



The Adventures of **Mo**

Chapter 26

By Carol Patton

Chapter 26

The Science Fair

It was early morning when Mo woke up. He was surprised to see the parts of a toaster scattered everywhere on the truck's roof.

“The toaster shot my toast out like a rocket taking off from its launchpad,” said Finchy. “So I took it apart to see if I could fix it.”

“What’s wrong with it?” asked Mo who knew nothing about how toasters worked. “More importantly, do you know how to put it back together?”

Finchy ignored Mo’s questions. “I was hoping we could fix it together,” he said. “Oh, and uh, I think one of the parts fell off the roof. Do we have any glue?”

For nearly the past five hours, Mo and Finchy had been traveling on top of the delivery truck along Interstates 35 North and 80 East, passing highways signs for cities named Des Moines, Davenport, and Cedar Rapids. They were traveling in a

state that was bordered by two rivers – the Missouri River to the west and the Mississippi River to the east.

The truck pulled into the parking lot of an elementary school. The words, *Science Fair*, were written across a big banner hanging above the school's front doors.

Mo and Finchy had never attended school. Everything they knew was passed down from generation to generation. Why couldn't humans do the same? Why did they have to go inside the same building, on the same days, at the same time, to learn? They wanted to see for themselves what made school so special.

But Mo knew he couldn't just walk through the front doors. He had to disguise himself – again. He didn't understand why dogs were never allowed in many of the same places as humans. They were just as smart as people, much easier to get along with, and not nearly as fussy.

The school's principal greeted the truck driver. They opened some of the boxes in the back of the truck that contained T-shirts and caps with the school's name on them.

The truck driver loaded several boxes on a dolly and headed toward the back door with the principal. Now was Finchy's chance. He ripped open two boxes inside the truck and snatched a cap and T-shirt for Mo, the same costume he usually wore to

conceal his identity as a dog. But this time, Finchy made sure the T-shirt was big enough to cover Mo's fluffy tail.

After looking almost human, Mo walked into the gymnasium. Finchy followed, perching himself on one of the lights that hung from the ceiling.

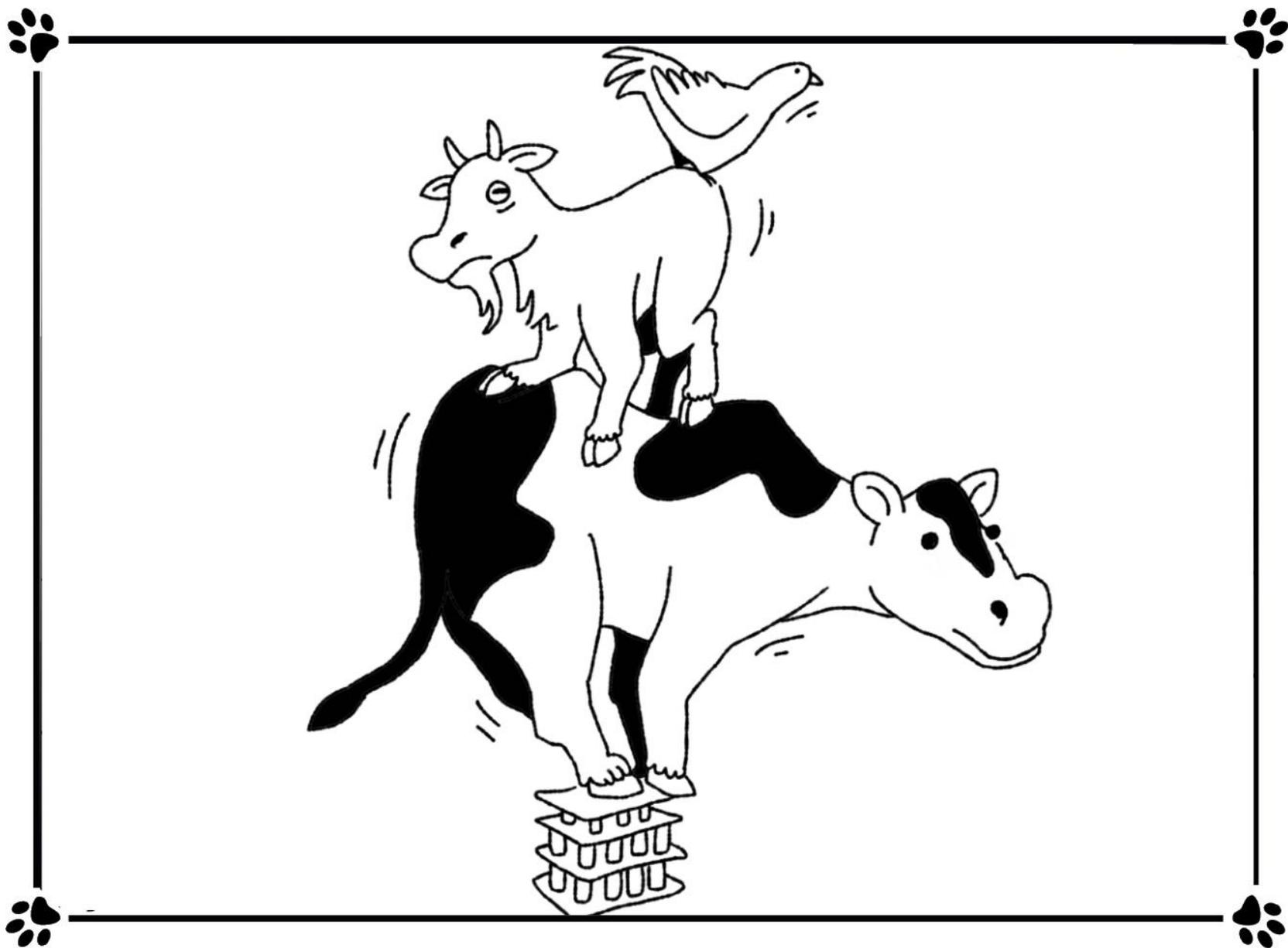
More than fifty children of all ages were standing by tables placed around the room, showing off something they created like a thermometer, balloon-powered rocket, or model of the Earth's layers. One student defied gravity with magnets and paper clips.

