



BONE HOLLOW

• KIM VENTRELLA •



SCHOLASTIC PRESS • NEW YORK

Copyright © 2019 by Kim Ventrella

All rights reserved. Published by Scholastic Press, an imprint of Scholastic Inc., *Publishers since 1920*. SCHOLASTIC, SCHOLASTIC PRESS, and associated logos are trademarks and/or registered trademarks of Scholastic Inc.

The publisher does not have any control over and does not assume any responsibility for author or third-party websites or their content.

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without written permission of the publisher. For information regarding permission, write to Scholastic Inc., Attention: Permissions Department, 557 Broadway, New York, NY 10012.

This book is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents are either the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously, and any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, business establishments, events, or locales is entirely coincidental.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data available

ISBN 978-1-338-04274-0

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 19 20 21 22 23

Printed in the U.S.A. 23

First edition, March 2019

Book design by Yaffa Jaskoll

CHAPTER ONE

• THE STORM •

A tornado touched down in Macomb County at the same time Gabe climbed to the top of Miss Cleo's roof in search of a chicken. To be fair, nobody knew where that tornado was headed till it was far too late. And besides, it's not like Miss Cleo sent him up there in search of just any ordinary barnyard hen. It was Princess Carmella, Miss Cleo's prize Sicilian Buttercup, winner of the Canadian Valley Poultry Expo three years running.

"Watch out for the tail feathers," Miss Cleo said, clutching Princess Carmella's favorite blanket to her chest.

Soon, the neighbors wandered over to investigate, and Miss Cleo put them to work tossing every pillow they could find across the yard in hopes of a softer landing.

Of course, none of that would be necessary if Gabe did his job.

"Do you see her?" called Mr. Lawson, owner of Lawson's New and Used Hardware. He was by far the tallest of the bunch, and standing on his tiptoes he could just make out the figure of

a boy crawling across the roof. “Don’t spook her, now. Nice and slow.”

“And quiet!” shouted Miss Cleo at the top of her voice.

So Gabe crept, slow and quiet, across Miss Cleo’s roof, which was his roof, too, it should be pointed out, though maybe not for long. The tiles sagged in spots, where the rainwater had gotten in. If he pressed down too hard, they started to creak and crack under his weight, and so he moved like Mr. Lawson’s old cat. Ghost was a giant cat, the color of ash, but he flew over the packed shelves of the hardware store with such skill and finesse he really might have been a ghost, or at least that’s what people said.

Down below, Gabe’s trusty dog, and best friend, Ollie, barked in a panic. Gabe didn’t speak dog, but he had a pretty good idea he was saying, “Get down from there right now—storm’s a-coming!”

If only it were that easy. Miss Cleo was real nice, letting Gabe and Ollie stay with her after his parents passed, but he didn’t stay for free. He had to “put in the work,” the way she told it, and most of that work involved looking after Princess Carmella. That dang chicken was more like family to Miss Cleo than he’d ever been.

And, just like that, Gabe spotted her, perched atop the chimney, preening her dumb speckled feathers.

“There you are, you mangy old hen,” Gabe said, though not loud enough for anyone down below to hear. Miss Cleo did

not take kindly to anyone insulting her prize poultry. Like the time he'd accidentally sat on Princess Carmella, on account of her being tucked surreptitiously into his very own bed. Despite the fact that he hadn't been to blame, seeing as it was his bed and nobody had warned him there might be a chicken inside, Miss Cleo had given him a whupping he wouldn't soon forget.

"Gosh dangit!" Gabe added as a raindrop the size of a hummingbird plopped onto his head. That raindrop was followed by another and another, each one bigger than the last.

"Hurry up!" cried Miss Cleo. "That storm'll be here in a tick. You know what happens when Princess Carmella gets wet."

What happened was that Miss Cleo would spend the whole night cradling that hen in her favorite velvety blanket, the one with her name embroidered on the back. Then, in the morning, her feathers would be one big ball of frizz. "Gosh dang chicken!"

A bolt of lightning lit up the clouds, just like in the movies, and Princess Carmella released an ear-pinching squawk. She leapt off the chimney with ease, landing on the tip of the iron weather vane, which had been hewn in her very own image. Her beady black eyes met his just as another bolt of lightning streaked overhead. Her eyes flashed yellow, and Gabe swore that if chickens could talk she'd be laughing at him.

"Got you now," Gabe said.

The pounding rain drowned out all the voices down below,

so it was just him and the chicken. And Ollie, straining to be heard over all that wind. That dog was awful terrified of storms, and Gabe would be glad when he could get down off this roof and comfort him. Poor, wimpy hound.

“I’ve had enough!” Gabe said, partly to rev himself up, partly to put the fear of God into that good-for-nothing chicken.

In a burst of energy, he scrambled up the arched roof, his sneakers squeaking on the wet tile. “You’re mine!” Gabe lunged, grabbing for a wing or a foot or a whatever he could get ahold of. He no longer cared about ruffling feathers.

His fingers grazed the edge of a wrinkly toe, but at the last minute Princess Carmella leapt into the air. She landed a few feet away, shaking her speckled tail feathers right in his face.

That was when he heard Mr. Lawson shouting something from down below. At first, he couldn’t quite make out the word he was saying, over and over, like a prayer. The wind was so wild and the rain so fierce, it was all he could do to hang on to that weather vane for dear life.

