



The Adventures of **Mo**

Chapter 45

By Carol Patton

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The Frog with the Hot Pink Hat

This was one of the strangest contests Mo and Finchy had ever seen.

Several men were standing in a circle, each holding a neatly folded T-shirt that was frozen. The first one who could unfold and wear his shirt would win.

The men smacked the shirts against the hot cement. Some even stepped on them to help loosen the layers of frost or ice on them. After seven minutes of smacking, stomping, and pulling, one man finally was able to unfold his shirt and then stuck his head and arms through its openings.

“We wave a winner!” shouted the judge who then handed the man his prize money. The man’s smile was so big that it covered his entire face.

Mo and Finchy looked at each other, not knowing why humans would create such a contest. It didn't involve any skill like running, jumping, digging, sniffing, swimming, flying, or anything fun.

It was a very hot and sticky day. Mo and Finchy were hoping to snatch a frozen T-shirt and spread it out like a picnic blanket. They wanted to lay on top of it to cool off. No such luck. At the end of the contest, the men walked away, each carrying their frozen T-shirt.

The day before, Mo and Finchy had been riding on top of the delivery truck for more than seven hours, mostly along Interstate 55 South. They crossed two state lines. They saw signs for cities named "Jackson" in one state and then "Alexandria" in another. Many of the cars that passed them on the highway had license plates with unusual phrases: "Land of Opportunity" or "Sportsman's Paradise".

Alex, the truck driver, pulled off the highway. Mo and Finchy began seeing road signs for the Beauregard Watermelon Festival at the Beauregard Parish Fairgrounds. What was a watermelon? What was a Parish? Neither of them had ever heard of those words before now.

Alex pulled into the fairgrounds and began unloading boxes from the back of his

truck. Mo and Finchy walked around the festival. Watermelons were everywhere. Even the archway to the festival's entrance looked like the inside of a watermelon.

Mo and Finchy wondered what was so special about the fruit. Why did humans like it so much?

A young boy in front of them was eating a slice of watermelon. Somehow, it slipped out of his hands and fell on the ground. He started to cry. His mother began comforting him and didn't even notice Mo or Finchy. This was their chance. Mo grabbed the slice off the ground and ran behind some bushes.

Finchy poked at the watermelon with his beak. Mo touched it with his paw. It was cold and wet. They both liked its reddish-pink color. Still, it didn't look like anything they had ever eaten.

Mo bit into the watermelon. His eyes lit up. Finchy then bit off a big chunk. Within the next few minutes, they ate the whole thing.

“Want more?”

The voice came from behind them. They turned around and saw a bright green frog

wearing a hot pink hat.

“It’s delicious, isn’t it?” asked the frog that introduced herself as Cora. “Watermelon is my favorite thing to eat during the summer!”