Mo sensed the excitement in the air. He was hoping to learn more about how the natural world worked from these very smart kids.

“Know where you can find most of the Earth's liquid water?” asked one student to the small group of people surrounding her. “Here's a hint: It's not in the rivers or lakes and is home to nearly every living thing on this planet.”

Mo's favorite project was made by a second-grader named Jamie. He built a tower out of index cards that was so strong that animals could stand on top of it!

As Mo continued looking at other projects, he overheard two students talking.



“I heard that Jamie’s father made his tower,” said Mark to his friend Scott. “He’s an engineer.”

“That’s not fair,” said Scott. “Let’s tell Mr. Blake. He’s standing right over there.”

The two boys approached Mr. Blake, one of the teachers at the school. Mo followed, curious about why they were so upset.

“Mr. Blake,” said Mark. “Josh told me that Jamie’s father built his tower, that Jamie didn’t do anything. Jamie should be kicked out of the fair.”

“Yeah, I heard that, too,” said Scott, who had only heard this from Mark moments ago.

Mr. Blake was Jamie’s teacher and knew this was nothing more than mean gossip. So he decided to find out how this rumor got started.

He first spoke with Josh who learned from Sam that Jamie’s father built the tower. Sam heard from Mia that Jamie’s father only built part of it. Mia heard from Charlotte that Jamie and his father built it together.

“That’s not what happened,” Charlotte told Mr. Blake. “Jamie built it all by himself.

All I said was that his father is an engineer so Jamie knows a lot of stuff about building things.”

By now, the ugly rumor had spread throughout the school. Some students stopped by to see Jamie’s tower. One called it stupid. Another threatened to knock it down.

