



The Adventures of **Mo**

Chapter 28

By Carol Patton

Chapter 28

Mo Learns a Lesson

“Strike three!” shouted the umpire after a racoon swung at a ball that bounced off the ground.

“You’ll do better next time,” said Mo to the racoon, trying to cheer her up.

Mo and Finchy were playing in a baseball game. But it wasn’t just any game. It was animal-style.

Their team – the Four Paws – were playing against the state champions – The Fast Tails. Every player hit the ball with their tail. The players out in the field were birds who tried to catch fly balls while soaring through the air. The umpires were big black bears that no one argued with unless they wanted to see their huge fangs.

The day before, Mo and Finchy had traveled for more than nine hours nonstop on top of the delivery truck. They passed signs for I-75 South, I-69 west, and for cities

named Lexington, Frankfort, and Louisville. The state they were visiting was bounded by the Ohio River in the north and the Appalachian Mountains in the east.

After driving for most of the day, the truck driver stopped at a hotel for the night. The next morning, he drove to the Louisville Slugger Museum & Factory.

“What the heck is that leaning against the building?” Mo asked Finchy as the driver began unloading boxes from the back of his truck.

“You’ve never seen a baseball bat before?” said Finchy rather surprised. “Ever hear of a sport called baseball?”

Mo shook his head back and forth. Back home, people and animals played and competed in all kinds of sports. Skiing. Snowmobiling. Fishing. Sled dog racing. He had never heard of baseball and was amazed at the bat’s size. It towered over the museum’s roof and seemed to touch the clouds.

Finchy explained the game to him, telling him that he and his bird friends watch baseball games every summer while perched on stadium lights. “But the bats people use are much smaller,” he said.



A woman come out of the museum and shouted to the truck driver, “Hey Alex, were you able to pick up those extra supplies we need?”

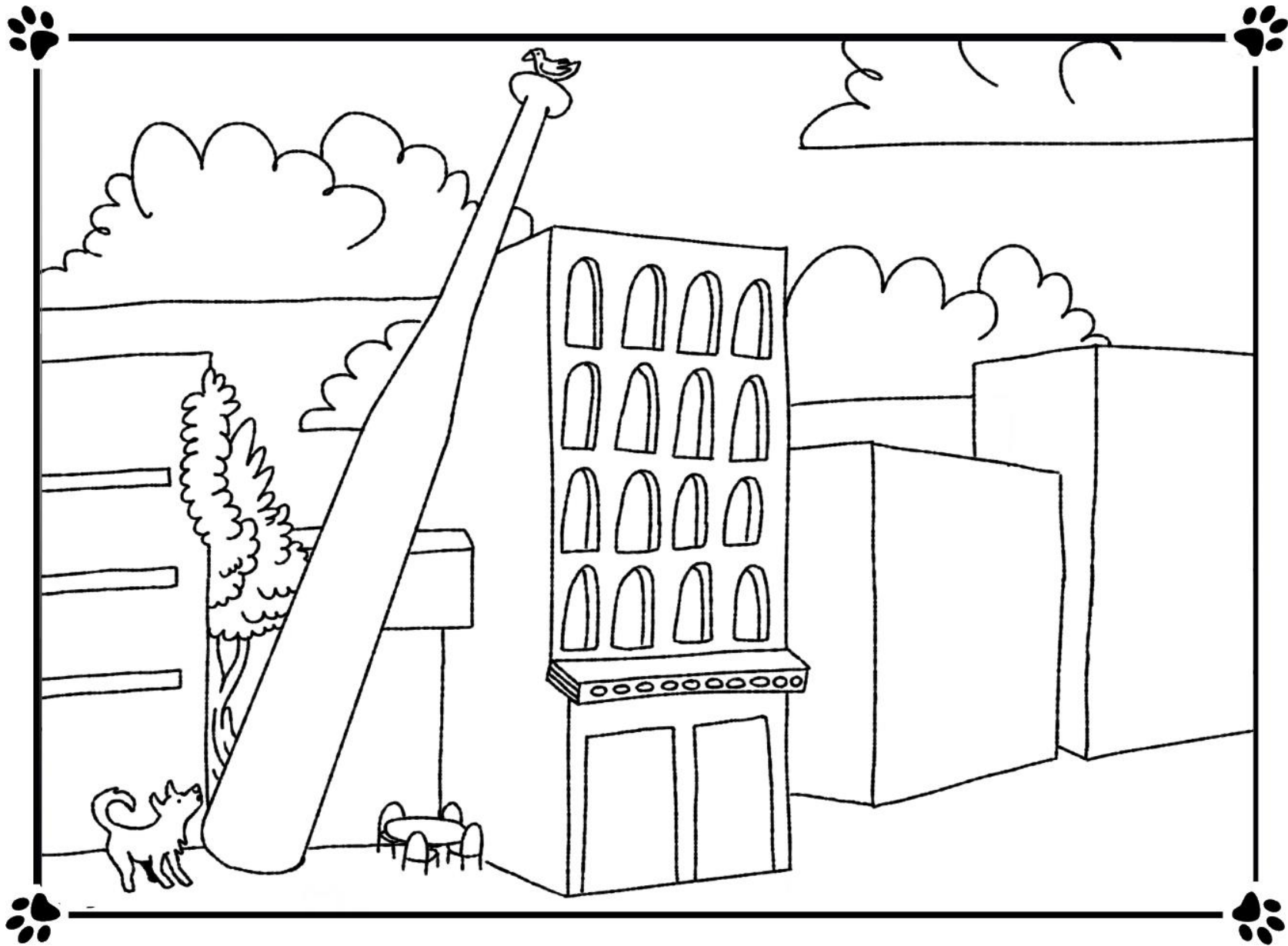
Mo and Finchy looked at each other. They had been traveling on top of this delivery truck for a very long time and never knew the driver’s name – until now.

