

Yellow Bird and Me

By Joyce Hansen

Chapter 13

THE WAY IT USED TO BE

I felt real excited when me and Bird entered the auditorium. Practically the whole class was there along with kids from other classes, and two other teachers. Mr. Washington sat on the stage talking excitedly while his legs and sneakered feet dangled over the edge.

T.T. sat in the first row along with Lavinia, Russell, and Mickey and Dotty.

"I thought T.T. didn't want to be in the club," I said to Bird.

He frowned. "Guess he changed his mind, and Barker let him join."

"I bet if you're good in this play, Barker will let you come back in the class," I said as we sat down in the back of the auditorium.

Bird pulled the seat down so hard that Mr. Washington heard him.

"Come up on front," he said to us. It seemed like every head in the room turned around, and every eye was on Bird and me.

Lavinia put her hands over her mouth and whispered to Mickey.

"Hey, Bird!" Russell yelled when he saw us. "Where you been hiding?"

His face split into a big grin. Russell knew.

Mr. Washington stood up and looked at Russell. "This ain't homecoming. You socialize after the meeting," he said.

Russell faced front, but T.T. still stared at us with a smile the size of a half-moon. "Ignore them, Bird," I whispered. "You better off without friends anyway."

He slumped down in the seat and stared at his hands. I nudged him. "Bird, you'll do so good in the play that nobody will tease you about being in that class."

Mr. Washington swung himself down from the stage and leaned against it. "Mrs. Barker tells me you are reading *A Christmas Carol* by Charles Dickens in your English studies. Who can tell me what it's about?"

"I can," T.T. called out. "It's that cool story about that Scrooge dude. He's rich, but he's real stingy. I saw a cartoon about him on television."

"Very good, T.T.," Mr. Washington said. "I was thinking of us updating that story."

Lavinia giggled. "T.T. could be the ghost of Christmas past."

Bird looked up slowly and whispered to me, "You really think I'd be good in a play?"

I nodded.

Bird grinned.

"We're going to do an adaptation. We'll have a Scrooge-type character, but we won't call him Scrooge," Mr. Washington said.

Lavinia raised her hand. "He could be a mean old man."

"Or a mean young woman," I said to myself.

"Right," Mr. Washington said, "how do we show his meanness?"

"He beats people up," a boy hollered.

Mr. Washington looked concerned. "I don't think we want to be violent, although that's a very good illustration of meanness."

"He's cheap," Bird whispered, "like the real Scrooge."

"Give your idea too, Bird," I said.

"Naw," he shook his head, "you say it for me."

"It's your idea, Bird." I pulled his arm up.

Mr. Washington nodded in our direction. "James?"

"What if . . . what if. . . ?" Bird stuttered. Someone snickered.

"The man is cheap," I finished. Then I raised my hand. "That was Bird's idea," I said.

Mickey giggled.

"It's a good idea," Mr. Washington said. "We can show the meanness in his character through his cheapness." Mr. Washington put his hands in his pockets and paced back and forth quickly. "Okay, now I want you to think of some characters and scenes." He stopped pacing and took a pad and pencil out

of his briefcase. "I'll jot down your thoughts."

Bird raised his hand by himself this time. "He could have a lot of money but won't share it with nobody — not even his own family."

Mickey said, "Yeah, and he don't even help no one in any kind of way."

"These are wonderful suggestions," Mr. Washington said, writing quickly.

Bird pulled off his hood. Dotty waved her hands excitedly and stood up. "The man owns a building. Charges people too much rent and throws them out in the cold dark night if they can't pay." She hugged herself and shivered.

Mickey pulled her back in her seat. "Why don't you stop acting stupid?"

"And the man could hate Christmas the most out of all the holidays," I whispered to Bird.

Bird raised his hand.

"Yes, James." Mr. Washington continued to write while he listened.

"Doris has an idea. Suppose the man hates Christmas the most of all the holidays?"

Lavinia snickered and said something to Mickey again.

Mr. Washington looked up from his pad and smiled at us.

"You and Doris speak for each other, right?" He wrote my idea on the board.

I was proud that he used my idea, even though I was embarrassed when somebody giggled.