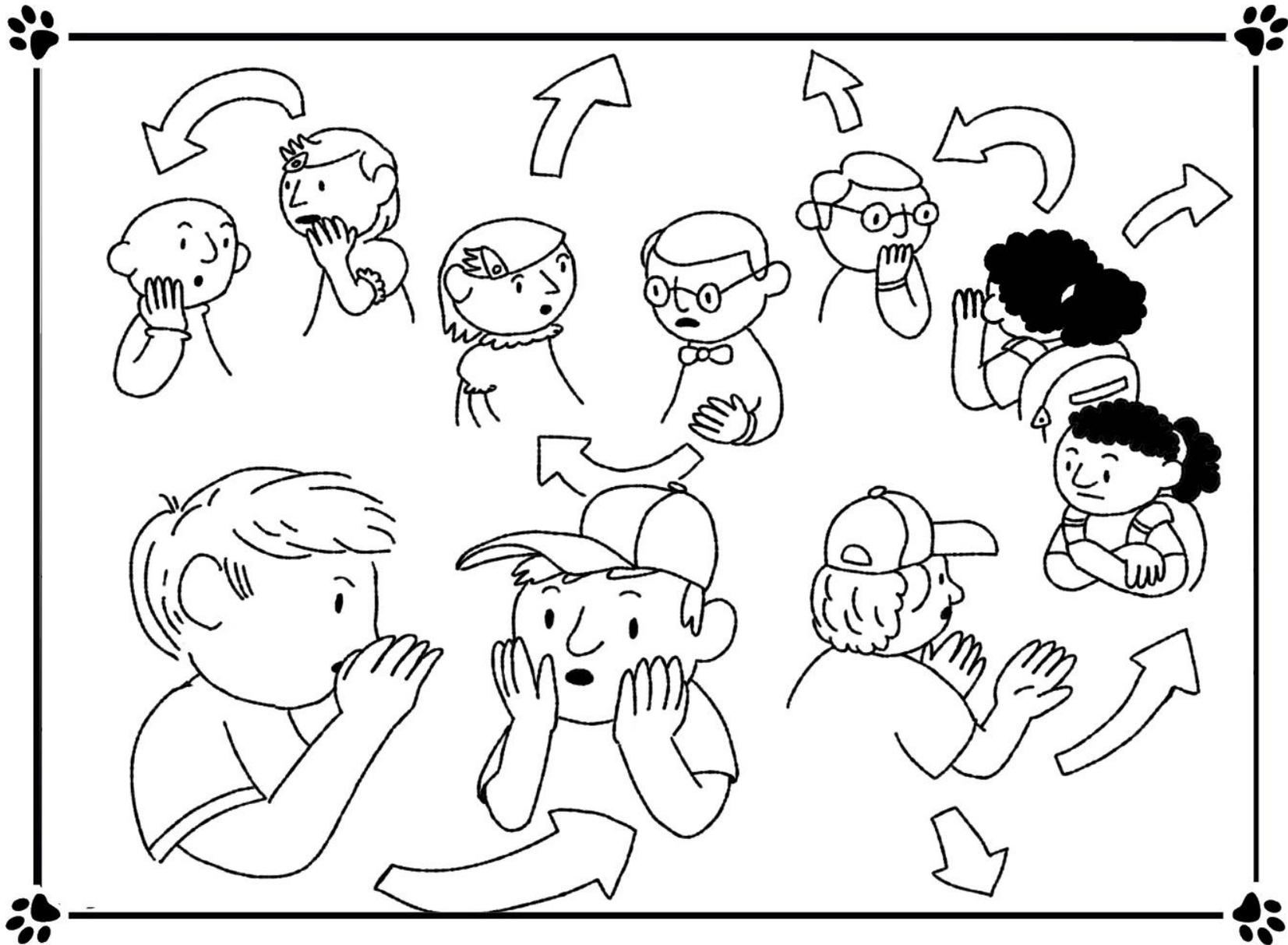
Jamie was upset. He spent a lot of time working on this project. He was very proud of it and hoped he would win first place for his grade.

Why is everyone being so mean to me?

Mo overheard Jamie explain to many different people how he made the tower and why it was so strong. If his father had built it, Jamie wouldn’t be able to answer their questions.

But how could Mo share what he observed? How could he prove that Jamie really built the tower by himself?

Mo had an idea. He borrowed a cell phone on a nearby table and recorded a video of Jamie explaining his project in detail to a group of adults.



Then he connected the cell phone to a projector by the stage at the front of the room. After Finchy turned off the lights, Mo turned up the volume and aimed the projector toward a big screen on the stage.

Suddenly, everyone was watching Jamie answer questions about his project. Some were really hard. But he answered all of them correctly.

When the video ended, everyone in the room was silent, especially Mark and Scott. Some people started clapping. Then more and more clapped until everyone in the room was cheering for Jamie.

Mr. Blake explained to Mark and Scott that what they heard was simply gossip.

“You didn’t bother to find out if what you heard was true,” said Mr. Blake. “Still, you told others. They spread it to their friends who then spread it to more people. It made Jamie upset and now some students may not believe or trust him.”

Mark and Scott felt very bad about what happened.

“I think you both owe Jamie an apology,” said Mr. Blake.

“I’ve got a better idea,” said Mark.

Mark and Scott walked over to the microphone on the stage.

“Uh . . . hello . . . everybody,” said Mark. “Scott and me think Jamie should win first prize for his project. It’s really cool. Oh, and uh, Jamie built it all by himself. No one helped him. For real.”

Jamie was shocked, especially when Mark and Scott apologized for what they did. Then all three carried the tower to the stage so everyone could see it.

While many first, second, and third place ribbons were awarded to students in each grade, Jamie got his wish. He won first place for second-graders.

“When we get back home, Mo, we should make something great – really great – and enter it into a science fair,” said Finchy. “Every brilliant scientist will want to see it.”

Mo didn’t respond. He didn’t want to crush Finchy’s dream, no matter how silly it sounded.

“I’m serious,” continued Finchy. “We could find a way to make rain go up instead of down so there won’t be any more floods, or ooh, I know, make all the water in rivers and lakes taste like chocolate.”

Mo laughed. “I think we make better explorers than scientists,” he said. “We can’t even figure out how a toaster works.”