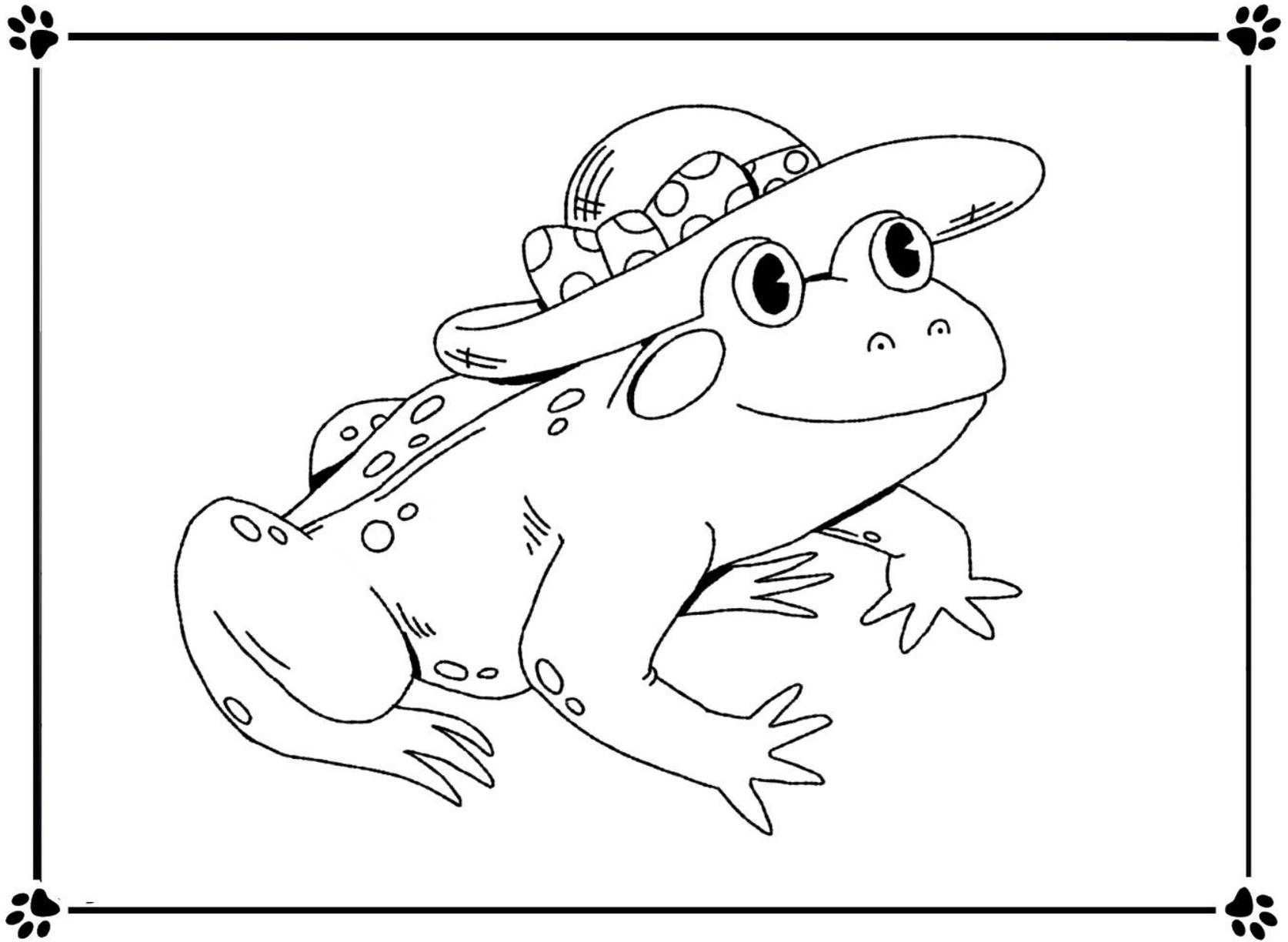
Mo and Finchy had seen many frogs before but had never spoken to one, especially a frog that wore a hat. They introduced themselves and asked Cora if she knew the name of the state they were visiting.

“Can’t remember the name but I know it’s the only state in this country that starts with the letter L,” she said.

“Can you tell us anything else?” asked Finchy.

Cora thought very hard.

“My brother once told me that there are half as many alligators that live here as there are humans,” she said. “My best friend said that the country’s first opera was performed in this state, in a city called New Orleans. That’s everything I know.”



Cora invited Mo and Finchy to her home for more watermelon. She introduced them to her brother, Leo, and cousin, Josie. They didn't waste any time eating a gigantic watermelon before resting on the cool grass.

Mo and Finchy told them about the strange contest they had watched earlier that day.

“They hold that contest every year,” said Leo. “It’s the dumbest thing I ever saw.”

“No, it’s not!” shouted Cora. “It’s a lot of fun.”

“You’ll have to excuse my sister,” said Leo. “She means well but she’s not like the rest of us that live here.”

Cora rolled her eyes. “My brother thinks everyone has to act and think like him,” she said. “Practical. Sensible. Rational. Well, I’m not that way. I’m more the creative type.”

Leo laughed and pointed to her hot pink hat.