Then a gust of wind swooped down and scooped up Princess Carmella, like a giant hand reaching out of the sky. She flew up and up and up into the towering gray clouds, right along with his chances of ever setting foot in Miss Cleo’s house again, and that was when Gabe understood the word Mr. Lawson was shouting.

“Twister!”

Gabe tightened his grip on the weather vane. He felt mighty bad for what had happened to Princess Carmella, but he wasn't about to let the same thing happen to him. He had a dog down below who was depending on him, and if he flew away, he could be dang sure Miss Cleo wouldn't take care of Ollie. She'd never had any love to spare for dogs, or for him, when it came right down to it.

"I'm coming, Ollie!" he shouted, sucking down a mouthful of rain. He folded his arms tight as can be around that wrought iron chicken and started to pray.

"Please, please, please, please," he said, "don't let me die on account of a chicken." Though he really did feel bad for her. "Tell Ollie not to be scared, Lord, if you're up there. Please, please, please."

As if in answer to his prayer, the wind went still for a moment and the black sky lit up, glowing a dirty shade of gold. *Thank all the chickens in the world*, Gabe thought. *From this day forward I'll never curse another chicken.* But then a swirling funnel of wind dropped down out of the clouds.

It picked up a telephone pole as if it were light as a splinter and tossed it at the Bentons' farm. The roof underneath him started to shake. The tornado whined as it cut a path across the town.

"I've got to get off this roof," Gabe thought out loud, but then a gust of wind picked him up and carried him high into

the air. Time froze for a while, as Gabe realized he still had hold of that weather vane, though it was no longer attached to the roof. He could hear Ollie, whimpering down below, a note of true desperation in his voice.

Then, faster than Mr. Lawson's cat, Ghost, the whole world sped by, and Gabe hit the ground hard with a crack!



Green bean casserole was the first thing Gabe smelled when he woke up. He was lying in Miss Cleo's very own bed. Which was strange, because that was one of the many places he wasn't allowed. He could tell it was her bed because along with the scent of creamy casserole was the not-so-pleasant aroma of Miss Cleo's homemade toe gel. It was a mixture of Vaseline and fresh egg yolk. In short, it stunk.

Stranger still, his loyal dog, Ollie, was curled up at his side, resting his long, skinny nose on his chest. If it was strange for Miss Cleo to let him sleep in her bed, it was unheard of for her to let Ollie in the house, let alone on her thousand-dollar, Sleep-o-matic mattress.

"What a brave boy," Miss Cleo was saying, pulling a Kleenex out from her bra. "He looks just like he's sleeping, doesn't he? I always said he had a kind heart, didn't I? But who knew he'd face down a twister to save my sweet princess?"

To Gabe's astonishment, Ethylene Roberts, who used to babysit Gabe when he was little, despite not being much older

than him, walked into the room carrying a familiar ball of reddish-brown frizz. It was Princess Carmella, a little rumpled but none the worse for wear.

“Oh, just look at the state of you!” Miss Cleo said, wrapping the chicken in her velvety blanket, the one with her name sewn on the back. “And aren’t you the bravest of all, for surviving such a storm?”

Miss Cleo buried her head in the chicken’s fluffy feathers, and to Gabe’s further surprise, Princess Carmella turned one black marble eye on him and winked. Or maybe he imagined it. Either way, Ollie started barking something awful, probably trying to defend him, and Gabe decided it was time to give that chicken a piece of his mind. After all, she’d been the cause of this whole dang debacle.

He tried to sit up, but he was covered in each and every one of Miss Cleo’s hand-knitted blankets, the ones she bought every year at the Ladies of the Bible charity auction.

“If you don’t mind, Miss Cleo, I’d like a quick word with your bird. And it’s not going to be a nice one, either, I’m sorry to say.” It was always better to warn Miss Cleo before cursing or otherwise misbehaving. To Gabe’s annoyance, she didn’t answer or even look up.

“Taken from us too soon,” Miss Cleo was going on, as a few more neighbors poured into the small room, hanging on her every word. “That’s what they would have said about you, isn’t it, sweetie pie?” She kissed Princess Carmella right on the

beak, not once but three or four times. “Thank goodness there was a hero on hand to save you.”

“Bless his soul,” said Mrs. Romero, Gabe’s sixth-grade teacher, dabbing tears from her eyes.

Mr. Lawson brought around a Kleenex box and everybody grabbed at least one or two, even if they weren’t near to crying.

“What about me?” Gabe said, not that he planned to tear up over some misbehaving chicken, but still. Maybe he was a little bit happy she was okay, and who knows, maybe he needed to blow his nose.

Nobody answered, not even his best friend Chance, who walked in carrying a pizza box from Penny’s Sweet and Savory Pies. Gabe could tell just by the smell that it was his and Chance’s favorite, double jalapeño with pepperoni on the side.

“Nice,” Gabe said. “I’m starving.”

Chance pretended not to hear him. Not only that, but he wouldn’t even come all the way into the room. He kept sniffing and staring at his shoes, like maybe they were stuffed full of ragweed.

“Seriously, it’s not like I didn’t try to save your dumb old hen,” Gabe said, frustration heating up his words. “I’d like to see one of you all climb up to the roof in the middle of a thunderstorm, all on account of some spoiled rotten chicken.” Honestly, there he was, trying to do something nice, and just maybe get on Miss Cleo’s good side, and how’d he get repaid? With a cold shoulder big enough to freeze Texas, that’s how!