



# The Adventures of **Mo**

**Chapter 24**

By Carol Patton

## Chapter 24

### Toto, the Cheater

The pupils in Mo's eyes grew large. His whole body started trembling. He had difficulty breathing.

Mo and Finchy had entered the Ouachita (Wash-i-tah) National Forest. While Finchy was chatting and chirping with other birds, Mo was busy exploring.

*What kinds of animals live in this forest? Were they the same as those back home? Are they just as friendly?*

Mo began sniffing everything in his path and came across an unusual smell. It wasn't the scent of any animal or even human. He followed it for a long time and then poked his head between two thorny bushes to see what was on the other side.

That's when he saw them.

Two gigantic furry animals with two arms and two legs were standing around a campfire. They seemed a million feet tall. Two smaller animals were running around, chasing each other and laughing. They all walked upright and even looked human. Well, almost.

Mo and Finchy had been riding on top of the delivery truck for almost a day, traveling mostly along Interstate 35 South, seeing highway signs for cities like Tulsa and Broken Arrow. Then the truck driver headed east, stopping in a small village at the forest's edge named Talihina (Tah-luh-hee-nuh).

They overheard several people talking to the truck driver but no one mentioned anything about creatures this large, this hairy, or this scary.

Who were they? What were they? Where did they come from?

“Think they’re friendly?” Finchy whispered to Mo.

One of the smaller animals spotted Mo’s white face between the green bushes and ran straight toward him.

Mo and Finchy froze. They didn’t want to be the animals’ next meal.

“Hey, dad!” shouted the small animal. “We have guests!”

His father walked toward them. While Finchy could fly away without getting caught, Mo could never outrun this enormous creature.

“Good morning,” said the father. “My name is Albert. Want to join us for a late lunch?”

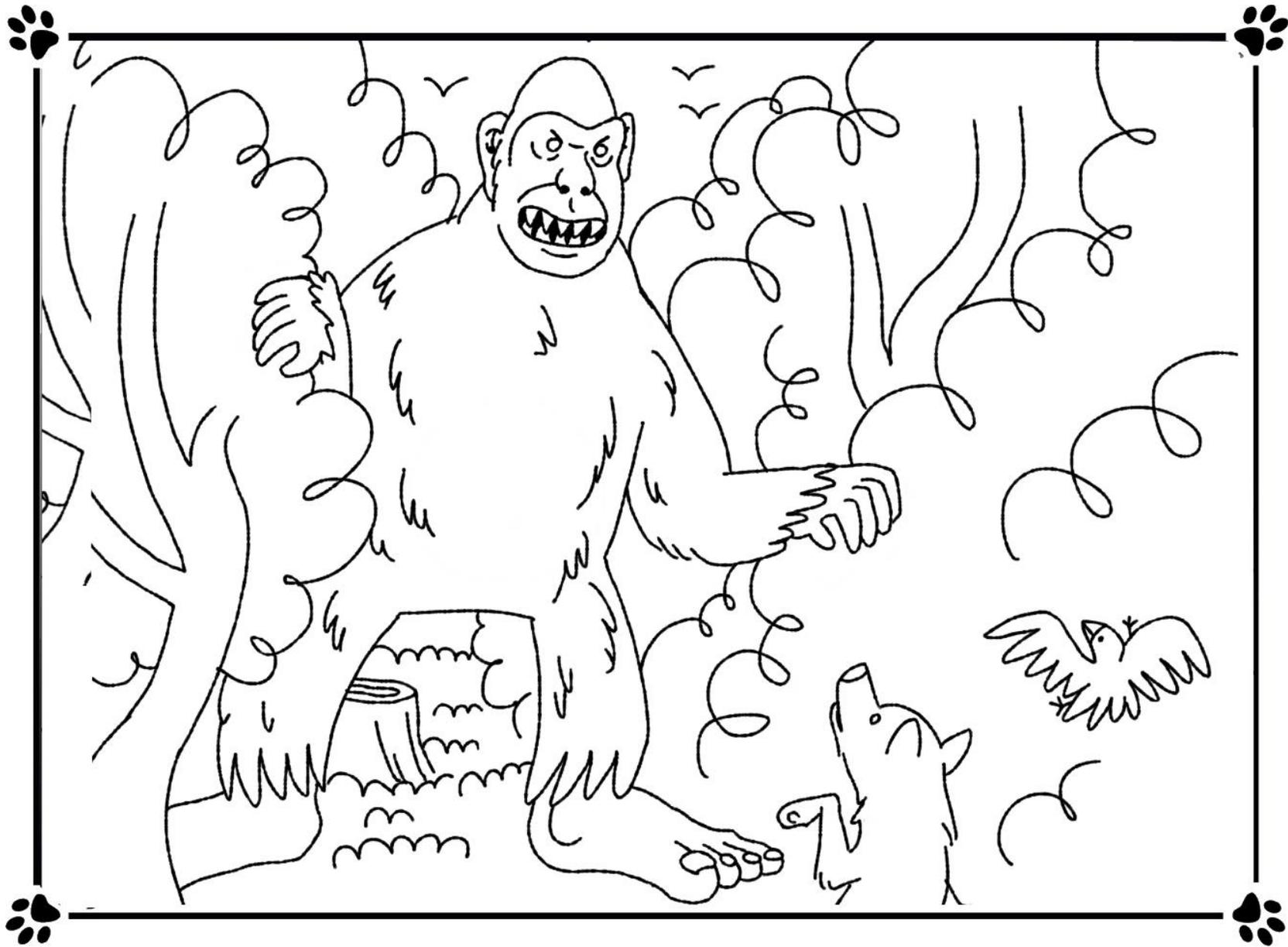
Mo exhaled. He didn’t realize that he had been holding his breath.

