

Gaby to the Rescue

A Siamese cat crouched on a tree branch, peering down at Gaby with brilliant blue eyes. It cried out. The cat was stuck in the tree in front of her house and, as luck would have it, she had on the nicest cardigan she owned. Gaby pulled the cardigan tighter around her. This was her last good school cardigan until who-knows-when her father would have enough money to buy her a new one. The poor cat cried again. Gaby looked back at her small yellow house. If her mother were here, that cat would already be out of the tree and purring – safe and sound, in her mother's arms.

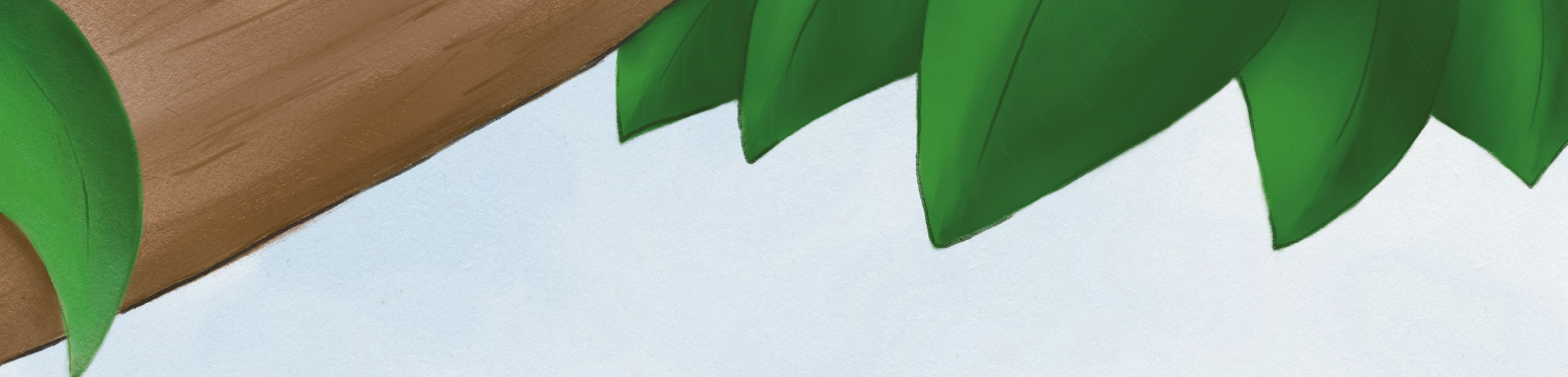
Mind made up, Gaby pulled off her cardigan and tossed it onto her porch. 'You're out of luck, *gato!*' she yelled. 'My mom, master tree climber and cat rescuer, isn't back yet.' She rolled up the sleeves of her white shirt. 'But until she is, you've got me.' Gaby grasped the nearest branch and pulled herself up. 'Gaby to the rescue.'

The cat meowed.

'*I am* hurrying.'

The last time Gaby had climbed the tree was when she and her best friend, Alma, had challenged the boys to a water-balloon fight last summer. Up high was the perfect spot for a full-blown assault on the boys below. Those guys never had a chance.

Gaby secured her feet and hands and climbed higher, until the cat was within arm's reach. 'See? You aren't the only one who can climb.' But then she looked down. Mistake number one.



She knew the universal rule of tree climbing said don't ever, ever look down, but she couldn't help it. This was the highest she'd ever climbed. If she fell, she'd definitely end up looking like an Egyptian mummy. Gaby imagined herself bandaged from head to toe and sipping dinner through a straw.

Well, she'd just have to not fall. Simple as that. 'Here, kitty, kitty!' she called out, the same way she had heard her mom call for stray cats hundreds of times. But this was no stray. The cat was too shiny. Too chubby. Around its neck, a rhinestone collar with gold charms sparkled. Someone loved that cat. She reached out toward it. 'Almost got you.' Mistake number two.

The cat arched its back and hissed.

Gaby pulled back, startled. 'Nice teeth.' She resettled on the branch, considering her options.

When Gaby was younger, she had seen her mom climb the same tree many times to rescue a cat. All the way up, her mom had giggled and sweet-talked the cat in Spanish. '*Que bonita eres gatita*. You're so pretty, little cat.' Her mom told her that when dealing with cats you should speak softly and pick them up by the loose skin at the back of their neck, because that's how their mothers carried them. Her mom had always made it look so easy. Once she had the cat nestled against her chest, she would manoeuvre down through the branches, comforting the cat with kisses on the ears and soft words with rolling Spanish *r*'s like purrs.

There were never any arched backs, hisses, or sharp teeth.

Gaby took a deep breath and reached out for the cat again. 'It's okay, little kitty,' she said sweetly. This time the cat latched on to her, digging its claws into her arm and shoulder. 'Ooh, ouch!' She couldn't quite get it by the scruff of the neck like her mom had shown her, but at least she had the animal. That was progress. Now she just had to get down.

Without falling.