“Is that what you call creative?” he asked. “How many frogs do you know that wear

hats? The answer is zip. Zero. Why can't you be like everyone else? Why do you have to be so . . . so different?"

Mo and Finchy kept quiet. They didn't want to get in the middle of a fight between a brother and sister.

Josie tried to change the subject.

"For the past few weeks, Cora has been working very hard on a giant project," she said to Mo and Finchy. "She is turning a very drab pond into a beautiful resort for all the frogs that live around here. No one can see it until she's done."

Leo told Mo and Finchy that this project was nothing but a waste of time. So long as the pond was filled with water, it was good enough for him and every other frog.

Cora told them that she finished the project late last night. She asked Josie, Mo, and Finchy if they would like to be the first ones to see it. They eagerly nodded. Even though he wasn't invited, Leo said he wanted to come. He didn't want to pass up another chance to make fun of his sister.

Cora led the way. She hopped from spot to spot for about an hour and then stopped.

“Right behind this small tree is the resort’s main entrance,” she said. “Ready?”

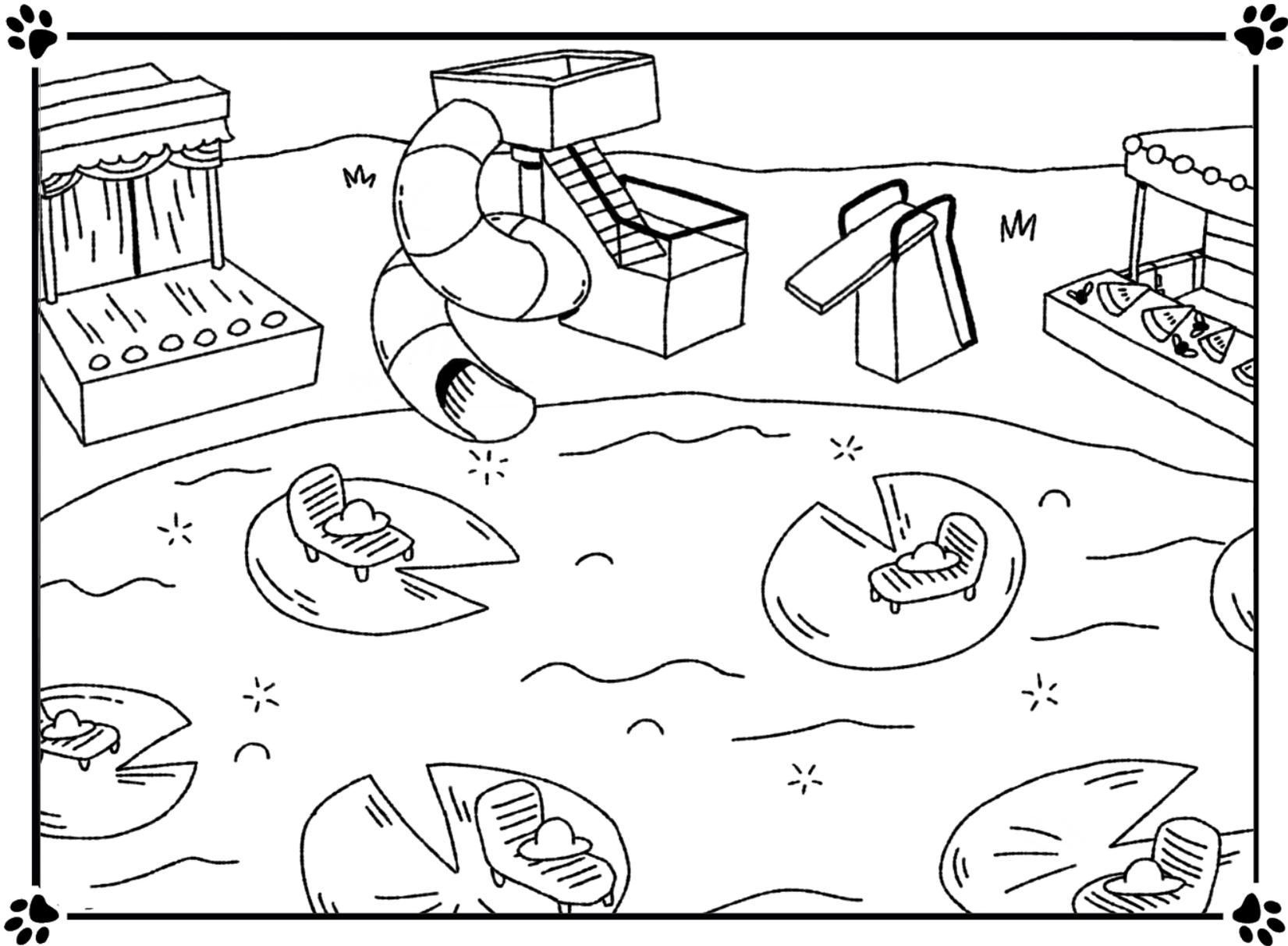
Cora pushed back one of the tree’s low branches so everyone could see the resort. They all looked at each other. They were speechless.