"That was a great idea, Doris. We can call the play *The Man Who Hated Christmas*" He wrote real fast.

Everybody contributed ideas - even the two teachers. Then Mr. Washington talked to us about creating characters and writing and acting out scenes. Time flew and even though I didn't mean to, I started getting interested in the scenes and characters we created. I was sorry when the meeting ended, because now Bird would have to face "Russell, T.T., and the rest of them.

Bird and I started walking toward the door. Russell was the first one to come over to us. T.T., Lavinia, and Mickey and Dotty followed.

"Hey, man," Russell said, "I hear you in that class where them kids tell time with a giant toy clock?" If Russell wasn't ten times my size, I would've knocked that big, simple grin off his face.

T.T. said, "They need to get a cuckoo clock, then they don't have to tell the time — just listen."

"Bird is a cuckoo clock," said Russell, and they both snickered.

"Why don't you two grow up and stop making fun of people?" I yelled as we left the room.

"Bird is smarter and more talented than both of you put together. He's just having some trouble now, and he don't need you two mouthing off to him."

Bird walked close to me, looking ashamed. He didn't even try to defend himself. He acted as if he thought they had a right to tease him.

Before I could say anything else, Lavinia yelled as we walked down the hall, "It ain't right to make fun of them kids."

"Yeah," Dotty said, "They can't help how they are."

"You better hope nothing ever happens to you and people laugh at you, Russell and T.T.," Mickey shouted.

I was so shocked that those girls defended Bird I almost started liking them again.

"You know Russell and T.T., some things just ain't funny," Lavinia snapped.

I started feeling like Amir. He would have stood up to Russell and them without caring what anyone thought, just like I did. I guess since I was right, people just followed along with what I said.

Russell stopped walking. "We was only joking. Nobody making fun of Bird." He turned to Bird. "Man, we don't care about you being in that class. We miss you, man."

"Our class is boring when you ain't there," T.T. added.

We continued walking.

"Barker shouldn't have taken you out of the class," Mickey said touching his arm. "You belong with us."

"I'm getting back in 6-3," Bird said. "Doris is going to help me."

"Right, old buddy," Russell boomed, slapping Bird on the back. "This just a little setback." Bird tried to cuff him on the side of his head, but Russell was as fast as he was big.

Russell ducked and ran down the hallway while Bird chased him and T.T., followed with his foolish "He, he, he." I know Bird was happy to be with his friends again. I was too.

I could hear the boys noisily racing down the stairs as I continued walking down the hall. Lavinia, strolling behind me, cleared her throat. "Doris, I'm surprised you're so friendly with Bird. You two having a little romance?"

I swung around and faced her nose to nose. "So what of it, Lavinia?"

She raised both her hands and backed away. "Nothing. We just noticed you've been spending a lot of time with Yellow Bird." She glanced slyly at Mickey.

"We best friends," I said, staring right at Mickey. "And he don't start rumors like some folks around here." I glared at Lavinia.

"You joining the club?" Mickey said, looking away from me.

"Maybe," I said. "I mostly came to keep Bird company. He ain't as silly as he acts sometimes."

I stared at Lavinia, knowing she'd have a smart remark to make.

Before she could open her mouth, Dotty said, "Join the club, Doris, it'll be fun."

"Well, to tell you the truth," I said, "I've already decided to."

"All right!" Dotty yelled, and she skipped down the hall in front of us as if she were jumping double Dutch. Evidently, she wasn't angry with me no more. And they were so understanding about Bird, that it caused me not to be as angry with them. It probably didn't make sense to stay mad at Lavinia because she's always been gossipy and nosey and is probably never going to change.

The boys were waiting for us when we got outside. Bird said to me, "Come on to the candy store with us, Doris."

"No, Bird," I said, clutching my notebook. "I need to study. I'll see you-all tomorrow."

"Come on, Doris," Mickey and Dotty said at the same time.

Lavinia locked her arm into mine and dragged me along. "You got to come with us, Doris, 'cause we like you again. Besides, I got some news to tell you."

Then Russell grabbed my notebook out of my hands and ran down the street, and we all chased him, laughing and clowning, until we got to the candy store. It was good to be back with my old friends again. Just like old times.