

The Paradox Cat

by Dale Larner

Kazoo the cat, a sneaky black calico, crept up behind a squirrel who sat motionless in the backyard between a pine tree and the wood fence. Kazoo breathed in the lovely smell of fresh squirrel and crouched down low in the grass, but just as he was about to jump, he heard a strange noise coming from the squirrel that held him in place. It sounded like sobbing.

Kazoo straightened up and tilted his head. He felt sorry for it, but then he remembered how tricky squirrels can be, and he wriggled his hind legs back down into position.

The squirrel turned its head slightly and watched Kazoo.

“What are you waiting for?” the squirrel said.

“What? Why aren’t you running away?” Kazoo said, lifting up again. “Don’t you know cats try and kill squirrels?”

“I know cats try and kill squirrels. That’s what I want. Please just get it over with quickly.”

This certainly was odd, but being a curious cat, Kazoo sat back and casually licked his right front paw and listened.

“I can’t bear it any longer,” the squirrel said, as he turned to Kazoo. “On our way through Alabama, a sudden blizzard separated me from my family. I followed their scent this far, but now I can’t find them anywhere. No doubt a hawk or a cat like you has gotten them, so why not me too?”

Kazoo snatched a quick glance at the squirrel and saw that its gray fur was wet under both eyes. And as it talked about its family, he could hear a tremble in its voice, not from fear, but from pain. Cats don’t normally care about such things, but Kazoo knew just how it felt. He

was lost in the woods once with a pair of owls hooting overhead, and he had imagined they had torn apart his family with their sharp beaks and talons, and he was sure he was next. His whiskers twitched just thinking about it.

“Well, did you try behind that old barn at the end of the woods?” Kazoo said without looking up from his paw.

“No, do you think they could be there?”

“Perhaps, it’s where I’d go if I were a squirrel.”

The squirrel scrambled up to Kazoo.

“Then you’ve got to take me there!”

Kazoo stopped licking his paw but held it in place and looked down at the desperate squirrel. He wanted to comfort it with a few kind words, but cats must always stay cool.

“I was thinking of going down there anyway,” Kazoo said. “I suppose I could take you along, but you’ll need to keep up.”

“Oh, I will, I will! Thank you! By the way, my name’s Nog the squirrel.”

“Mine’s Kazoo the cat. Let’s get going, Nog the squirrel. It’ll be dark soon.”

Kazoo vaulted over the fence and vanished into the woods. Nog darted quickly after him, and the two raced through the dense forest leaping over fallen trees and dashing under thorny bushes. A shortcut led them into a patch of ivy that mounded up into the shape of a giant wreath, and they dove through its middle and out the other side into a field of tall grass and yellow dandelions. Then it was up and over a steep hill and down the other side, tumbling in unison like two rollercoaster cars knocked off their tracks.

They stopped on the crest of another hill and looked down at the barn and farmhouse below. It was just getting dark and the back porch light suddenly snapped on, and a scruffy looking dog sleeping on the porch raised its scruffy looking head.

“Don’t worry,” Kazoo said, as he scratched a sprig of ivy off his ear. “That’s only Rex the puppy. He won’t bark if we stay on this side of the barn. Come on.”

Kazoo drifted down a dark path towards the barn, but Nog paused and scanned the trees for signs of a squirrel’s nest. Disappointed, he followed down the path. Kazoo had already reached the barn and was talking to, of all things, a frog.

“Don’t cats normally try and kill frogs?” Nog said when he had caught up.

“Yes, but me and Ugh have a kind of agreement. Nog the squirrel, meet Ugh the frog.”

The frog blinked at Nog and croaked a few times then said that a mother squirrel and her child had recently moved into the loft in the barn. Nog didn’t wait to hear the rest. He clawed his way up the side of the barn and stopped at the loft opening and glared in. His wife was explaining to their daughter the importance of stocking up with new acorns for the winter. He called out and scampered over and embraced their delighted faces.

The climb was harder for Kazoo, but he made it to the loft opening and pulled himself onto the ledge—which gave Nog’s wife and daughter quite a scare.

“Don’t worry,” Nog said quickly. “This is Kazoo, the cat who doesn’t kill. Kazoo, meet my wife, Mistletoe, and my daughter, Gingerbread.”

Kazoo dropped down into the loft and sat across from the squirrels.

“Then it is true,” Mistletoe said, as she took a timid step forward. “Yesterday a frog told us there was a cat around here.” She took another step closer. “A cat that helped other animals instead of killing them, but we didn’t believe it.”

Kazoo swished his tail back and forth and then lowered his head down to Mistletoe with his ears bent back and his mouth hinting at a grin. A nearby candle gleamed and glimmered in his lowering eyes.

“Don’t let that get around,” he said, and pulled his grin up into a big toothy smile.
