

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.



Michael is a young fisherman. He often takes out his boat, the 'Louisa May', for a day of fishing.

An Encounter at Sea

It was hot. Really hot. There wasn't the slightest breeze to cool the skin or make even a baby-finger crease on the surface of the sea. The *Louisa May* floated like a toy sitting on a glass table.

For the first time in over a week, Michael hadn't seen a dolphin all day. He was two miles offshore now, motoring along his daily survey course. The *Louisa May* pulled the reflection of the sky and the island into pleats behind her, and the *putt-putt* of her engine was lost in the big, quiet stillness of the afternoon.

Michael shut off the outboard motor and stopped. He leaned over the side to scoop up a bucket of seawater to cool himself, and looked down. Long fingers of sunlight slanted into the clear water, shifting slightly in arcs of radiating lines, and were swallowed up at last into the perfect blueness of the depths.

He poured the water over himself, savouring the delicious coolness.





Pppffffffwwwraa! The sound came from close behind him, and made him spin round so fast he lost his balance and fell into the bottom of the boat.

Pppffffff – shorter and louder, even closer.

Michael picked himself up and looked over the side.

A black shape, much, much bigger than the biggest dolphin, showed about five metres from the boat. It was like a polished rock. On its rounded side was a slit like a flattened S, bigger than a man's two clenched fists, with a raised lip around it. As Michael watched, astonished, not understanding what he was seeing, the lips pinched together, the hole closed, and the black shape sank rapidly beneath the sluicing water.

A whale! Its dark head and blowhole! That's what he had seen.

Pppffffffwwwraa!

Now it had surfaced on the other side of the boat. This second surfacing was hardly less shocking than the first, although Michael just managed to stay on his feet and cross the boat this time.

Carefully, Michael leaned over to look: on one side of the boat lay the whale's tapering tail; on the other side, the head with its scarred lines lay like a piece of huge, dark wreckage. This close, Michael could see that big sections of skin had peeled off in straight lines, giving the whale's head a patchwork look in greys and blacks. Closest of all to the boat, only just submerged, was the whale's eye. Michael looked right into it, and the whale looked back. It was so very, very close. He leaned out further and further, stretching his hand slowly towards it. The whale didn't draw away.

He reached down, until his fingertips touched the crease of skin that gave the whale a kind of eyebrow. It was cool and smooth, like a carved stone covered in a finely stretched coat of rubber.

And as his fingertips touched the whale, he looked into its eye. It was impossible to say what colour it was: dark but with rays of brightness. It was like a window into a whole galaxy, with stars and planets, comets and supernovae moving inside.

Effortlessly, as if movement and thought were the same thing, the whale submerged out of reach of Michael's hand. There was a last shushing sigh as the flipper caressed the boat one more time, and then they were separate again.

The setting sun made a path over the sea, bathing Michael in golden light. He felt as if he were lit up inside too. He had touched a whale and looked into its eye! Like a sleeper waking from a dream, he looked around, dazed.

