



The Adventures of **Mo**

Chapter 47

By Carol Patton

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Star of the Show

“Look at the size of those . . . those . . . what do you think they are?” asked Mo to Finchy.

They had just arrived at the Sandhill Crane National Wildlife Refuge. Not far from them were creatures with long necks. They stood at least four feet tall and had gray bodies, white cheeks, and a bright red crown or red spot on their heads.

“They’re birds,” said Finchy. “Actually cranes. I’ve seen them fly but never stopped to say hello or chat. Don’t know how friendly they are.”

The cranes were stretching and moving their bodies this way and that way. Some made very loud noises that sounded like trumpets while others honked like geese or made snoring sounds.

Mo and Finchy wondered if they should introduce themselves. They were a little

afraid of them. Each crane was at least five times bigger than Mo and Finchy combined.

“See those two twirling around?” said Finchy, pointing to two cranes on their left. “It looks like they’re dancing.”

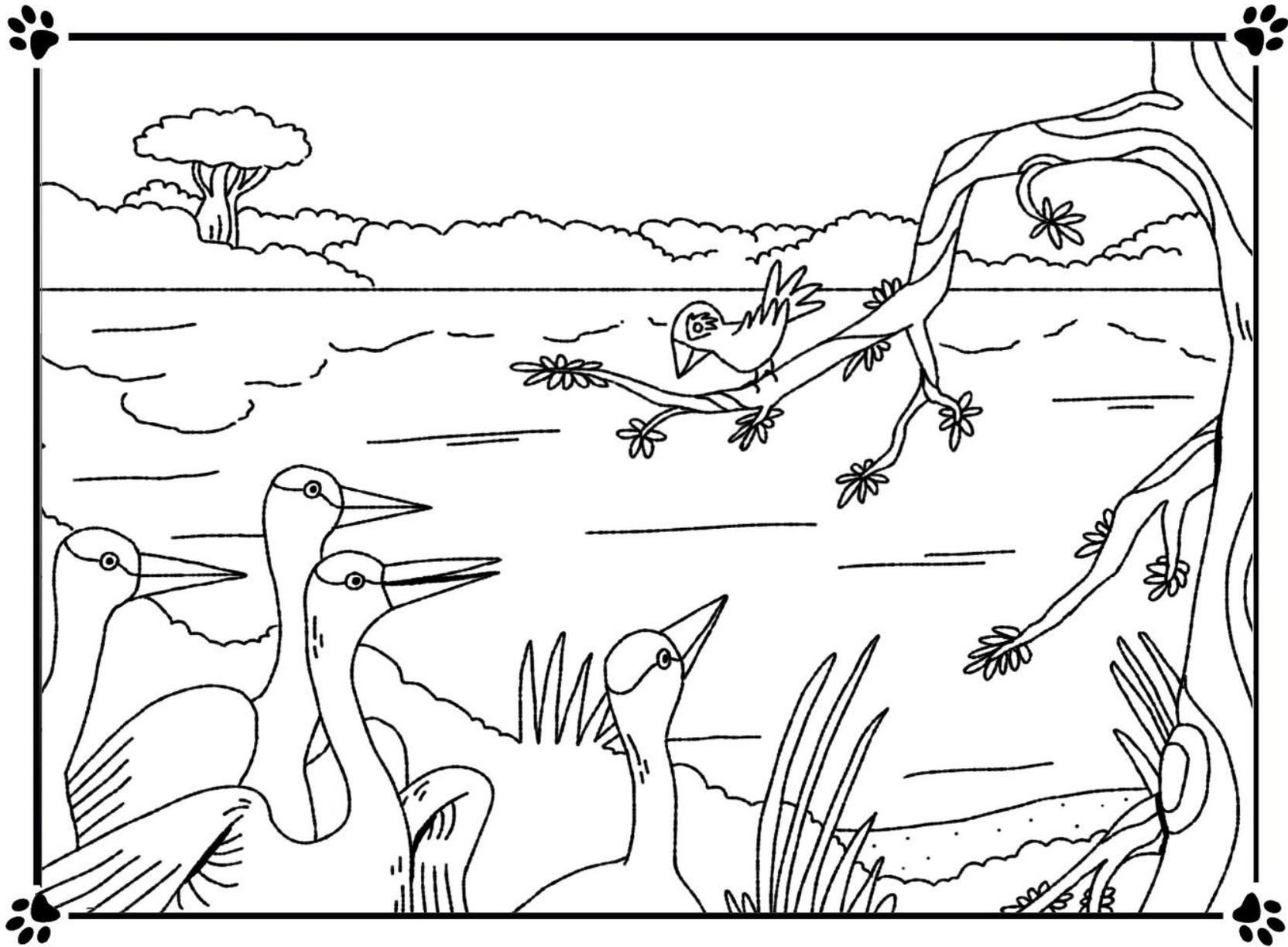
Mo and Finchy didn’t know how to dance. But Finchy always wanted to learn. He told Mo that he would introduce himself to the cranes. If he chirped three times, that meant they seemed nice. But if they were mean, he would just fly away.