“Um . . . um . . . sure,” mumbled Mo, not knowing what to say or do. “My name is Mo and uh, this is my friend, Finchy.”

“We’ve got enough food for everyone,” said Albert whose smile revealed large jagged teeth.

Mo and Finchy followed him to the campfire. He introduced them to his wife, Jade, and their two children, Mara and Clyde. No one in Albert’s family had ever seen a dog.

“Do you feel soft and squishy?” asked Mara. “Most animals don’t let me touch them. They run away every time I come near them.”



“Why are your ears pointy?” asked Clyde. “Why do you have four legs instead of two like me? Why are they short? What it does it feel like to have a tail? Why are you so white? Why. . .”

His questions seemed endless.

“Don’t mind them,” said Albert. “We see many birds but never, well, what exactly are you, Mo?”

“I’m a dog,” he said proudly. “An American Eskimo dog.”

While everyone began eating berries and nuts wrapped in leaves, Albert shared his family’s story.

“Jade and I were born in this forest about one hundred years ago,” he said. “Actually, it may have been longer than that. We lost track of the years. Since we believe every day is special, we really don’t need to celebrate birthdays.”

Mo studied their faces. No wrinkles. Anywhere. Not even one white or gray hair.

*I'm only five years old. They don't look one day older than me.*

“Humans call us by different names,” said Jade. “The most common are Sasquatch and Big Foot. We travel everywhere. Washington. Idaho. Montana. Utah.

Clyde interrupted his mother.

“Wanna come to our canoe race?” he asked Mo and Finchy. “Everyone will be there.”

Albert explained that many of the local Sasquatch children race canoes in a small river not far from their campsite.

Mo and Finchy had never watched a canoe race. They quickly finished their meal and walked to the river with Albert and his family. A dozen small canoes sat on the river's shore. Mara and Clyde climbed into separate canoes while other Sasquatch children did the same.

“Now remember what I told you to do when you go around the bend,” said Albert as he and Jade gently pushed Mara's and Clyde's canoes into the river.

Moments later, someone shouted, “Ready, set, canoe!”

Mara and Clyde began paddling very fast. Everyone was cheering, especially Finchy, who hovered over them, chirping loudly while excitedly flapping his wings.

