

Chapter One

"Bernie, Bernie, come here. You have a phone call. Hurry! It sounds like it is long distance," shouted Dr. Huff with a sound of urgency in her voice.

"Whoever it is said you need to hurry as he does not have much time."

"Ok, ok. I will be there in just a second," said Bernie, the cute little white mouse as he was putting away his equipment in the lab. Dr. Huff had trained Bernie as her assistant and he took the job seriously. Whatever she asked of him was Bernie's command. He loved Dr. Huff so much there was not anything he would not do for her. She had made him a set of dusting cloths that would fit his feet and tail and he was in the process of dusting her office. Otherwise, Dr. Huff would never dust she was so busy with her animals. But instead of just dusting, Bernie was singing, "Put your little foot, put your little foot, put your little foot right out." And each time he came to the little foot part a foot would go out, or back, which ever was required to keep his balance, and he used some exaggerated hip movement as well. He was really into dusting.

To Ralph, (Bernie's friend and a pigeon trained by the CIA to be a carrier pigeon of verbal messages, of course, in English) it seemed as though Bernie

was taking forever and Ralph did not have much time. How much time, he had no way of knowing. He had spotted the CIA agents, Richard and Paul, watching him with their binoculars, some time back. He was visiting with a drunk in the park getting free peanuts. The drunk would say, "Speak to me." Ralph would talk to him and the drunk would throw him a peanut. The drunk was trying to entice the talking pigeon to come up close so he could capture him. He was making plans for a circus routine already. Ralph was just enjoying the treats.

Agents Richard and Paul had been looking for the escaped pigeon for some time now and they just happened upon the conversation between the drunk and the pigeon, noting that the pigeon was the better conversationalist of the two. They slipped out of their car thinking they had not been spotted by the pigeon or the drunk, but they forgot about the keen eyesight of the pigeon. Plus, the agents thought that you could never tell which way they are looking out of their beady little eyes. Of course, the drunk could not see anything, except the pigeon with the near perfect English.

Much to the chagrin of the drunk, Ralph suddenly flew over to a hot dog stand and while the attendant was selling hot dogs, borrowed his phone to

call Bernie. He pecked on the speaker button and pecked in Dr. Huff's number down in Del Rio, TX. He had called before, many times in fact, checking on Bernie and Tommi Mouse after each litter was born or sometimes just to say hello. He missed Bernie and Carlos and the adventures they used to have together.

Under his breath, Ralph was saying, "Hurry up Bernie." While he was at the phone, his thoughts drifted back to the days that he and Bernie spent together getting down to Del Rio, TX. He had to smile in thinking about Bernie and all the things he could get into. (It is a proven fact pigeons can smile, but you have to catch one and either tell it a joke or tickle it under its wing to find out though.)

Bernie says, "Hello."

Ralph says, "Bernie, Bernie, I need your help," speaking in a very soft whisper.

Bernie says, "Speak up, man, I can't hear you. Who is this? You sound like Ralph."

Ralph says, "Bernie, it is Ralph. I need your help," still whispering.

Bernie says, "Ralph, you need some kelp. What is kelp?"

Ralph, who starting to get aggravated shouted, "I need your help, Bernie, I need your help. Can you hear me now? I got two CIA agents on my tail and I think they may have me surrounded with several agents and you are asking me to shout."

Ralph kept a sharp eye peeled for suspicious looking people. One blonde in a short skirt was really eyeing him, and he wondered about her, then he thought, "Naw, not a blonde."

Continuing with his conversation with Bernie, "With all that is going on over in the Middle East I do not believe they will give up until they get me. Get Carlos and come help me. I am in Washington and you remember where we first met? Come there! Ok? Bernie, do you understand me now?" Saying that, Ralph saw the blonde start toward him and in a hurry so Ralph left the hot dog stand immediately, the phone line still connected.

"Ralph, I can hear you. What has happened? Ralph? Ralph? Are you there?"

A female voice said, "Who is this?" Bernie, who had the phone on the speaker, and Dr. Huff overheard all that had been said. Ralph had left the phone and with the female voice speaking so quickly, Bernie figured the agents were breathing down his neck and he had to fly away. Bernie slammed a paw on the disconnect button not wanting anyone to trace the call.