Finchy flew toward the cranes. He landed on a tree branch that was close by but beyond their reach.

“Good morning,” he said. “My name is Finchy. Are you dancers?”

Several of the cranes walked closer to him.

“Yes,” said one crane named Haley. “We’re dancing in a show this afternoon. Every year, some of us that live here put on a show for animals throughout the state. Some come from as far away as Ashland. They all come to see us dance.



Finchy grew excited. *These birds know about states and dancing. Maybe they can tell us where Florida is. Maybe they'll teach me how to dance!*

Finchy chirped three times, loud enough for Mo to hear. Then he asked Haley if she knew the name of her home state.

She thought for a minute before asking the other cranes. No one knew.

By now, Mo was standing next to Finchy under the tree branch. Finchy introduced him and explained that they were trying to return a lost key to someone who lived in Florida. He told the cranes that they were traveling all over this country on top of a delivery truck. Just yesterday, he said, they rode for about eight hours, partly along Interstate 20 East and US 49 South. They passed many cities called Jackson, Collins, and Wiggins before arriving here, in Gautier.

“We’re trying to find a state named Florida,” said Finchy.

“We don’t know anything about Florida but can tell you some things about our home or community,” Haley said. “Then maybe you can figure out what state we’re in and which way to go to get to Florida.”

The cranes told Mo and Finchy that the largest river in the country runs through this state and nine others that were north of here. Haley gave them a big hint: the river and state shared the same name.

“The river is more than two thousand miles long,” said Haley. “Many of our friends – otters, coyotes, and deer– live along the riverbank.”

Other cranes bragged about a shoe store in a city called Vicksburg that sold the first pair of shoes in a shoebox more than one hundred years ago.

Mo and Finchy didn’t know why a shoebox or even shoes were so important since no animal needed them. But they tried to look interested because the cranes seemed so excited. They didn’t want to be rude.

One of the cranes named Wendy kept checking her watch. “Anyone know where Vicky is?” she asked. “She’s late. That’s not like her.”

The cranes looked around the big field. No sign of Vicky. Some started to get worried.

“Oh no,” said Wendy. “Vicky just texted. She hurt her foot this morning and can hardly walk, let alone dance. What do we do now? She’s the star of our show.”

The dancers were upset. The show was in two hours. They would have to cancel it unless they found another bird to take Vicky's place. But who? It would have to be someone that was a quick learner.

Many animals from around the state would soon be arriving. The cranes had to think fast.

"Shelly would be great but she's on tour," said one crane.

"Pinky could do it," said another crane. "But I don't like working with her. Very bossy."

The cranes rattled off several more names but no one seemed to fit.

"C'mon, everyone, think harder," said Haley. "There's got to be one bird that can take her place."

Mo's ears perked up. He knew how badly Finchy wanted to learn how to dance.

"My friend can help you," said Mo. "Finchy may not be as big or as good as Vicky but he's smart and a quick learner. He won't let you down. Promise."

Finchy couldn't believe his ears. *Did Mo really say that?* It seemed that Mo had more confidence in Finchy than Finchy had in himself.

All of the cranes looked at Finchy, hoping he would agree to be in the show. But Finchy had never performed in front of a large crowd. He would be out of his comfort zone and scared that he would make a mistake. He didn't want to embarrass himself.

Then again, Mo believed in him. Why not take a chance? All he had to do was try his best and think positive. This show could also launch his career as a dancer.

Finchy refused to let fear guide his decision. He chirped, "Yes," over and over, until Haley placed her wing over his beak.

"Save that energy," said Haley to Finchy. "Let's get to work!"

Mo sat on the soft grass watching the cranes teach Finchy how to dance. Finchy began by stretching his tiny legs and wings. They showed him how to twirl across the stage and hop to the right, left, forward, and backward while shaking his tail feathers.

The other cranes also began stretching, twirling round and round on their tippy toes,

and leaping very high into the air. Mo thought their style of dance was graceful but a little strange – a cross between ballet and hip hop.

