

## READING TIME FOR YOUNG FOLKS

### A PROMISE TO KEEP

By FRANCISCO DUGAR \*



CONRADO was up on the roof. He was waiting for his father to bring a ladder to help him down. He had climbed up by the porch at the back of the house. But coming down was harder than going up.

Ever since Conrado had been a tiny boy, he had been afraid to come down from high places. This wasn't Conrado's fault. He was born with the fear of falling. And he didn't know how to get over it. He was very brave about many other things. But every time he looked down from a high place, he felt dizzy and grew afraid.

So on this day, when he looked down from the roof, he felt the usual fear. Whenever he reached down his foot toward the top of the porch, he would pull

it back quickly. It was just too far, it seemed to him.

Soon Conrado's father brought the ladder. He was used to helping the boy down from high places. Every few days, the neighboring children would come to him saying, "Conrado is up in a tree and can't get down," or "Conrado is on the roof of our *bodega* and wants you to bring the ladder."

Father didn't mind bringing the ladder, but he did wish Conrado would get over his foolish fear.

"I am glad you can climb so well, Conrado," Father said as he helped Conrado down from the roof. "But I do wish you would think more about what you are doing. Don't climb up to places from which you cannot climb down."

"How do I know whether I can climb down until I climb up?" asked Conrado. "I always think I won't be afraid next time."

"You can learn to climb down," said Father. "You can practice coming down from easy places before you climb up to hard ones."

That night Father said to Mother, "It seems as if I am going to spend my life helping Conrado down from high places—out of trees and off roofs."

"Shall we forbid him ever to climb again?" asked Mother.

"No, we can't do that. There must be some other way," answered Father. "All boys should climb. But they should climb down as well as up."

Early one Saturday morning Father said to Conrado, "Son, I'm going to the

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*hacienda* of Don Diego on business. I expect I'll be gone for several days. Would you like to come with me?"

"Yes, indeed, Father!" cried Conrado, very much pleased.

Conrado and his father were great pals. And if there was one thing in the world that Conrado liked better than anything else, it was to go away on a short trip with his father. He had never been to Don Diego's *hacienda*, but he had heard about it. He knew there would be some boys there of his own age, and it would be great fun to watch the men as they worked in the sugar central.

"I must go in the auto to town on an errand before we can start," said Father. "But I will be back again by nine o'clock. Be sure to be ready at that time, for I want to start promptly."

"I'll be ready and waiting for you—you can be sure of that. I promise you I will," said Conrado.

"You might fix us some lunch to eat on the way while you're waiting. That will save time," Father called from the car.

"All right!" Conrado shouted back. "I'll have lots of lunch ready."

So Father drove away, and Conrado began to prepare the sandwiches and other things for their lunch. He had just finished, when he saw in front of the house Alfredo and Benjamin, two boys who lived nearby.

"Hello, Fredo and Ben," called Conrado. "Where are you going?"

"We are going to eat some mangoes. Come, go with us. Don't you want to?"

"Sure!" said Conrado. "But I have to be home by nine o'clock."

"Oh, there's lots of time!" said Alfredo.

Conrado knew that there was a large

mango tree full of delicious ripe fruit not very far from his home. He knew that Mr. Hernandez, who owned the tree, would be willing for the boys to eat some of the fruit. He would scarcely be out of sight of home, and, as Alfredo had said, there was plenty of time.

So he and the other boys raced to the mango tree. They all scrambled up the tall tree, and soon they were busy picking and eating the delicious yellow fruit.

After a time Alfredo called out, "I've had enough now. Let's go."

"All right. I'm ready," agreed Benjamin.

"I'll be along in a minute," said Conrado. Alfredo swung himself down lightly to the lowest branch, crawled out a little way, and then dropped to the ground. Benjamin followed him. Next minute they were running down the road and were soon out of sight.

"I have just about time enough to get home to Father. I have my promise to keep. I must be there at nine o'clock." This is what Conrado thought as he sat eating a mango.

But when he glanced down, the distance to the ground seemed terribly great.

The boy sat very still on the branch, thinking. He never could get to the ground, he felt sure. If only the other boys had not gone he could have sent a message to his father. Now he would not be home at nine o'clock when Father came for him. He could not keep his promise. Father would think that he did not care very much about going with him, and, worse than that, Father would think he had forgotten his promise to be there.

Conrado shouted until he was hoarse,

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but no one answered. He wanted to cry. But he choked back the tears.

"I won't be a cry-baby," he said to himself. "I promised Father I would be there at nine o'clock. And I'm going to keep my promise. I'm going down."

Holding tightly with his hands, he swung his legs and feet, trying to reach the branch just below him. But the sickening fear that always made him feel dizzy forced him quickly to draw up his feet and settle down again securely on the sheltering branch.

He tried again and again. "I can do it!" he kept telling himself. "I can do it for the sake of my promise. If the other boys could get down, I can!"

At last, he made one great effort. Out went his legs. His feet touched the branch below him. With much scraping and scratching of his hands, he found himself on the branch just below where he had been sitting so securely.

"If I could do that one," Conrado cried triumphantly to himself, "I can do the next one."

Over and over again he tried. It wasn't so bad this time, and before long, the boy found himself on the branch just below. Each

time he went down, it grew easier. Each time he was not so afraid. At last, there was left only the drop to the ground. It looked a long way down with no kindly branches to break the drop this time.

"I'm down this far anyway," Conrado told himself. "I must not fail to keep my promise." So, closing his eyes and making a jump, away he went off the branch into the air.

"There!" he cried, a moment later. "I did it myself. And it wasn't so hard after all."

Then he ran like the wind for home. He was out of breath, his hands were badly scratched and bruised, and his trousers were torn when he ran into the yard. But his eyes were shining, and his cheeks were flushed with the excitement of the victory.

"Father, am I on time?" he asked excitedly.

Father was standing by his auto taking the lunch which Mother was handing him.

"Just on time, to the minute, Conrado," Father said cheerily.

"I didn't break my promise, did I?" Conrado was still shouting excitedly. "I climbed down from a tall mango tree all by myself."

"You climbed down from a tall mango tree all by

yourself!" exclaimed the astonished father who looked almost as excited and happy as Conrado.

"Yes, indeed!" said Conrado proudly. "I couldn't break my promise to you, so I climbed down. And I don't think I shall ever be afraid to climb down again."

And Conrado was just about the happiest boy in the world. He had kept his promise.

## REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What was the strange fear of Conrado?
2. What did his father sometimes have to do?
3. Where were Conrado and his father going?
4. Where did Conrado and the boys go?
5. Where did the boys leave Conrado?
6. Why did Conrado wish to get down from the tree?
7. Did he succeed in getting down?
8. Was it difficult for him to do so?
9. Why was Conrado happy?
10. Why was his father happy?