



The Adventures of **Mo**

Chapter 43

By Carol Patton

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The Telling Trees

“I’ve never seen a dog and bird ride on top of a delivery truck,” said a reddish-brown bird that landed on the truck’s roof next to Finchy. “I’ve been following you along Interstate 95 South, after you crossed the state line.”

Mo and Finchy had been traveling for almost five hours. They introduced themselves to the bird named Wren and told her about the key Mo had found and their mission to find the owner who lived in Florida.

“So where are you headed now?” asked Wren. “You’re welcome to join us for our weekly Telling Trees show. Any animal can come.”

Wren explained that the Telling Trees were special trees that told stories every week to animals about their personal experiences or area’s history. Mo and Finchy were eager to go. No one had ever invited them to a live show.

Alex, the truck driver, pulled off the highway toward a city named Charleston and drove to the back of a large hotel. The animals overheard him tell the hotel manager that after he finishes this delivery, he would like a room for the night. Mo and Finchy knew they had the whole evening to do whatever they wanted.

Mo climbed down the ladder on the delivery truck without any humans seeing him. He wondered how many animals would come to the show and if they would be nice. More importantly, would food be served?

“The name of the tree that’s performing tonight is Angel Oak,” said Wren. “She’s the best story-teller and lives on Johns Island. Although she doesn’t know her real age, she’s at least five hundred years-old. I think she stopped counting birthdays years ago and simply forgot.”

Wren then looked at Mo. She chirped very loud and five large birds landed next to her.

“Since Angel Oak lives about ten miles from here, we’ll have to carry you there,” she said to Mo. The other birds gathered around her to form a plan.

Mo didn’t like the sound of being carried high in the air. What if they dopped him? But

he really wanted to see the show. Besides, ten miles was a short distance for birds to fly. He talked himself into it.

The big birds gripped Mo's tail, pointy ears, and the back of his neck. They lifted him off the ground and carried him through the air. Finchy flew next to Mo, trying to distract him so he wouldn't be so afraid.

But Mo didn't hear a word Finchy was saying.

Ok, I can do this. I'll be brave. I'll be on the ground in no time flat. Everything is fine. They won't let go. They won't let me fall. They just won't. I hope.

Before Mo realized it, he was safely on the ground. He let out a huge breath, not realizing that he had held his breath most of the way there.

"Angel Oak, I'd like to introduce you to two visitors," said Wren.

Mo and Finchy turned around and were amazed at what was standing right in front of them.

The tree was very wide and more than sixty-five feet high. Some of its branches pointed

in different directions and were covered with so many leaves that they blocked out the sun.

