

Yellow Bird and Me

By **Joyce Hansen**

Chapter 12

A NEW VENTURE (Continued)

When Mr. Washington came out, he handed me a tissue, and I wiped my eyes and blew my nose. He sat down next to me on the steps. "Mr. Washington," I said. "Bird ain't like them other kids. I've been helping him with his homework, and he's got just a little something wrong with him."

Mr. Washington looked kind. He didn't correct my grammar or get mad at me for not minding my business. "How so, Doris?" he said.

I explained to him how Bird was seeing things mixed up and he had trouble reading, and Mr. Washington said he'd look into it more and make sure that Bird got the help he needed. And he thanked me for being so caring. I didn't think I was being caring, though. I just wanted to help my friend.

I didn't say anything to anyone about where Bird was. I didn't even tell his buddies — Russell and T.T. When we were dismissed at three, I rushed outside. I waited for Bird, but he never came down the school steps. He must've left early or come out of one of the side

exits.

Then I remembered that the students in the special classes left a little earlier. That's why no one saw him. Instead of walking down Cauldwell Avenue to 163rd Street, I took the shortcut through the playground.

When I got to the 163rd Street exit, I saw him. "Bird," I yelled. "Wait up."

For a minute it looked like he was going to run from me, but he stopped. I caught up to him. "Why didn't you tell me?"

He wouldn't look at me. "I couldn't."

"You're not like those kids. I don't mean to talk bad about them or anything like that, but you're not like them."

"Yes, I am. I can't read," he said in a choked-up voice. He sounded like he was going to cry and I felt like crying again.

"You read a little. I mean, all you have to do is keep being serious like you been."

He turned his back to me and shook his head.

I didn't know what to say to him. "You're in the club now and that should be fun, Bird." I touched the arm of his jacket. He didn't move.

I expected him to turn around smiling that old Yellow Bird smile. Instead he shrugged his shoulders.

"You ain't interested in it anymore?" I asked.

"How can I be in a play if I can't read the script? How can I be an actor?"

We started walking toward the block. "You used to do the same work we did, Bird. I'll help you read the script. That ain't no big thing. And you know maybe we can get Mr. Washington to talk to Barker if you do real good in the play. Maybe she'll let you back in the class."

Bird was silent.

"Maybe this class change is only for a little while. They just trying to scare you, Bird. I bet they let you back in our class."

Bird stared at me and shook his head again. We reached my building. "You want to do homework with me?" I asked.

"For what? I can do the work in my new class. One plus one equals two and *t-h-e* spells *the*" He shivered a little and rubbed his hands together. "And we don't get homework."

"Study with me anyway," I said, looking back at him. "That way you'll know the work when you get back in our class."

He followed me" up the stairs. "I'll never get back," he mumbled. "And I didn't know the work when I was in the class."

"That ain't true. You knew all the social studies. And you knew them dates, too."

When we sat down at the kitchen table, Bird turned the pages of my social studies book slowly.

"Something's wrong with my head," he whispered.

There was nothing I could say. We just sat there quietly for a while listening to my mother talking to Gerald in the next room. Then I said, "Bird, I'm going to read Amir's letter to you." I went in my room and came back with the letter. "I wasn't going to show this to anyone, but I'll show it to you." Bird grinned at me like he was pleased.

"I still miss that dude sometimes," he said sadly, his face kind of clouding up.

I miss him all the time, I thought to myself. "It's too bad he had to leave," I said.

"But he's happy. And he better off where he is than he was with that foster family here in the Bronx. We should be happy something good happened for him."

Bird's mood changed slowly. We talked on and on about what a good time we all had together when Amir was living on 163rd Street. I loved to talk about him with Bird. Amir seemed more real and closer to me than ever.

"Hey, Doris," Bird said, suddenly excited. "Why don't you join the Drama Club too?"

I shook my head. "No. Not me. I don't want to be in no club, especially with them troublemaking girls."

"You'd be there with me. Me and you, Doris."

"I told you, I'd help you read a script, but I ain't joining."

"If you don't join, I ain't either," he said.

"You promised Mr. Washington."

His happy mood was disappearing, and he was beginning to look the same sad way he did when I saw him at three o'clock.

"Doris, I don't want to to be in it if you don't come too."

"That's silly," I said. "You like to dance and act, not me."

"I don't want to go there alone," he muttered.

"Alone? You know everyone in the club."

His eyes looked pained. "Russell, Lavinia, and them, you know, they'll be laughing at me about being in that special class."

"They laugh at everyone, Bird. I just showed you the nice things Amir said about you."

"Amir ain't here, and you're my best friend, right?"

I didn't know what to say. At first I'd helped Bird because that's what Amir would've done. But lately I looked for Bird and worried about Bird because I really cared about what happened to him.

"I'll go with you to the meeting, but I ain't joining," I said.

"Join," he said. "Please?"

If I was going to help Bird, I thought, I'd have to go anyway. "Maybe I will," I said. "Yeah, maybe I will."

He jumped out of the chair and almost knocked me out of my seat when he ran over to me and gave me a big kiss on my cheek.

"You so crazy, Bird," I chuckled, rubbing my face, and I was glad he was my friend.