“Makes sense that his name is Alex,” said Finchy. “He’s always yapping on his cell phone. Probably named after Alexander Graham Bell.”

As Alex and the woman entered the museum, Mo climbed down the ladder on the delivery truck and walked toward the huge bat at the museum’s front door. Mo sniffed it, touched it. Then he looked up – way up – titling his neck all the way back to see Finchy sitting on top of it.

Mo noticed a big brown dog walking toward him. He introduced himself as Tank.

“Ever play baseball?” he asked. “Our third basedog quit. Something about not enough treats after the game. I was hanging around the museum in hopes of finding animals that like baseball and could play in a game today.



Mo didn't know what to say. No one had ever invited him to play on their team. He wasn't exactly, well, good at sports—any sport.

“We also need a left fielder,” Tank said to Finchy. “Interested?”

Mo and Finchy talked it over and decided to play. Since the game wouldn't start for another two hours, Tank offered to coach them.

They walked to a small baseball field a short distance away. There were many dogs, racoons, birds, and squirrels gathered in different spots on the field. Some were moving their tails this way and that way, trying to perfect their swing. Others were playing catch or chased each other around the bases.

After Tank introduced Mo and Finchy, he made good on his promise. For the next two hours, he showed Finchy how to grab fly balls with his claws and taught them when to swing at balls, how to steal bases, and warned Mo against chasing some of the smaller players around the field for fun.

It was time for the game to start. The Four Paws were up to bat. Jackson, a tiny black dog, dug his four legs into the dirt, and swung as hard as he could, hitting the ball

smack down the center of the field. Both the second and third basedogs couldn't grab it fast enough so Jackson made it to first base.

It didn't take long before the bases were loaded. Tank was up next and hit a home run. Just like that, the Four Paws were leading four to nothing.

But the next player struck out.

"Why did you swing at that ball?" shouted Tank to his teammate, a racoon. "It hit the ground! And your tail was straight up in the air. Next time, curve it."

A large spotted dog named Duke batted next.

"Strike one," shouted the umpire.

"Stay balanced!" shouted Tank.

As hard as he tried to hit the ball, Duke still struck out. Suddenly, the team had two outs. One more out and it would be the other team's turn to bat.

Mo was up next. He tried very hard to remember everything Tank taught him. *Curve my tail. Dig in my front paws for balance. Stand on the toes of my back paws to improve my swing.*

The first pitch zoomed past Mo's face.

“Strike one!” shouted the umpire.

Mo thought playing this game would be easy. Not much to it. Hit a ball and then run. Well, this wouldn't be the first time he was wrong.

The next pitch whizzed by Mo's face so fast that he didn't even swing. But the third time, Mo hit the ball, which slowly rolled toward second base. The second basedog was too busy chasing a frog to notice. Mo safely made it to first base.

The small crowd began cheering Mo's name. He was thrilled and then bowed before the fans.

Finchy flew over to Mo to give him advice.

“Don't steal second base,” he said. “I've seen this happen before. The pitcher

pretends to throw the ball to the batter but suddenly turns around and throws it to the second basedog. You'll get caught in a pickle or be stranded between two bases."