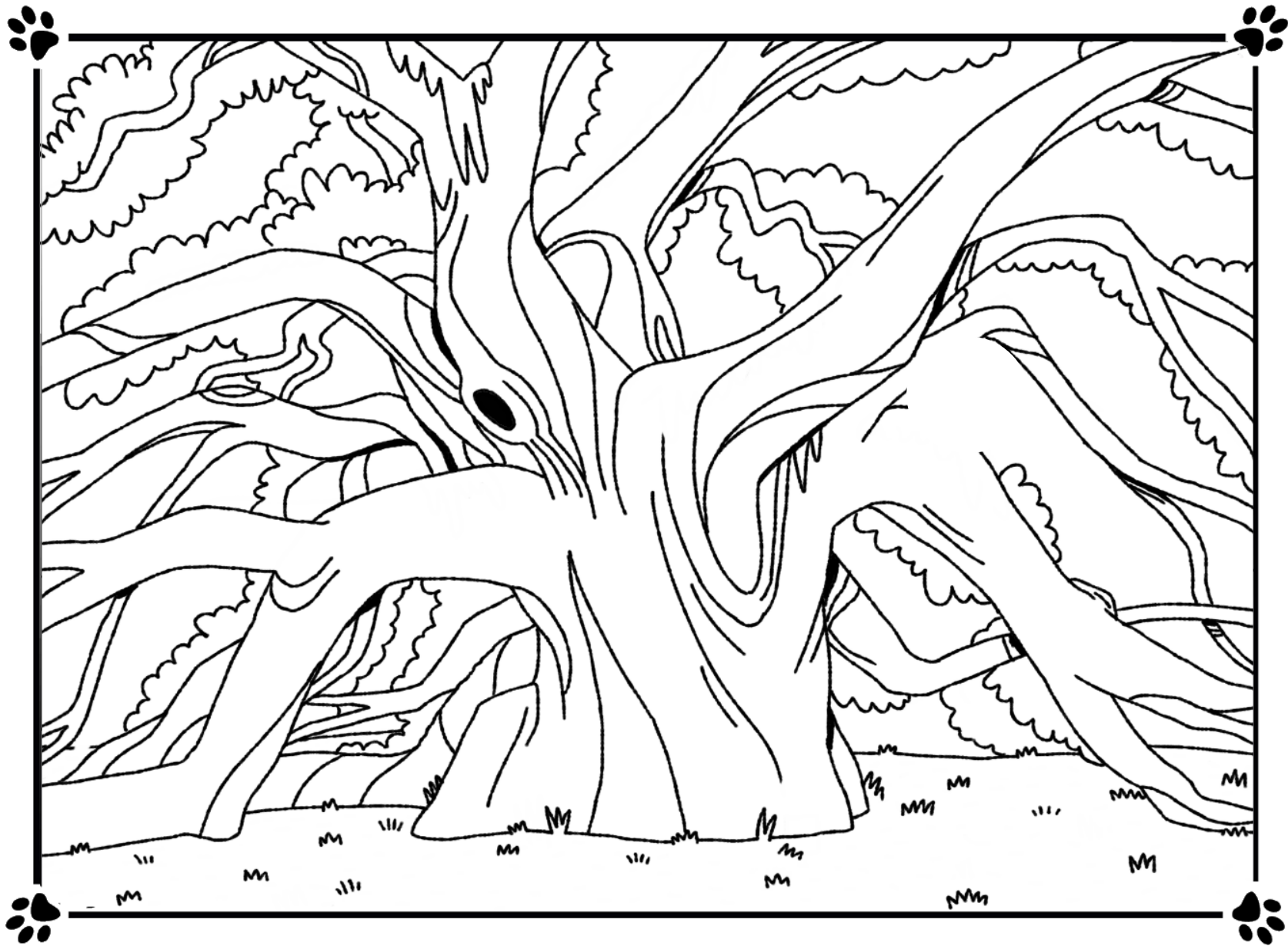
“Hello,” said Angel Oak. “Nice to meet you! Isn’t it a lovely day? Make yourselves comfortable. There’s plenty of food to eat.”

Mo and Finchy had never heard a tree speak.

“Thank you for inviting us,” said Mo, thinking that Angel Oak had a pleasant voice. “We’re excited to hear your story.”

Angel Oak smiled and told everyone to grab something to eat so their stomachs wouldn’t growl during story time.

Mo and Finchy looked around them. The audience included several deer, raccoons, coyotes, bobcats, otters, and wild hogs. Some were chatting about their recent travels around the state. Two raccoons visited Myrtle Beach, saying how much they liked riding the SkyWheel, one of the country’s tallest Ferris wheels. Others bragged about their golf game on Hilton Head Island. Several bobcats toured the state’s capitol in Columbia.



