

Yellow Bird and Me

By Joyce Hansen

Chapter 6 GROUNDED

When I walked into the kitchen, all Ma said was, "Girl!" Her eyes and mouth turned to slits. I put my hands up to my face, but she didn't slap me.

Daddy's whole face was a frown. He sat at the table holding Gerald. Ma stood by the sink, folding her arms. "What was you doing hanging out, in of all places, the Beauty Hive?" she yelled.

"Ma, I wasn't hanging out." I let the tears roll.

She walked over to Daddy and sat down next to him. He still wasn't saying anything.

"Them crocodile tears ain't gonna help nothing, Doris," Ma said. "Now tell us what was you doing in there." Poor Gerald, between her yelling and my tears, started crying too.

"Mrs. Nicols said she couldn't believe her eyes when she was passing by and saw you in the window watering that dead plant," Ma continued.

I wiped my eyes with a fist like a big dumb kid. Daddy handed me his handkerchief. "I was just. . . just helping Miss Bee out ..."

I sobbed. "I wanted to earn some money . . . that's all. I wasn't doing nothing wrong."

"Wasn't doing nothing wrong? Me and your father told you that you wasn't to go out and get a job. You ignored us and went out of this house like a grown woman."

I sat silently.

Daddy's voice sounded heavy, like a foghorn. "Doris, your mother lets you go out and play on Saturdays when she could really use you in here to help her." He drummed his hand on the table. "If you so itchy to work, you stay in this house and help your mother."

Ma stood up and started making coffee. "You're grounded, Doris," she said. "You ain't gonna see them streets except for school and back."

"You're *not* to go to work outside this house," Daddy said and plopped Gerald in his high chair and left the kitchen. He seemed even angrier than Ma, even though she the one who done the punishing.

Ma turned up the gas under the coffee. "You defiantly disobeyed us, Doris. There's dangers outside this house, and we can't have you running around like some wild child doing things we don't permit."

"I'm sorry, Ma," I said. I started feeling bad that I'd disobeyed them. I didn't mean to hurt them. "I still don't see why you all don't want me to work," I said.

"You father doesn't even want me to go back to work right now. He

wants me to be home with you and Gerald." She stared at the coffeepot.

"Why? You worked this summer," I said.

"That was an emergency and you were home from school." She tapped her arm with her fingers as she watched the pot.

Ma turned the coffee off and poured herself a cup. "Your father is a very proud man, Doris." She sat down across from me. "He doesn't want his young daughter out there working as if he can't take care of his family." She took a sip of coffee. "You are too young — just turned eleven. You can work when you're a teenager."

"I can't wait that long, Ma," I said. "Anyway, don't you like Miss Bee?"

"She's all right. Hardworking woman. Smart enough to hold on to her own business all these years. But, Doris, the problem is not whether or not I like Miss Bee. The problem is, your father and I aren't sending our child out to work. And besides, you're too young to be hanging around them women in the beauty parlor all day."

"You used to let me go there to get my hair done," I reminded her.

"That was only on special occasions. You wasn't in there all day. Besides, that woman don't change with the times. People come out of her shop looking like a French poodle."

She handed Gerald his teddy bear. "What about your schoolwork?"

"The job is only on Saturdays. It won't interfere with school."

"Doris, how much money you say you made?"

"I didn't say. Twelve dollars — I know it ain't a lot but. . ."

She leaned back in the chair and crossed her legs. You could put a dime in her dimples when she smiles. "Doris, that money ain't taking us from rags to riches. Like Mrs. Nicols said, you need to be close to home."

I wished Mrs. Nicols wouldn't talk so much. "I am close to home. The Hive is just down the block."

"That ain't close enough. And don't keep bugging me about that job, which ain't no real job anyway." She took another sip of coffee. "You in that shop all day and all she paid you is twelve dollars?"

"That was tips I made."

She looked up at the ceiling. "Please. She ain't even paying wages."

"Ma, I made a beautiful comrow design for a little girl."

Ma stared into space for a minute and smiled to herself. "You and your girl friends been comrowing from the time you played with dolls."

"But I do it good now. The lady paid me three dollars." Ma was surprised, but she tried not to show it.

I squeezed her arm. "Ma, did you know that corn-rowing came

from ancient Africa? I read about it in a book.

Every style has a meaning, Ma, and —"

"What does that have to do with working at the Hive?"

"I'd be practicing an ancient African art right in the Beauty Hive."

"You practice your ancient African art in this apartment."

"How long am I grounded?"

"Two weeks."

"Ma!" I couldn't even go back to Miss Bee's if I wanted to. My plans were totally ruined. "Ma, that's too long," I said.

"You lucky it ain't longer," she said, taking Gerald out of his high chair. She carried the baby out of the kitchen and I stared at the four walls. I'd *really* messed up this time. Somehow, I had to come up with a new plan.