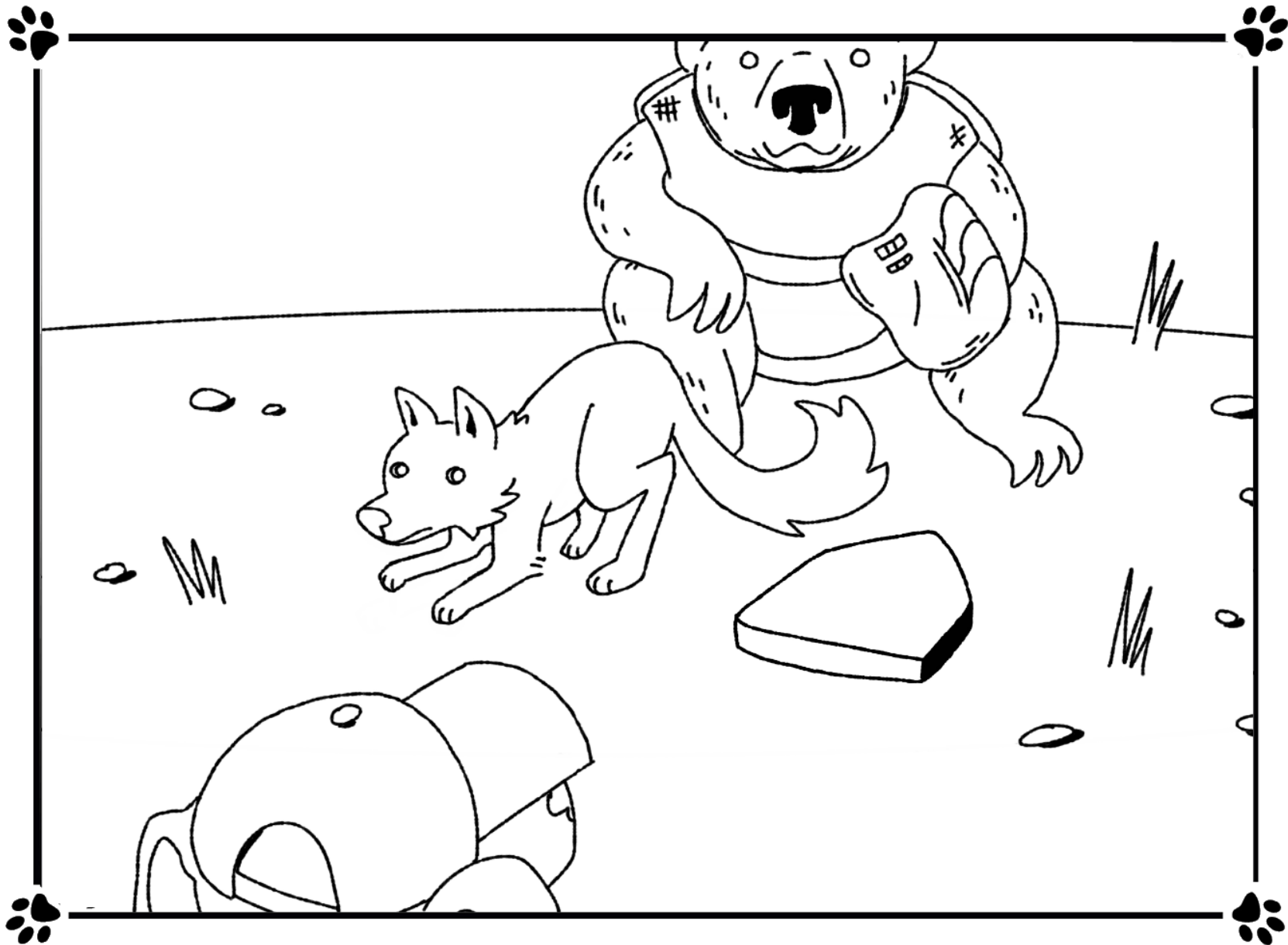
Mo was too excited to hear anything Finchy told him. As soon as the pitcher pretended to throw the ball, Mo did exactly what Finchy told him not to do – he ran toward second base.

The pitcher threw the ball to the second basedog. After catching the ball, the dog ran toward Mo. So did the first basedog. They kept throwing the ball back and forth to each other while squeezing Mo in the middle. It only took a few moments before the umpire shouted, "You're out!"

Mo froze. How did this happen? I made it to first base. I'm a fast runner. How can I be out?

"Mo, c'mon, get off the field," whispered Finchy to Mo. "You're embarrassing me."

Mo looked around and saw that everybody was staring at him. He ran off the field with Finchy close behind.



Tank approached Mo.

“Why did you try to steal second base?” he asked Mo. “I told you not to do that.”

Mo stared at the ground, not knowing what to tell him.

“The second basedog didn’t seem to be paying attention,” said Finchy, trying to get Mo out of hot water. “She was digging a hole.”

“It’s a trick she plays on new players,” Tank said. “And you fell for it.”

Tank walked away angry.

Mo felt bad, really bad. He was warned twice – by Tank and then again Finchy – not to steal second base. But he thought he knew better. He was full of himself and wouldn’t listen to anyone’s advice.

The baseball game had two innings. The Four Paws ended up winning, five to four. In the last inning, a batter on the Fast Tails hit the ball so far that many animals began cheering, believing it was going to be a home run. But Finchy caught it while flying through the air.

The players on the Four Paws wanted Finchy to join their team. But they didn't ask Mo. Finchy politely turned them down, explaining about his journey with Mo to Florida.

“Why didn't you listen to Tank or me about stealing second base?” asked Finchy as Mo and him walked back to the delivery truck.

Mo was silent. He felt ashamed.

“My uncle's favorite saying is, ‘Some birds are better at hunting worms than others,’” said Finchy.

“What do worms have to do with this?” asked Mo, rather confused.

Finchy ignored Mo's question. He talked endlessly about the best way to find worms, which ones were the tastiest, and how many he could stuff in his tiny mouth at once.

Mo lost patience and interrupted Finchy's never-ending chatter.

“What was your uncle trying to tell you?” asked Mo.

“That someone may know more than you, be better at something than you, or have a better idea,” Finchy said. “That’s why we need to listen to each other. Except when it comes to my Aunt Helen. She thinks she knows everything about everything. Never listens. Just talks, talks, talks. Can you believe I’m even related to her?”