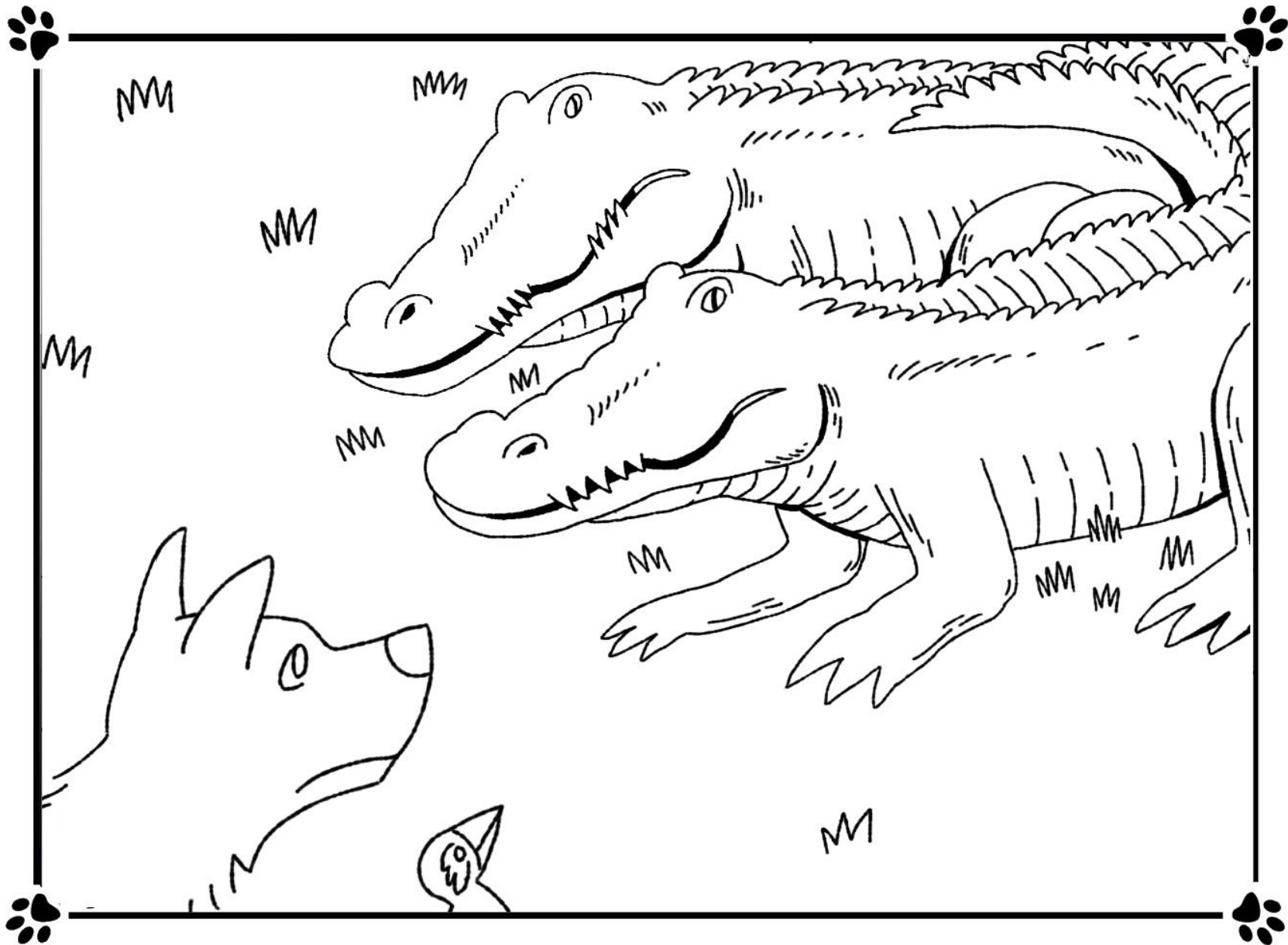
There were also two, very scary-looking creatures in the crowd. What were they? They were around ten feet long and their stomachs were close to the ground. Each had a long tail, huge head, and lots, lots of sharp teeth. They each stared at Mo for a very long time. Maybe it was his imagination. Maybe not. Either way, he didn't want to be their afternoon snack.

Next to Angel Oak were dozens of leaf sandwiches stuffed with fruits, nuts, and berries. The animals ate everything in sight. Not one berry was left. Still, those scary creatures wouldn't take their eyes off Mo.

“Now you know how I feel around cats,” whispered Finchy to Mo. “Sit far away from them, just in case.”

Angel Oak lifted her tree limbs, a sign that storytelling was about to begin.