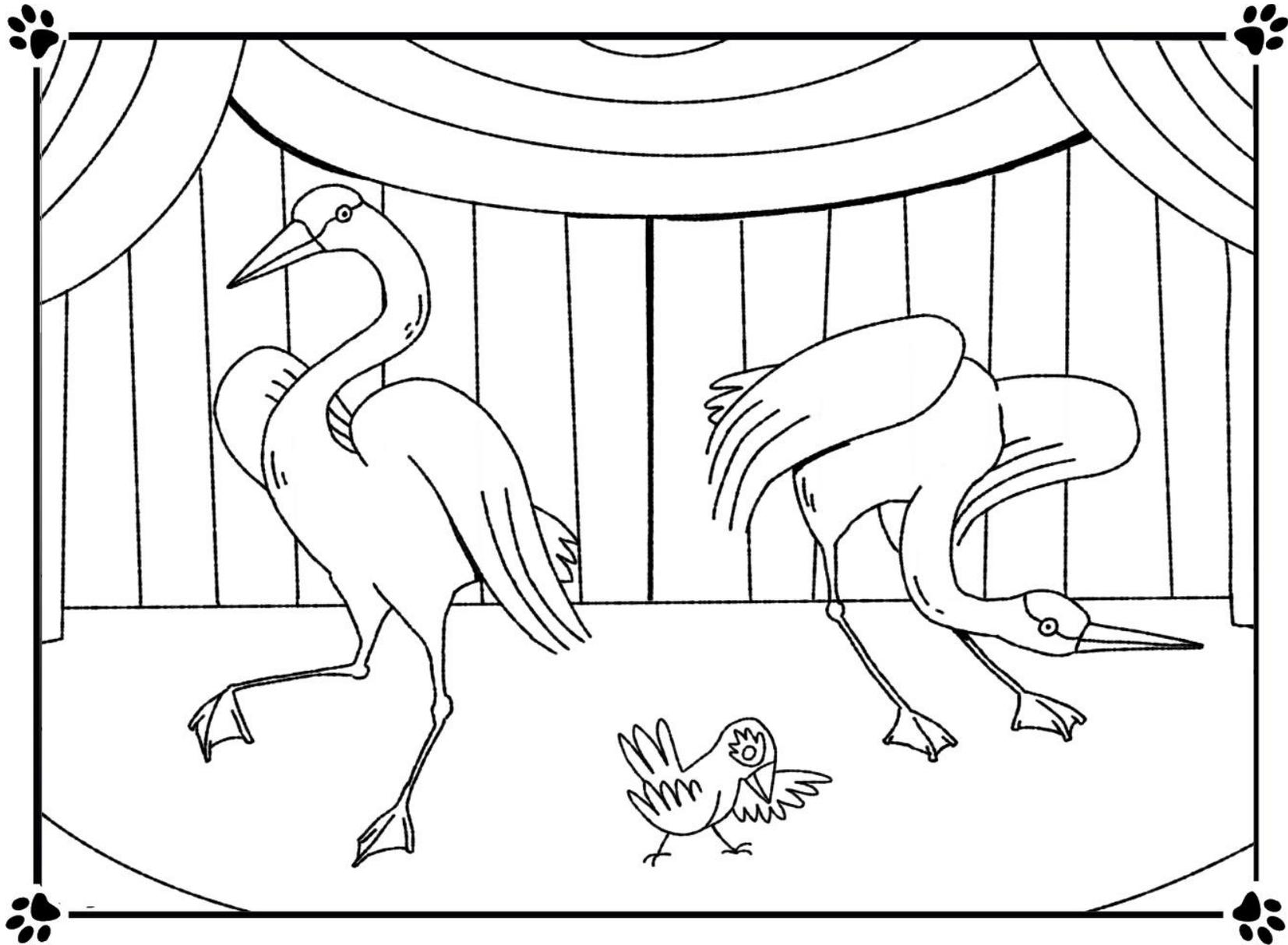
Mo had never seen Finchy so happy. He practiced his dance routine over and over. His tiny chest looked like it would burst with pride and joy. The cranes were thrilled. Finchy was a natural and quickly learned each dance step.

By now, many of the animals were starting to arrive. They sat on the soft grass in front of the stage. Some brought popcorn. Others had opera glasses so they could watch their favorite dancers up close.

Before the show started, Mo told Finchy to “break a leg”. Finchy was shocked that Mo would say something so mean but then learned it was show biz talk that meant, “good luck”.

Moments before the show began, two cranes sprinkled glitter all over Finchy’s beautiful feathers. Finchy never felt so handsome or so proud.

The show lasted for about an hour. Finchy simply sparkled. The glitter made his feathers twinkle. But even more important, he performed each dance perfectly and with feeling or expression.



When the show was over, all of the animals in the audience stood up, clapping and cheering. Everyone said that this show was the best ever. Many asked the name of the wonderful new dancer. Who was he? Of course, they were talking about Finchy.

Each of the dancing cranes hugged Finchy, thanked him, and told him how he had saved the day. But Finchy was quiet, almost teary-eyed. He couldn't find the right words to express his gratitude for teaching him how to dance and allowing him to be in the show. This was the happiest day of his life.

On the way back to the delivery truck, Finchy's feathers still had glitter on them. He told Mo that he would never – ever – take another bath.

“So how does it feel to be famous?” asked Mo.

“Now that I sing *and* dance, I should take acting lessons,” Finchy said. “Then I could move to Hollywood. Maybe buy a house. But just a small one. Something with seven or eight bedrooms, a swimming pool, tennis court . . .”