

THE TORN SWEATER

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JUANITO looked sadly at the big hole in his sweater. "What will Mother say when she sees it?" he thought anxiously. "I promised her that I would not climb any tree while I was wearing my good sweater, and then I forgot all about my promise the minute I started to play with Jose and Tomas."

Juanito walked home very slowly. How he hated to have Mother see his new sweater! She had given it to him for his birthday and it was the nicest sweater that he had ever owned. Now there was a big hole right in the front where it had caught on a branch.

Juanito was so busy thinking about his sweater that he didn't notice Jose and Tomas running after him.

"Wait a minute, Nito!" called Jose, but Juanito didn't even hear him.

"Nito, wait for us!" shouted Tomas. He shouted so loudly that this time Juanito stopped and turned around.

"We just—wanted—to tell you—how

sorry—we are about—your sweater," puffed Jose, who was all out of breath from running.

"Yes," added Tomas, "we thought maybe we could help."

Juanito shook his head sadly. "I guess no one can help me. It's such a big hole that my sweater is spoiled. The worst part of it is that I broke my promise to Mother."

"It was our fault as much as it was yours, Nito," said Tomas. "If you hadn't tried to help us fix the swing, you wouldn't have torn your sweater."

"That's right," agreed Jose. "Maybe if we went home with you and explained to your mother, she wouldn't mind about the sweater so much."

"Oh, no!" answered Juanito quickly. "I didn't have to climb that tree because you did. You could have fixed the swing all right without me. That would be only an excuse. Mother says that she doesn't like boys who make excuses when they do something wrong."

Jose and Tomas didn't say anything for a minute. They were thinking hard of some way to help poor Juanito.

"I know!" said Jose. "Why don't you tell your mother that you caught your sweater on the fence while you were playing in my yard? Then maybe she wouldn't scold you at all."

"Oh, dear," said Juanito. "I wish I could. That would be much easier than telling Mother I broke my promise."

Juanito knew that he couldn't tell his mother such a lie. He knew that if he didn't tell her the truth, it would be much worse than climbing trees when he had promised her that he would not.

"No, Jose," said Juanito at last, "I couldn't tell Mother that. I don't think it would be right."

"No, I guess it wouldn't," agreed Jose, "but I really can't think of any other way to help you, Nito."

"I'm afraid I'll just have to go home and tell Mother exactly what happened," decided Juanito. "I'm going right now and get it over with as fast as I can." And away he ran.

"Hello, Juanito," called Mother, when she saw him come running into the house. "You are just in time. I have baked some cup cakes. Here are two big ones for you to eat before you go out to play."

Two cup cakes! That was what Juanito liked to eat better than anything else when he came from school in the afternoon. Today, however, even two cup cakes couldn't make him feel happy.

Mother set a glass of orange juice and a plate with the two cakes on it on the kitchen table.

"Here is your lunch, Juanito," she invited.

"I don't feel hungry," he replied in a low voice.

Mother looked at him in surprise. Something terrible must have happened to make Juanito refuse freshly-baked cup cakes. "Are you sick?" she asked anxiously.

Juanito shook his head. "Look!" he said, pointing sadly to the big hole in his sweater.

"Oh, Juanito," cried Mother, "your beautiful new sweater! What happened to it?"

Juanito felt very much ashamed, but he looked at Mother bravely. "I caught it on a branch while I was climbing a big mango tree in Jose's yard."

"But," asked Mother in surprise, "why

were you climbing the tree? You promised me you wouldn't. You don't usually break your promises to me."

"I'm sorry," said Juanito.

"But why did you do it?" asked his mother again. "Haven't you a reason, Juanito, for behaving so badly today?"

"No," answered Juanito. "I guess I just forgot all about my promise. I saw Tomas and Jose, and they asked me to come over and play with them. They were making a swing, and I climbed up in the tree to help tie the rope. It was my own fault, Mother."

Mother looked at Juanito a long time without saying anything. He felt so much ashamed. He wished she would hurry up and scold him.

"I'm very sorry about your sweater, Juanito," said Mother at last, "but perhaps I can mend it so that it won't look so bad."

Juanito looked at his mother in surprise. "But aren't you cross because I broke my promise to you?" he asked.

"No," said Mother. "But I don't like to think that my boy would break his promise. It makes me feel very sad, but I am glad that I have a son who is brave enough to tell me the truth, and who doesn't try to make excuses for doing the wrong thing. I know how sorry you must feel about spoiling that nice new sweater. Perhaps you've had trouble enough for today without my scolding you, too. So, eat those two cakes and drink your cold orange juice now. That will probably make you feel better."

"Oh, Mother," exclaimed Juanito happily, as he ate one of the cakes, "you are the kindest mother any boy ever had. The next time I make a promise, I'll be careful not to break it."