

*Follow Brio as he escapes his fenced yard one Thanksgiving to make his way to the Great City. There he plans to lead golden chariots, Arabian horses, elephants, lions, and Egyptian soldiers in a Christmas Eve production of Aïda. Brio gets hopelessly lost. Will he attain the "BRAVO!" he craves? Most of all, how will he ever find his way home?*

## **Bravo! Brio:** **A Holiday Adventure-Fantasy** by Albert Rita

**Order the complete book from the publisher**  
**[Booklocker.com](https://www.booklocker.com)**

**<https://www.booklocker.com/p/books/10127.html?s=pdf>**  
**or from your favorite neighborhood**  
**or online bookstore.**

# BRAVO! Brio

*A Holiday Adventure-Fantasy*



Albert Rita

Copyright © 2018 Albert Rita

ISBN: 978-1-64438-441-1

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, recording or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the author.

Published by BookLocker.com, Inc., St. Petersburg, Florida.

Printed on acid-free paper.

The characters and events in this book are fictitious. Any similarity to real persons, living or dead, is coincidental and not intended by the author.

BookLocker.com, Inc.  
2018

First Edition

## ***Table of Contents***

Chapter 1 - AN ESCAPE .....	7
Chapter 2 - SOPHIE'S RIBBONS AND TROPHIES.....	13
Chapter 3 - A WARNING .....	22
Chapter 4 - HITCHING A RIDE.....	27
Chapter 5 - AN URGENT CALL.....	31
Chapter 6 - A PUZZLING CLUE .....	34
Chapter 7 - A ROADSIDE THANKSGIVING .....	38
Chapter 8 - JOE MEETS THE REAL MCCOYS.....	40
Chapter 9 - A HALLOWEEN DREAM.....	43
Chapter 10 - BOTTOM OF THE BARREL.....	52
Chapter 11 - ANOTHER SEARCH .....	56
Chapter 12 - A RESCUE.....	59
Chapter 13 - BRIO IS DEAD?.....	64
Chapter 14 - CHAUTAUQUA ARRIVAL .....	66
Chapter 15 - A REWARD OFFERING.....	68
Chapter 16 - A DISTANCE TO GO.....	70
Chapter 17 - A TURN AT THE GATE.....	76
Chapter 18 - BRIO TAKES THE STAGE.....	88
Chapter 19 - SURPRISE AT THE GAS 'N' SHOP.....	93
Chapter 20 - ANOTHER MOMENT OF DESPERATION .....	97
Chapter 21 - THE BIG AUDITION .....	101
Chapter 22 - SUDDEN CHANGE OF PLANS .....	108

Chapter 23 - BRIO MEETS HARRY OF ENGLAND.....	112
Chapter 24 - RUN! RUN! RUN!.....	117
Chapter 25 - A GOOD DEED.....	122
Chapter 26 - TUCKER'S TRIBE.....	128
Chapter 27 - THE INITIATION .....	140
Chapter 28 - A MAGIC BONE.....	153
Chapter 29 - BRIO VERSUS TUCKER.....	166
Chapter 30 - HARRY'S HISTORY .....	171
Chapter 31 - BRIO'S COMMAND .....	177
Chapter 32 - PHANTOMS OF THE OPERA.....	180
Chapter 33 - BLESSING OF THE ANIMALS .....	184
Chapter 34 - THE GRAND MARCH.....	191
Epilogue .....	197

## ***Chapter 1***

### ***AN ESCAPE***

“Brio!” Joe shouted from the porch steps. “Brio!” he yelled again, expecting him to come running out from the bushes. But, Brio did not come. Joe scanned the yard then bellowed once more. “Brio!” A shrillness in his voice pierced the autumn air, but in response he heard only a faint whimper from Robbie.

“You’re sure you let him out this morning?” Marianne called from the car.

He could not remember. Like brushing his teeth, that was just something he did automatically. Robbie’s presence in the yard, however, suggested Brio would not be found indoors. Wherever Brio went, Robbie followed, a pattern set soon after that day three years ago when Joe adopted Brio as a companion for Robbie. Yet, having no better explanation for Brio’s absence, he set his doubt aside, and with Robbie tagging along, went inside to search.

“Find Brio, Robbie!” he urged.

Robbie answered with only a puzzled stare, then dutifully followed while Joe checked each room, looking where Brio had been known to hide. When they came back out on the porch, Marianne looked quizzically. Joe shook his head.

