

Yellow Bird and Me

By Joyce Hansen

Chapter 15 DECISIONS

On Monday morning, it was so cold outside that Bird wasn't even waiting for me on my stoop. As I took the shortcut through the playground, I noticed turkey and pumpkin decorations on the school windows. It was almost Thanksgiving, and I wondered how Amir was getting along.

When I passed the swings, I heard someone calling me and turned around. The twins were waving and running to catch up with me. I waited and the three of us walked to school together.

Dotty wore a plaid tarn with a big green pom-pom on top. "I hear you coming to the club this afternoon, Doris."

"Yeah," I said, "but I ain't getting on no stage and acting."

Mickey adjusted her bright red tarn. "Doris, I'm glad you joining. Even if you don't be in the play."

When we got to school, instead of going to the library to wait for the morning bell, I went with Mickey and Dotty to the cafeteria. Bird was there and walked over to us when we came in.

He sat next to me on one of the benches, and then T.T. and Lavinia and Russell came and sat down and we all talked and joked together while we waited to line up for class.

That afternoon, Mickey and Dotty and I went to the Drama Club. Dotty said more people showed up than at the first meeting last week. I think if the whole school wanted to be in the play, Mr. Washington would've let them. There were students from every grade, including Bird's class.

"Everyone quiet now." Mr. Washington stood on the stage. "The title of the play is *The Man Who Hated Christmas*. It's going to be a musical about a person who refuses to lend a helping hand. In the end though, he learns some important lessons about caring and sharing."

Mr. Washington paced back and forth staring at the floor while he talked to us. "We'll have a chorus composed of two or three students from each grade, so we'll be needing good singers and dancers."

He assigned roles next. Bird waved his hand each time Mr. Washington announced a part, but Mr. Washington ignored him. He pointed to Russell, "Would you like to play the man?"

"Yeah," Russell said, grinning. It was one of the main parts in the play. Mickey would play the part of the man's wife and Lavinia, his niece. I was relieved whenever someone else volunteered or was picked for the cast, even though Mr. Washington had told me I didn't have to act.

Bird raised his hands for part after part, but Mr. Washington pretended not to see him. I hoped he wasn't going to leave Bird out.

There were only two roles left: a shy, young boy named Joe and a homeless old woman.

Dotty waved her hands. "Can I be the old lady?" She got up and moved around like an ancient woman. Mickey jerked her back in her seat.

Mr. Washington turned to Bird. "James, I want you to play the role of Joe. Okay?"

Bird looked like he wanted to go into one of his spins. But he controlled himself and just nodded. Me, Mickey and Dotty, Lavinia, T.T., and Russell clapped and cheered. Joe was the biggest role in the play!

T.T. decided he'd rather take care of the props and make scenery. A teacher and a group of her students would operate the lights. As I was deciding what I wanted to do, Mr. Washington motioned for me to come to the stage.

"Doris, I want you to write a poem for the play."

"Mr. Washington I can't write a . . ."

He held his hand up. "James and some of the girls here have told me what a good poet you are." My face burned, and I started to get mad all over again about the poem. But then I remembered that Amir liked it. Maybe it wasn't so bad after all.

He started putting papers in his briefcase.

"Anyhow, Doris, that won't be right away. For now, I need you to coach James."

"Oh yeah, I can do that, Mr. Washington."

"I knew I could depend on you." He put on his jacket. "Okay, folks. That's all until tomorrow."

Rehearsals began the following day, after school. When I got to the auditorium, Bird wasn't there yet. He could change like the weather sometimes. I hoped he'd show up.

Mr. Washington gave everyone copies of the script. "I know you'll study these so that you can memorize your parts. I expect that when we come back after the Thanksgiving weekend, all of you will know your lines perfectly." Mr. Washington smiled. Everybody moaned.

I watched the door and prayed Bird would come. Mr. Washington called some people up to the stage. Lavinia pranced around as soon as her foot hit the steps.

I turned around again to look for Bird, and just then he walked in. His blue hood was pulled way over his head. He sank down in the last row of the auditorium.

Mr. Washington called me and gave me two copies of the script. Before I had a chance to ask him how to help Bird, someone else got his attention.

I walked to the back of the auditorium and sat next to Bird. "What's

wrong with you now?" I said.

"Nothing."

"Why you look so miserable? I thought you was happy about the play."

"It's the reading. Sometimes I forget words. Suppose I get on the stage and forget everything?"

"Bird, you say you want to act. You know actors have to read."

He seemed to shrink down into his hood. "Guess I was thinking about how much fun it looked to be on stage singing and dancing."

I handed him a script. "You got stage fright and we ain't even started yet."

"You scared too, Doris."

"I know I'm scared to be in front of an audience, but I don't want to be no actress."

I read his lines to him, and he followed along with me and repeated them, sounding like someone just learning how to speak English. Barker will never let him back in the class if he sounds like this the night of the play, I thought.

We worked so hard on the play for the rest of the week, I didn't have time to think about anything else. Bird really tried, but still had a lot of trouble reading the script.

"This is different from that improvisation stuff Mr. Washington showed us," he kept saying. When Bird didn't have to read off the script and

could act out the little bit he'd memorized, he was okay.

But still I wondered if Bird was going to make it.

When Saturday rolled around again, I was worried about going back inside the Hive since I came so close to getting caught. I had to talk to Miss Bee, though. Daddy was at work, and Ma had to go out for most of the day. I had to mind Gerald as I anxiously waited for her to come home.

As soon as Ma got home, I went straight to Miss Bee. There was no cloud of smoke over her booth, and she sat in her chair reading the paper.