“Tonight's story is a bit different than the others I've told,” she said. “It's not about pirates, pioneers, or presidents. This story will make you think. It will make you feel. It may even make you disagree with each other. But before I start, I'd like to welcome our guests, Mo and Finchy.”



Many of the animals looked at them, wondering why they were here. Were they visiting family? An otter that was the only real estate agent for animals on the island hoped they came to review the show. A great online review would make the Telling Trees famous and then animals from all corners of the world would want to live here. He would be rich!

The otter's daydream was interrupted by Angel Oak.

“As you know, all kinds of animals live here,” she said. “Just look around. See how different we are from each other? Well, there's another animal that lives close by that you probably have never heard about or even seen. It's called a monkey.”

The animals looked at each other in surprise. They thought they knew every type of animal that lived here.

“Less than two hours south from here is Morgan Island, which is also called Monkey Island,” she said while pulling out several large photos from inside her tree trunk of several monkeys that live on the island. “Here's what they look like. There are nearly four thousand monkeys living there and . . .” She paused. “Humans aren't allowed on the island!”

The crowd gasped.

“Many, many years ago, one of my good friends was a young monkey named Scarlet,” continued Angel Oak. “She slept and played on my branches. She was like family. I was her favorite tree. We had lots of fun together.”

Angel Oak told them all about how Scarlet and other monkeys acted. She explained that monkeys sleep sitting up on a tree branch, can swim – even underwater – and eat mostly fruits and flowers.

“But one day, Scarlet came to me with a question,” said Angel Oak. “It was the most difficult question anyone has ever asked me.”

All the animals looked at each other, wondering what Scarlet could have possibly asked.

“She found a comfortable branch to sleep on,” said Angel Oak. “But the branch next to it was much bigger and blocked her view of the sunrise. Could she cut off the giant branch?”

Angel Oak said she didn’t know what to do. She had dozens of branches. While

cutting any of them off wouldn't hurt, she valued them all, watched them grow, and didn't want to do it.

Still, Scarlet was her friend. Friends did nice things for each other. Was Angel Oak being selfish? Was Scarlet?

Nothing like this had ever happened to any of the animals in the crowd and they began shouting out their thoughts.

“Scarlet should have never asked you to do that!” said a coyote. “She was only thinking of herself, not you. Very selfish if you ask me.”

“Maybe, but maybe not,” said a deer. “Friends help each other out. Many times, that means sacrificing or doing things you don't want to do.”

“How would you feel if you cut off the branch and then later on, Scarlet moved to another tree?” said a raccoon. “That would make me really mad! Could you trust her to stay?”

Angel Oak listened to everyone's opinion. Then she told them the rest of the story.

“I spent the entire afternoon wondering what to do,” she said. “One moment, I was willing to cut off the branch. The next moment, I wasn’t. As I said, this was one of the hardest decisions I ever had to make.”

Angel Oak told them there was still another choice. They could both be happy if they each gave a little bit or compromised. Angel Oak would not cut off the branch but would help Scarlet find another one to sleep on with a good view of the sunrise or help her find a better branch on a different tree.

The next day, the two friends searched for a good spot and found one on Angel Oak. While it wasn’t perfect, Scarlet slept on that same branch and watched the beautiful sunrise for many years.

Angel Oak told the group that helping others was always important but not if it upsets or hurts you in some way. She told them how important it was to compromise or give in a little bit like they each had done.

The animals sat in silence thinking about the lesson they had just learned. Were they selfish? Did they always try to get their way or did they meet their friends halfway?



Mo and Finchy thanked Angel Oak for the great story and said goodbye to Wren and the other animals.

The five large birds carried Mo back to the delivery truck and gently placed him on its roof.

After Mo and Finchy waved goodbye, they thought about Angel Oak's story.

“Ya know, Finchy, I guess there were times where I was selfish, where I could have met you halfway,” said Mo. “I could have been more thoughtful about what you wanted instead of focusing only on what I wanted.”

Finchy laughed.

“It took you this long to figure that out?” asked Finchy. He reminded Mo of all the times he simply had to have his way. “No worries, Mo. You're still my best friend. You're just lucky that my heart is as big as my brain.”