Marianne, carrying her Siamese cat, Sophie, now joined him in the yard. "If he's not inside," she said, "he must be hiding out here somewhere. Are you sure you checked everywhere?" Joe nodded.

"Under our bed?"

"He's not in the house, Marianne. I looked everywhere."

Marianne must have read the worry on his face. "Brio's just having a joke on us," she said, softening her tone. "Why don't you take a quick look under the rhododendron? I've seen him poking about there recently. Sophie and I will have another look inside. It can't hurt to double check."

If Brio were hiding in the house, Joe thought, Robbie would have quickly sniffed him out. Yet, he did not argue against her searching it again in the hope she might prove him wrong.

He recalled too well that only a year ago a number of neighborhood dogs mysteriously disappeared - none of special pedigree, some plain, even homely-looking, but each loved by his master. Though lost dog notices were placed, reward flyers posted, searches made, not a trace of them was discovered. In the year since, there had been wild talk as to their fate. While Joe did not hold to any particular idea of what had happened, his heart ached under the suspicion the dogs had been abused. For months afterwards he refused to let Robbie and Brio venture in the yard unaccompanied. But knowing how much they enjoyed the run of it and how

## *BRAVO! BRIO*

little time he could spend with them, he gradually relaxed his ruling.

Guilt possessed, he walked to the rhododendron. "Brio," he yelled. But this time he knew in his heart Brio would not come running. Still, he proceeded to act on his wife's advice.

The sprawling rhododendron reached the front porch roof. Its lush leaves captured the sunlight, leaving the ground beneath in shadow. With Robbie close beside him, Joe stooped low and gently pressed aside a branch. Brio was not there. No mistake. A little brown or black dog, perhaps, could have camouflaged itself, if only momentarily, in the dark tangle of leaves and branches, but Brio's shiny, white coat would have given him away at once. Yet, Joe called Brio's name again, this time almost as a prayer. Then his eyes fixed on something unexpected. At the far side of the rhododendron close to the fence he saw a mound where the ground ought to have been level. Without regard for his new jeans, he got down on hands and knees and crawled under the bush. On reaching the mound, he discovered the ground beside it had been hollowed out. The excavation extended under the fence. Though a narrow and shallow channel, Joe figured it just big enough for Brio, who on all fours stood only ten inches tall. He realized at once, Brio had squeezed through this opening and gained access to the street, the hills, and the mountains beyond.



He backed out from under the rhododendron just as Marianne, now without Sophie in her arms, came out and onto the porch.

“He’s not in the house,” she confirmed.

Joe then told her about the channel.

“But why would Brio want to escape?” Marianne wondered.

“Saw another dog, maybe, or a rabbit. Who knows? Anyway, I’ll have to take Robbie and go find him.”

Robbie, perked his ears up attentively.

“Shouldn’t take long,” Joe continued, trying to mask his concern. “Couldn’t have gotten far on his short legs.”

Marianne grabbed her cell phone. “I’ll call my parents and tell them we’ll be late.”

For hours, Joe, with Robbie on a close leash, crisscrossed the neighborhood. He called Brio’s name so loudly the neighbors surely must have heard him. What they could not have heard from inside their houses, however, were his anxious pleas: “Where’s Brio, Robbie? Find Brio, Boy; find Brio!”

No sooner did Robbie seem to be onto a scent when suddenly he would abandon it. At first, Joe suspected the smell of roasting Thanksgiving Day turkeys beginning to waft in the air as the cause of Robbie’s distraction. On second thought, though, he

## *BRAVO! BRIO*

realized Robbie too serious a dog to be put off his purpose so easily. Was he intentionally leading him in circles? Joe could not imagine him acting at cross-purposes to his wishes, but, how else to account for Robbie's strange behavior?

As they approached another street corner, Robbie stopped suddenly and sniffed hard. Issuing several staccato barks, he turned and hurriedly dragged Joe over territory just covered. Joe thought this unusual. If Brio had been wandering this way, they would have seen him. Still, wanting to believe Robbie at last was onto Brio's scent, he gave him all the leash he wanted.

