy to have found a friend. As the two boys spoke, Barton still felt that all was not well with the boy.

So, when the boy offered Barton some cherries from a tree at his home, Barton readily accepted, hoping that he might discover a cause for the boy's apparent uneasiness.

The two agreed to meet at the school gates when school was dismissed. Barton and the boy would walk to the boy's home together. The boy lived along the same road as the one Barton usually chose to journey home.

The cherry tree was small and was not heavily laden. However, Barton accepted the generosity of his new friend and helped himself to two dozen **ripe** cherries. These he placed in a small bag.



Barton quickly calculated that he could share the cherries equally with his brother, and sister. Each of them would receive **eight** cherries.

At the visit, Barton was introduced to the boy's parents and his younger sister. They invited Barton into their home.

As the family chatted with their son's new friend, Barton realised that the boy's father was recently laid off from his job. He had been yet unable to secure another job. The family's small savings were almost completely used up and the entire family was sensing that frightful feeling of financial insecurity.

Though still a young boy, Barton was quick to notice the worried look on the face of the boy's father, clearly the sole breadwinner of the family. The little boy's mother also looked unhappy, though she endeavoured to look cheerful in front of her son's guest.

Barton, though, noticed that she appeared to be close to tears as she hugged her little son.

It was a thoughtful and worried young Barton, who bade goodbye to his friend's family and trekked off homewards. Many disturbing and frightful thoughts meandered in his head and whilst he clutched a small bag of cherries in his hand.

Later that evening, as the Sandiford family sat down for dinner, Barton was surprisingly very quiet. The family noticed Barton's unusual silence, but no one commented on it at that time.

After dinner, the family listened to the daily news from 7:00 pm to 7:45 pm, for a total of **forty-five minutes or three-quarters of an hour**. It was then that Dad and Mom decided to have a little talk with Barton. The devoted parents wished to inquire as to the reason for their son's source of bother. And so, young Barton told his sad tale to them, growing quite emotional at times.

Barton's parents listened attentively to their son's story about the disturbing events of the day. They too were both very deeply concerned and understood the reason for Barton's sad face and his unusual quietness at the dinner table.

The Sandifords were filled with empathy and their concern and desire to help the less fortunate from around knew few bounds.

As Barton left the room at 8.00 pm and headed off to bed, he was comforted by his parents. However, Mom and Dad remained and spoke quietly for about an hour. They went to their bedroom at **nine p.m.**

By that time, Barton had satisfactorily completed his homework and was in bed. However, with the many thoughts in his mind, he fell asleep about half an hour later, at **9:30 p.m.**



The next morning, Barton discovered that Dad had left him a message with Mom. The folded piece of paper simply read-

Don't worry too much. I'll see what I can do.

Mom could not offer any explanation about the note to Barton. However, the boy felt strongly that something would work out positively for the unfortunate family. He was certain that his kind father was somehow going to get involved and help in some way.

That evening, Dad came home from work a little earlier than usual. Oddly, he was accompanied by a well-dressed gentleman. Dad introduced the man to the family and took him into the study. About half an hour later, both men walked out. Dad had a brief chat with Mom and then the two men left together. Mom told Barton that they were going to visit the parents of the little boy. Barton desperately hoped that all will be well.

He was rather anxious to hear what Dad had to say when he eventually returned home two hours later.

It was 7:30 pm, and a full hour later than the family's dinner time at 6:30 pm. Although Dad had not had eaten dinner as yet, he called for Barton, for he held some exciting news.

The gentleman, who had accompanied Dad to the house earlier that evening, was the Managing Director of a large company.

His company was expanding at a very fast rate and he needed someone with the same qualifications as the father of Barton's friend, to fill one of the immediate vacancies.

The boy's father seemed amply qualified for the job.

The Director was offering a starting salary that was larger than what the man had earned in his previous job. The poor man was elated beyond compare.

Barton was thrilled, happy, and relieved, only upon listening to the events of the evening. However, this was not all of the exciting news. Indeed there was even more happy news that followed. Barton and Mom could hardly wait for Dad to continue.

It so happened that the little boy's mother was also a skilled worker and a vacancy also existed in the company for her, as well. The boy's parents were indeed very willing to work and accepted both job offers. Together, their income would be more than twice what the man had earned before. It was a new beginning for them.

Dad said that the family was overjoyed about the new jobs and Barton could only imagine their unparalleled happiness. The man reminded his wife of an

old saying that he knew since he was a boy and as he remembered the past few weeks of worry.

“It is always darkest before the dawn, my ole pappy used to say,” said the man, to Dad, as he remembered his dear father, with pride and respect.

In the man’s previous job, he earned \$4 000 per month and in this new job the offer was 25 % more, a total of \$5 000. The wife was offered the salary equivalent of eighty percent of that of her husband’s previous salary, which worked out to be \$3 200. Together they were expected to earn \$8 200 per month.

If the tax on salaries was fifteen percent of their total earnings, which is equivalent to \$1 230, then they would have a net income of \$6 970 per month.

The couple thanked Mr Sandiford and his friend again, and their deep gratitude extended to Barton, for his concern and thoughtfulness.

Barton was happy that all turned out well. The little boy became a good friend of Barton, and as time passed, he looked and sounded much happier. More importantly, his grades at school began to steadily improve. His average mark moved upwards from a previous 60%, by between 10 to 15 percent in each subject. He was now averaging between 70% and 75% overall and aspiring to even greater heights.

As Barton continued to walk homewards, remembering that tense and eventful period, he thought that all of the good fortune and happy ending for his friend’s family had been started by the simple act of sharing his lunch.