Dr. Huff says to Bernie, "He sounded so desperate. Do you think you can talk Carlos into going up there? Why doesn't Ralph fly back down here? Since you were cut off I guess you have to go to him."

Bernie says, "Oh, I will have to go Dr. Huff. Ralph is my pal. He is a pal to Carlos, too. We have to go. It will be ok with you if I go, right?" Bernie felt like his best friend and adopted Mother would wish him well. She was a good Mom and a good Veterinarian. His prison pal, Eddie Blueeyes, had married Dr. Huff and the two of them felt led to adopt Bernie, now Bernie Blueeyes.

They did not have to wait long because Carlos had just started a trip over Lake Amistad checking the international border and he flew on south to Dr. Huff's place. She was always good for a hand out, so he made a trip by there almost every day. He also enjoyed soaring with Bernie on his back and the conversations they had while hundreds of feet in the air. (Carlos, an American crow, worked for the Border Patrol patrolling the area over Lake

Amistad, TX. He spoke English and Spanish. There are several type crows, Fish Crows, Mexican Crows and American Crows, which are the largest of the three.)

Carlos had barely reached the ground when Bernie was telling him all about Ralph's call and his desperate plea for help. Carlos wanted to know how they could possibly find Ralph that many miles away. Bernie told him they were to meet Ralph at the same place he and Ralph had first met, the prison a few miles outside of Washington. Bernie never did know the name of the jail and it just dawned on him while he was telling Carlos about the prison that they may have trouble finding it. Then he remembered Eddie Blueeyes served time there so he should know all about its name and location. Eddie had gone to San Antonio for some supplies for Dr. Huff and would not be back until tomorrow.

Did they have time to wait? Bernie told Dr. Huff that he and Carlos could call back while in route and get that information from Eddie. They agreed that was a good plan.

Carlos was excited about going north. He had spent his entire life on the Texas Mexican border and he was looking forward to the trip. He was worried about navigating that distance and finding someplace he had never

heard of. However, Bernie expressed a confidence that belayed his fears to some degree, since he had made the trip before, but stopped short of telling Carlos he did not have a clue about navigating. Bernie could not read a map.

Shortly after Bernie had first arrived at Dr. Huffs, she had made a harness for Carlos so that Bernie could ride on Carlos and not have to worry about falling off. She had tailor made it to fit perfectly and it did not worry Carlos being on his back and it did not worry Bernie while he was in it. There was absolutely no slippage. It had small pockets for carrying food and what nots. It even had a couple of steps for Bernie to mount up and a metal sword Eddie had made for Bernie to fight off hawks and owls while soaring.

Dr. Huff brought out the harness and made it ready for the trip, including some goodies for munching on the way. Bernie swung his sword a couple of times. It probably would not hurt birds of prey all that much, but Bernie just felt better having it by his side. He was still mad at that old Barred Owl that had attacked him and Ralph. He worried that he may have too much junk, but Carlos told him he and the harness was light as a feather. Bernie wondered about that but Carlos was a big bird. He was a whole lot bigger than Ralph and he had rode Ralph from Washington, D.C. to Del Rio, TX.

Dr. Huff gave Bernie and Carlos a crash course in map reading then drew a hand made map with the states and major cities and rivers to help them find their way.

Carlos and Bernie decided that they would leave at first light the next morning. That would give Carlos some time to visit with the Border Patrol and let them know that he was taking a few days off, maybe a few weeks. Finally he told them, "I will be back, I am just not sure of when."

Bernie said goodbye to Dr. Huff that night. He would wait and tell Tommi Mouse Blueeyes goodbye tomorrow morning. Dr. Huff had given T. M. and Bernie's last litter to a lab in Houston. They had promised to take very good care of them. None of Bernie's litters had produced a mouse that could speak human English and Bernie was very disappointed about that. But he and T.M. were young and they would keep trying.

Bernie was excited and worried at the same time. He had a terrible time trying to get to sleep that night. He knew where Dr. Huff kept the aspirin so he dissolved one in water and had a big drink of it. It worked. He was sound asleep in just moments after drinking the medicine.