"Good boy, Robbie, good boy. Find Brio; find Brio," Joe encouraged. With each length of brick sidewalk passed Joe filled with excitement, expecting any moment to encounter him. It might be around this corner or the next, but it would not be far. Soon they would see him safe, sitting quietly, savoring smells or kicking at piles of leaves. Brio, having had his little adventure, his quest satisfied for unconditional freedom, would see them and come running. He likely would put on that irresistible hurt look he wore anytime he sensed he was about to be scolded. Joe determined not to be taken in. As he jogged along, allowing Robbie to set the pace, Joe steeled himself to discipline Brio. "I'll make sure Brio understands never again to stray. But just to make doubly sure," he thought, "I'll fortify the fence. There will be no more excavations under it!"

With panic-stricken suddenness, Joe's satisfaction shattered when Robbie sharply slackened his pace.

Breathing fast, Joe stopped, and scanned both sides of the street.

Brio was nowhere in sight.

## ***Chapter 4***

### ***HITCHING A RIDE***

Running along the berm of the highway, Brio chased the sun. Whizzing traffic whipped wind and gravel in his face. Despite the choking road dust, he refused to slow his pace. Yet, no matter how fast he made his legs go, the horizon drew no closer, even as the sun sank ever lower. When his legs finally gave out, the sun had already sunk more than halfway in the sky. Panting hard and aching with thirst, he collapsed onto his empty stomach.

“Someone will see me and give me a ride to the city,” he told himself.

Brio rested as one car after another passed by without slowing. Discouraged, he summoned his will to continue. Now, though, his sore paws felt as if weighted down with sand.

He quit looking to the horizon to measure his progress and instead counted it by reaching the next utility pole, the next road sign, the next guard rail post. With each goal met, his spirit lifted. Caught up in the challenge of making it to the next marker, Brio pushed himself past exhaustion.

He had just passed one more road sign when a van spewing burnt oil sputtered alongside him, pulled over and stopped. Hearing the van’s doors slide open, Brio stopped and watched warily. A motley group quickly

poured out the side. Brio thought to turn and run, but his feet remained glued to the ground.

"Here, doggy," the tallest girl called. Brio watched the girl step his way, the others following behind. When she came within several feet, she stopped. "Come here, dog," she said firmly, stretching out her arms.

Brio warily drew close, and as he did so the girl grabbed him by his collar and lifted him into her arms.

"Let me hold him, Marcia," the smallest boy begged.

"Not now, Mickey. In the van."

One by one the kids climbed back in, with Marcia, holding Brio tightly, the last to board. After the doors slid shut Brio heard the engine sputter to a start and then felt the van jolt back onto the highway.

There were no seats in back, only torn cushions and shabby pillows strewn about. They took their places and made a spot for Brio on a frayed mat. Hands reached out at him from every direction, patting his head, stroking his back, scratching his ears, and rubbing his chin.

"What are we going to call 'im?" Mickey asked.

The front seat passenger stretched around. "Check the collar," the woman suggested. "See if there's a name."

## *BRAVO! BRIO*

Marcia coaxed Brio to her and undid the collar. She examined the two metal tags attached to it. The first tag certified Brio had received his rabies shot. Then she studied the second one.

"Here it is, Mom," Marcia said. "It says 'my name is Brio,' has a number to call. Should we call? Do we have to?"

Except for the engine noise, a long moment of silence filled the air. The woman and the driver exchanged looks of indecision. The driver adjusted the rear view mirror to bring Brio within its frame, then glanced once more at the woman.

"Your mother 'n' me don't think so. Likely the owner don't want 'im back. Prob'ly ditched 'im out here thinkin' he'd get hisself killed."

"Hooray!" kids shouted, as Marcia tossed Brio's collar onto a pile of loose laundry.

Brio felt relief that his adventure was not about to be aborted. Though he regretted what these people thought about Joe, he knew he would not be able to change their opinion. Besides, as he saw it, the main thing was he now had a ride to the city.

"Brio's a dumb name for a dog," one of the boys remarked. "Give 'im a new name!"

"Mickey seen 'im first," one girl pointed out. "He gets t' name 'im."

The others readily agreed and turned their heads in Mickey's direction.

"Go ahead, Mick," another girl encouraged. "But, 'member, it's got t' be a 'M' name."

So much younger and smaller than his siblings, Mickey now enjoyed the focus of their attention. He cocked his head and stared at the roof thoughtfully.

"Midget," he proclaimed finally. "Midget McCoy we'll call 'im, 'cause he's little like me." Then patting Brio's head gently, he added, "When we get back to Ohio, Midget, you 'n' me'll be best buddies forever."