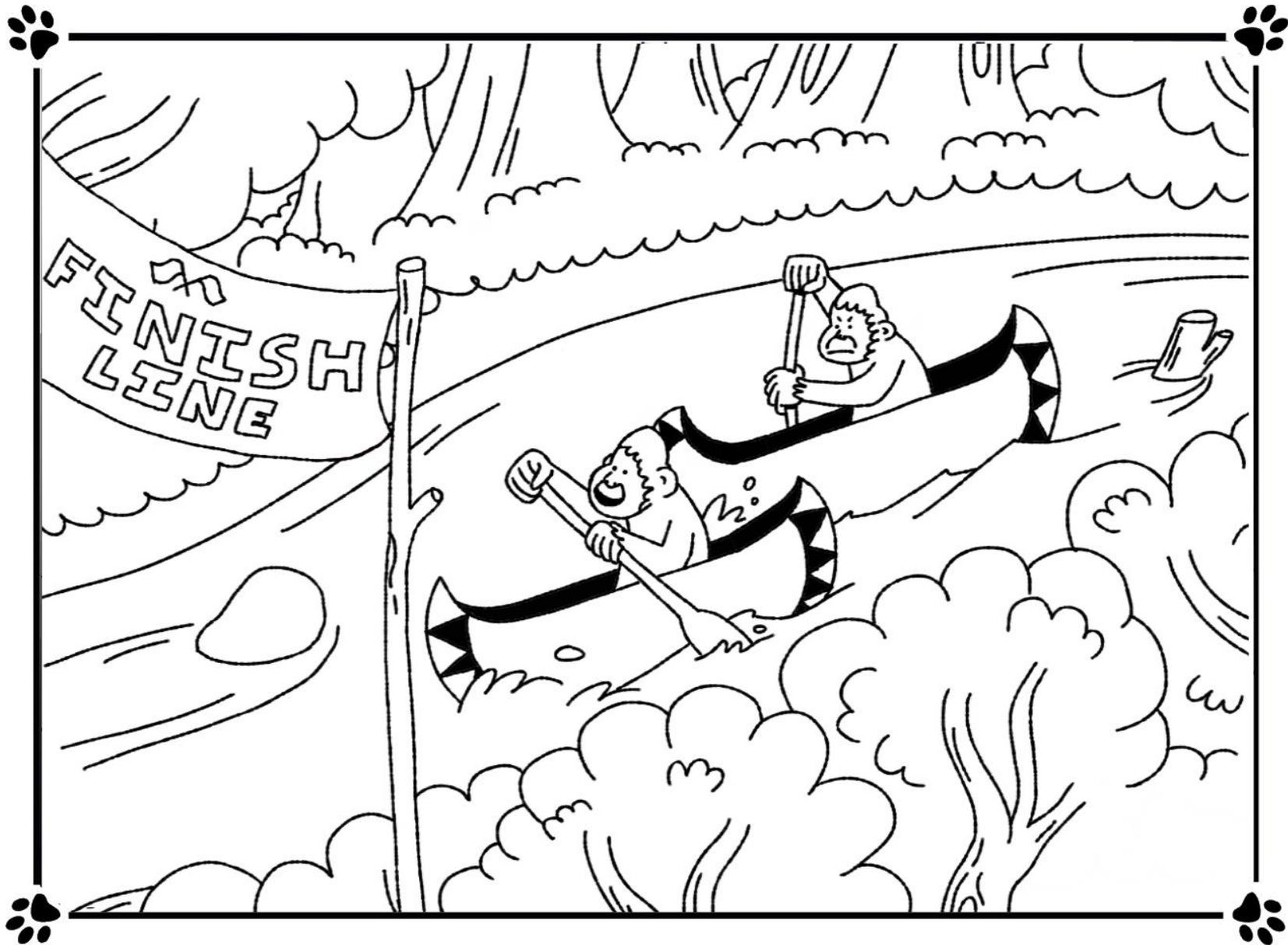
But about halfway through the race, Toto, one of the younger children, began slamming his canoe into other children's canoes, trying to push them into the mud or rocks at the river's edge so they'd get stuck and he could win the race.

Mara and several others realized what was happening. They surrounded Toto with their canoes. He couldn't move in any direction. Their self-sacrifice allowed the rest of the children to finish the race. When it was over, Mara, Toto, and the others canoed to the finish line where most of the children and their family members were now waiting.

When Toto climbed out of his canoe, the children surrounded him.

"You cheated!" angrily shouted one young boy.

"You're so selfish," said another. "I'll never trust you again!"



Everyone was staring at Toto, wondering what to do next. Should he be punished? Should he be banned from canoe racing?

To everyone's surprise, Toto didn't apologize. He didn't believe he did anything wrong. What was the harm in wanting to win?

Toto's mother spoke to him in front of the crowd.

“Think of all the bad things that happened because you cheated,” she said. “Your friends may not trust you the next time you play with them. Everyone here is upset because you took the fun out of the race. Now you'll never know if you could have won on your own, without cheating.”

Toto stood silent. He began to understand why cheating was wrong. He stared at the ground. Tears started flowing down his cheeks.

“I'm . . . I'm sorry, so sorry,” said Toto who felt guilty and ashamed. “I didn't know that cheating would make everybody feel this way, especially me.”

Was Toto sincere? Would he cheat again? Did he learn his lesson?

The Sasquatch decided to give him a second chance. But that didn't mean he was off the hook. He still needed to earn back the trust and respect of his family and friends.

It was now time for Mo and Finchy to leave. While walking back to the delivery truck they thought about the valuable lesson Toto had learned.

“I wonder,” said Finchy. “Are you still cheating if you don't get caught?”

Mo smiled. “You'll always know you cheated,” he said. “And that's what counts.”