

Yellow Bird and Me

By **Joyce Hansen**

Chapter 7

BIRD TO THE RESCUE (Part One)

On Monday, Bird wasn't at school, and by lunchtime, everyone was talking about his suspension. I didn't think it was fair — especially since he had been trying so hard to get serious. I sat at the far end of the lunch table, away from my ex-friends so I could figure out how to convince my mother to let me keep my job with Miss Bee. But I couldn't get away from all of their talk.

Russell took a big bite out of his baloney sandwich. "Wonder when Bird's father or mother will bring him back to school so he can get off suspension," he said.

"He's probably been grounded for the next five months," Mickey piped in. Bird ain't the only one grounded, I said to myself.

Lavinia leaned back in her seat and fingered one of the beads in her hair. "That Yellow Bird picked a fine time to mess up. We have the first Drama Club meeting today."

Dotty jumped out of her seat and tried to imitate Bird's dance.

"That club went to his fool head," Russell said.

"The class ain't no fun without him," T.T. added.

"This is a schoolhouse, not a funhouse, T.T.," Lavinia said waving her hand at him like she was shooing a fly. She turned her back to him to talk to Mickey and Dotty. T.T. stood behind her, imitating the way she moved her head from side to side while she talked.

"Mr. Washington says I have talent, and he said Bird is good too. Isn't Mr. Washington fine?"

It's a wonder Mickey and Dotty didn't break their necks nodding at every word that came out of Lavinia's mouth.

Bird was out of school for the rest of the week, and I was beginning to worry about him. I have to admit I enjoyed the peace and quiet, and I was still a little bit mad at him for what he'd done with my poem. Still, I wondered what had happened to him.

When school ended on Friday, I rushed home to see if I'd gotten a letter yet from Amir. On the way, I thought of my new plan of action to get off punishment and convince Ma why I needed to keep my job at Miss Bee's.

Ma had always told me that if you do good things, good things will come back to you. For the whole week, good became my middle name. One evening, while setting the table without being reminded, Ma said, "This wonderful behavior must be for a reason." I guess she knows me pretty well.

When I got home, Ma was sitting at the kitchen table, reading the paper.

"Ma?" I said, as I entered the kitchen.

"What, Doris?" she said without looking up from her paper.

"Did I get a letter?"

"No." She continued reading.

"Ma, you remember my friend Amir?"

She looked up and stared at me closely. "Yes. And I've been meaning to talk to you about that." She put down her mail and walked over to the stove to heat a pot of coffee. When she puts that coffee on, that means a long serious talk is coming. Why did I open my big mouth?

"I notice you been down in the mouth since your friend left. Maybe that has something to do with this job business?"

She poured the steaming coffee into her cup and sat down at the table. "I had a good friend once. We was like sisters. I thought I'd never find another buddy when she moved. Even started hating the friends I had because they wasn't like her." She stirred the coffee. "But life goes on and your life is here."

"What if I went to visit him, Ma?" I asked hesitantly.

She gazed at me like she was looking at something strange. "Do you think we'd let you go all the way upstate alone to see a boy?"

"We're best friends. He's not just a boy."

"You got a whole block full of best friends right here on 163rd Street.

Discussion closed."

She picked up her coffee and went to the living room.

Even though I knew Ma meant what she'd said, I still fantasized on Saturday morning that at any moment she would come up to me and tell me that I was off punishment and could keep my job. I even put out the garbage without being asked and cleaned the living room, which wasn't one of my regular Saturday chores. I called her to look at my work. "Ma, how do you like that?"

Everything was polished to a high shine. She folded her arms. "Okay, Doris. What do you want?"

"Am I still grounded?"

"I told you two weeks."

"Ma, I'm sorry for what I did. I was doing it for us — for the family. I thought you'd be proud when I came home with money I earned with my own hands. And I —"

She sighed. "Stop whining and lying. You know you was just trying to make money to go see your friend. I'll let you off, but you better not go near that beauty parlor."

"I have to tell Miss Bee that I can't help her."

"You had all week to tell her."

"But I was grounded. You told me to come straight home from school."

"Doris, don't play with me. You go over there and tell her that you cannot work for her and that's all you do."

"Yes, Ma," I mumbled. "Then can I go to the movies?"

"I don't have the money. Them movies just junk anyhow."

"Then why can't I work?"

"Don't start up again with that job nonsense, Doris." She turned on the television. "What about your own money?"

I smiled. "Oh no. I'm saving that, since I can't work. I don't know when I'll have so much money again." I put on my jacket. "Ma, the mail come today yet?"

"No. I wish you'd stop bugging me about the mail. And don't roam the Bronx."

I walked slowly down 163rd Street toward the Beauty Hive, dodging the little children playing stickball on the street. I didn't want to tell Miss Bee I couldn't come there anymore. I *had* to earn money to visit Amir. Things had been so good last week. Everything was perfect until Ma called.

The Hive was quiet and no cloud of smoke rose out of Miss Bee's booth. But as soon as I walked in, she said, "Honey, I'm glad to see you. I have a big job coming in here soon and I'm out of paper towels." The shop was empty. Not even the other hairdressers were around.

"Miss Bee, I—"

"The customer coming in is a bride-to-be. Getting married this evening and she's a nervous wreck." Miss Bee gave me \$4.00.

"Get four rolls of paper towels. Oh, and water that plant before you go."

"Miss Bee, I—"

"I always forget about that plant. What was you saying, Honey Bunch?"

"Miss Bee, I. . . that plant look dead to me."

"No, it ain't. It'll come back to life if we remember to water it."

I walked to the window. This was how I got caught before. But I was only doing her a favor . . . watering the plant and then going to the store. I wouldn't take money for it. I pulled the plant out of the window and took it to the back and watered it. I had to tell her.

"Miss Bee, my mother said —"

The phone rang. "Let me get that, honey. Now you hurry back with them towels."