

# Yellow Bird and Me

By Joyce Hansen

## Chapter 3

### PLANS (Part One)

The best thing about Miss Bee's Beauty Hive was the comforting sweet shampoo smell. I also loved the two posters of women with beautiful hairdos that stood in the tiny window next to the drooping spider plant. I wondered whether anyone ever came out of Miss Bee's with their hair looking like the women in the posters.

The Beauty Hive was small and narrow. More pictures of hairstyles were pasted on the walls. Three booths in the front of the shop were separated by the kind of thick frosty glass that you can't see through.

Miss Bee sat on a stool in the first booth, holding a large black curling iron over her customer's head. The other booths were empty. I almost tripped over a hair dryer cord.

"Who's that?" Miss Bee peeped above the top of the divider. "Hi, Honey Bunch," she said as soon as she saw me. A gleam of light sparkled out of her front gold tooth.

"Hi, Miss Bee," I said. "I just wanted —"

"Your mother sent you here to make an appointment for her? It's about time." She looked at her customer in the mirror. "You should see this child's mama. Pretty as a picture. But I lost her when she started wearing them out-of-date Afros."

If I didn't want a job so bad, I would've told her off. "My mother just like to be natural," I said.

She clicked the irons like castanets. "Natural? People wearing curls these days. That's what's natural now. So Honey Bunch, when does she want her appointment?"

"Miss Bee ... I want to know if ... I mean, do you —? I need a job."

"You and a lot of other people," she said. The customer laughed. Miss Bee's gold tooth glittered. "Yes, child. It's a rough world out there. Everyone's looking for work."

"Miss Bee ... I mean ... I was wondering if you need some help."

She twirled a lock of the customer's hair around the iron. "We all need help, Honey Bunch."

Smoke rose out of the customer's hair as Miss Bee made a big, fat curl. I moved from one foot to the other. I didn't know whether she was trying to be funny or really thought I had come in just to talk.

"Miss Bee, what I mean is, I was wondering whether you need someone to answer the phone, to run errands ... or write down appointments. You know."

She put the irons in the burner and wiped her sweaty forehead. "Honey, I thought you was bringing some money in here. Not trying to take it out."

I was thinking of leaving right then until I thought about Amir upstate, and how sad we were both feeling, and how important it was for me to see him. "You don't need someone to keep things straight for you?"

Her counter, filled with lotions, shampoos, combs, brushes, curlers, and pins, looked worse than my table at home.

"You volunteering?"

"I mean when you're busy."

She looked around the empty shop. "Do it look busy in here?"

"Aren't Saturdays busy?"

"Well. . . sometimes, but I —"

"Miss Bee, I can braid hair too — and make all kinds of cornrows with beads and —"

She pulled the customer's hair with the iron so hard the lady squinched. "On no. My clientele don't want no braids. I ain't having no beads and all kind of crazy stuff walking out of my shop. I'd lose my customers."

"But Miss Bee, I —"

"You young people are backwards. We used to wear braids

because we couldn't afford to go to the hairdresser. Right?" She looked at her customer, who agreed.

"Curls is what's happening now," she said, clicking the iron.

"But, Miss Bee, the little girls — I could braid their hair when they come in with their mothers."

"She shook her head. "Their mamas want those girls to have curls. When are you coming in for some? You a cute child. Let me curl your hair and you'll be a raving beauty."

The customer grinned, looking at me in the mirror. Miss Bee put the last curl in the woman's hair and slipped off her stool. "So child, I — Who is that fool?" She headed for the door, and I followed her.

Yellow Bird's face was pressed into the glass watching us. He looked like some kind of monster with his nose and lips mashed up against the window. I could have smacked him. Messing up my job interview.

"You know him?" Miss Bee asked.

"I think he lives around here."

"What you want, rascal?" she yelled, shaking her fist at Bird.

Bird ran. I'd tell him off good when I saw him. If I didn't get to see Amir, I didn't know what I'd do. I had to get this job. "Miss Bee, what about Saturday?"

Miss Bee wiped her hands on her apron and looked at me like

I was wearing her out. "Come by then and see what's happening. Maybe you could run a few errands. Drop in."

"So I got the job?" I said excitedly as the customer handed her some money.

"If you want to call it that," Miss Bee said. "There are two other hairdressers here on Saturdays. They'll tip you for running to the store for them."

"Tip?"

"Yes. We all believe in helping the youth."

It wasn't what I'd expected, but it was better than nothing.

"I'll be here Saturday."

"Okay, honey. And tell your mama to come in for some curls."

Bird was gone when I got outside. Dotty was jumping double Dutch in front of her building with some little girls. Mickey and Lavinia were on the stoop, draped over the bannister like a pair of curtains. I was on the other side of the street but since the block is as narrow as the Beauty Hive, I know they all saw me. They didn't speak to me, though, and I didn't speak to them.