Beautiful purple, white, pink, red, and yellow flowers wrapped around a huge archway. A winding dirt path led to a giant pond. On both sides of the path were flowers. Some were striped. Others were polka-dotted.

The pond’s water was sparkling. Bubbles floated to the top. At the water’s edge was a slide and diving board. Many lily pads were floating on the pond’s surface. Each one had a lounge chair on it with a bright pink hat, just like the one Cora was wearing. Frogs could wear the hat to protect themselves from the hot sun.

On the right side of the pond was a snack bar that served everything frogs loved to eat, including watermelon. On the left side was a stage. Any frogs in a band or that wanted to dance, act, sing, juggle, or tell jokes could perform.

“So,” said Cora as she turned toward Leo. “Still think being different is bad, that everybody has to act and think like you?”



Ever since he was a tadpole, Leo thought his sister was silly because she acted so different. He believed that frogs would be happier, even get along better, if they all thought the same way, acted the same way, and believed in the same things.

But after seeing what his sister created, Leo began wondering if maybe, just maybe, he was wrong. He thought the resort was amazing. He could never create anything like it. Not in a million years. Not many frogs could.

Now he began to understand that it takes all kinds of frogs to make this world work, no matter how different or silly they may seem.

Leo jumped into the cool pond, hopped on a lily pad, and relaxed in a lounge chair.

“This one’s mine!” he shouted after putting a pink hat on his head. “Cora, I’ll only say this once. I was wrong. You were right. I’ll never make fun of you again for being you.”

Cora couldn’t stop smiling the rest of the afternoon. She swam out to a lily pad and rested on a lounge chair. Mo, Finchy, and Josie did the same. They felt like they were in paradise.

Leo and Josie told Mo and Finchy more about the state. They said the southern border faced a big body of water called the Gulf of Mexico. Sometimes, bad storms named hurricanes would cause so much wind that tall trees would fall to the ground and so much rain that many places would flood.

Mo and Finchy had never heard of hurricanes before and wondered if the Gulf of Mexico was anywhere near Florida.

After cooling off for several hours, Mo and Finchy were ready to head back home. They thanked the frogs for a wonderful afternoon and left.

“That resort was really something,” said Mo to Finchy. “I hope Leo keeps his promise and never makes fun of his sister again.”

Finchy agreed and then added, “Hey, I just got a great idea. Actually, it’s magnificent.”

Mo prepared himself. Finchy’s magnificent ideas were often big, bold, and well, just plain bad.

“Why don’t we build a swimming pool with a snack bar on the roof of this delivery

truck?” he asked. “It doesn’t have to be very big. The pool could have a diving board and two lounge chairs next to it. What do you think?”

Mo laughed out loud. The roof of the truck barely had enough room for their stuff, let alone for something big like a swimming pool and snack bar.

“Well?” asked Finchy. “What do you think? This is the best idea I have ever had. My brain must be working overtime!”

“Your brain is tired,” said Mo. “I think it’s been working way too hard and just stopped thinking.”