Ohio! Brio's relief turned at once to anxiety. What was Ohio? Could this great highway lead to other places he did not know? What would he do if he found himself in Ohio? How would he find his way to the city? How would he find his way home again? Questions flooded his brain in a torrent, and in the end, each were answered the same way. He must seize the first opportunity to escape. He only had to hope his chance might come before Ohio.

## ***Chapter 5***

### ***AN URGENT CALL***

When Joe returned with Robbie past mid-afternoon Marianne was waiting.

“Sarah just called,” she said urgently.

“Who?”

“Cinderella.” Joe gave a blank stare. “You know, the statue people,” Marianne explained hurriedly. “She called to find out if Brio is missing. Spotted a little white dog in their yard.”

“Still there?”

Marianne shook her head. “Said it was about fifteen minutes ago. Saw him heading toward the highway.”

By car, the highway was only minutes from their house. Turning onto the westbound lane and driving slowly, they carefully scanned both sides of the road. It was not long until they had traveled farther than Brio could have possibly gone on foot.

“He must have slipped into the woods,” Joe reasoned aloud, noticeably distressed.

“He hasn’t been run down, anyway, so all is not lost,” Marianne sighed.



Joe strained a weak smile. He would have liked to take comfort in Marianne's words, but he knew too well the problems a pampered little dog would face in the woods. The mountains masked dangers Brio was ill-equipped to handle. Not only did temperatures plummet in the evenings, but this was also hunting season.

"No use going farther. I'll turn around at the Gas 'n' Shop."

Marianne nodded. "May as well stop then. Sophie needs milk."

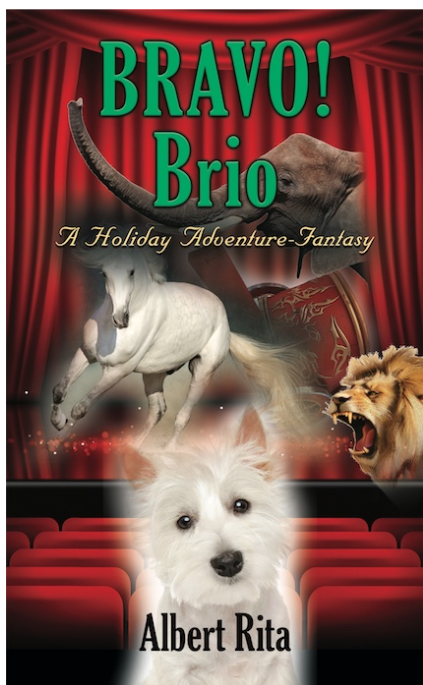
The Gas 'n' Shop stood back from the highway. Joe pulled into the lot and parked. Marianne went inside for the milk while he waited in the car with the engine running. Tapping his fingers impatiently on the steering wheel, he tried to think what to do next. With daylight fading fast a search of the mountains would prove impossible. As he shook his head in frustration he glanced at the vehicle in the adjacent space. Pock marked with rust and plastered with decals, the old van sported across its side panel a sign painted in bright red letters: The Real McCoys. Beneath in smaller lettering were the names Michael and Maureen, and under those in still smaller lettering, Marcia, Marty, Mitchell, Mindy, Marlon, Mandy, and Mickey.

The van's odd appearance distracted his thinking about Brio. He found himself wondering about these McCoys. The care with which each name had been hand painted seemed to say proudly, 'we are family; we are one.' And only then did Joe consider the possibility

*BRAVO! BRIO*

he might never see Brio again. The thought got twisted and tangled in his heart.

When Marianne opened the car door he knew that she could tell he had been crying.



*Follow Brio as he escapes his fenced yard one Thanksgiving to make his way to the Great City. There he plans to lead golden chariots, Arabian horses, elephants, lions, and Egyptian soldiers in a Christmas Eve production of Aïda. Brio gets hopelessly lost. Will he attain the "BRAVO!" he craves? Most of all, how will he ever find his way home?*

## **Bravo! Brio:** **A Holiday Adventure-Fantasy** by Albert Rita

**Order the complete book from the publisher**  
**[Booklocker.com](https://www.booklocker.com)**

**<https://www.booklocker.com/p/books/10127.html?s=pdf>**  
**or from your favorite neighborhood**  
**or online bookstore.**