

# Yellow Bird and Me

By Joyce Hansen

## Chapter 15

### DECISIONS (Continued)

I was glad she wasn't busy so that I could talk to her.

"Hi, Honey Bunch," she said when I walked in. "Where have you been today? We was real busy. We missed you."

"Hello, Miss Bee, can I talk to you about a problem I have?"

"Sure, sit down."

I took off my coat, pulled a chair up to her booth, and sat down to explain that the real reason I didn't want my mother to know I was working there was because my parents didn't want me to work.

"Well, Honey Bunch, you know I can't let you come here if your parents don't want you to."

"I know," I said sadly.

"I sure wish there was something I could do to change their minds," she said.

"I do too," I said. "But they pretty much made up their minds."

She looked at herself in the mirror and patted her hair.

"I sure will miss you, Honey Bunch, cause you're a nice girl and a good

worker. By the way, don't you go to that elementary school on Caldwell Avenue?"

"Yes," I answered.

"My nephew goes there too. He's in a play. Do you know anything about it?"

"Yeah," I said, "I'm part of it."

She opened her eyes and smiled. "Well then, I'll see you the night of the play. I'm going too."

"Miss Bee, that's wonderful. I'll see you there. And my parents will be there also." I stood up and put on my coat. "Who's your nephew?" I asked.

"You know a boy named T.T.?"

I nearly cracked up. T.T. is Miss Bee's nephew?

"He's my sister's kid. He's so excited about that play he wants the whole family to come." I wondered whether T.T. told them that he wasn't acting in it.

"Miss Bee, I'll see you the night of the play."

"Okay, Honey Bunch. And maybe I'll say hello to your parents," she said, winking.

It was beginning to snow again as I walked up 163rd Street. And even though I was out of work, I felt a thousand times better now that I'd finally quit that job and I didn't have to sneak around and lie anymore.

When I got home, Ma was in the kitchen. The apartment felt warm and cozy after the cold outside. I made hot chocolate and gave Gerald some milk while Ma fixed dinner. "Ma," I said, "I officially joined the Drama Club."

Ma beamed. "That's wonderful, Doris. I used to love being in plays when I was in school. I'm glad you're taking part in a special activity instead of moping around here."

"I'm not going to be in it. I am just writing some and helping Bird," I said proudly.

I sat down at the table across from her and we talked about the play. She told me that she'd noticed a big change in me, but I wasn't sure what she meant. When I went back to my room to begin my homework, I realized something. For the past few weeks, I'd been thinking about a lot more things than just how I was going to visit Amir. Since I started helping Bird, I felt good. Like I used to feel when Amir was still here.

I took out Amir's letter and re-read it. It didn't make me sad anymore. It wasn't that he didn't want to see me, or that he didn't need me. I knew it was time for me to answer him, because there was a lot to tell him. Maybe I couldn't visit him right away to cheer him up in person. But I knew what I had to tell Amir was going to make him happy right now.

November 16th

My Dear Amir,

How are you? Fine, I hope. I'm glad that everything is going well and that you have a nice family to be with. It's wonderful that you're with one of your brothers, at last. I read your letter to Bird, and he's glad too. It makes us happy to know that you're not lonely and you're someplace where people are treating you right. All the kids on 163rd Street still miss you too. They were all sad too when you left, but they wasn't mad because they knew it wasn't your fault that you had to leave like that.

Everything is real fine here. Dunbar Elementary is putting on a spectacular Christmas show. Everybody's part of it. Bird, the twins, Lavinia, Russell, and even T.T. I'm going to be doing writing and coaching Bird. It's real exciting, Amir.

Bird is trying very hard to do well in school and I help him. He got in some trouble and had to be put in a special class, but if he does good in the play, I know the teacher will take him back in our class. I am going to make sure he performs so well, that she'll be on her knees, begging to take him back. I feel happy like you still here when I coach Bird. You were right about him, Amir. He's beginning to change and so am I.

You will tell me when it's okay to come and visit. It's okay if it takes you a while to get used to your new home. Anyway, I'll have to figure out another way to make money, now that Ma made me quit my job at the Hive. Meanwhile we all think about you and hope you're okay.

Love,

Your friend to the end,

Doris

Ma let me walk out into the snow to mail my letter. The big snowflakes looked magical, swirling out of the sky.

Wednesday was the last rehearsal of the play before the Thanksgiving weekend. Russell and the rest of the cast had already been on stage for a few days, reading from their scripts. Since Bird had so much trouble reading, Mr. Washington wanted him to practice with me before he came on the stage.

Now Mr. Washington called Bird to the stage. "Come on up here," he said.

I stayed in my seat in the front of the auditorium.

Bird walked slowly to the stage — like he dreaded going up there.

"I wish it would snow. I wi-wish some-some . . ."

I covered my face. This was the part he'd memorized. Mr. Washington probably thought I hadn't helped Bird at all. Bird tried again. "I wish it would snow. I wi-wi. . ."

Mr. Washington jumped on the stage. He touched Bird on the shoulder. "Calm down. I know you and Doris have been practicing, right?"

I stumbled out of my seat before Bird had a chance to answer. "Mr. Washington," I said, "Bird knows that part. He said it all from memory yesterday."

Mr. Washington looked worried — almost like he felt sorry for Bird.

Bird finally found his voice. "Mr. Washington, maybe I can't do it. Maybe I should —"

"You can do this very well. I know you can, Bird." Mr. Washington didn't call him James anymore.

"When he ain't nervous, he does it good," I yelled up to the stage. I noticed that some of the other people in the cast mumbled impatiently waiting for Bird to get himself together.

"Doris, you come up too." He turned to Bird again. "Don't look at the words. Say what you remember. Ad lib, improvise the rest if you need to. Doris will help you with the words for the third scene."

Mr. Washington looked around. "Where's Marcia?" She was the girl who played Bird's mother.

"She's absent today," Lavinia said.

Mr. Washington looked at me. "Doris, get on the stage with Bird and play her part."

I climbed up on the stage. I knew the part from memory because Bird and I practiced it so many times.

"I wish," Bird began. "I wish snow."

He shook his head, and started again. "I wish it would snow. I wish something would . . . would . . ."

"Would happen to show me that this is a season of happiness and love," I whispered.

He repeated after me. Then I said, "Boy, you better stop wishing for snow. We have enough problems."

Bird stood up. "Isn't that supposed to happen this time of year? And isn't this supposed . . . supposed — I mean, supposed to be a season of love?" He blurted out quickly before he forgot.

I put my arm around Bird. "Son, snow and love don't go together. I hate snow." I pointed to what would be a drawing of a cracked windowpane when T.T. and his group finished the scenery.

"If it snows, do you know where it will fall?" I said.

"In this, in this —"

"Apartment," I finished for him.

"Apartment," he said, lowering his head.

"That's right son. Right through that cracked windowpane."

Bird was a little better in the next scene, replacing words he forgot with other words that made sense. I stayed at Bird's shoulder, telling him almost every word for the third scene.

He was a mess, but so was everyone else, except Lavinia. I began to wonder whether Bird being in the play was such a good idea after all. He'd never get out of the special class if he was judged by his performance now.

However, Bird relaxed when he sang his first song, "Why Is He So Mean?" His voice only squeaked once and he didn't seem at all like Yellow Bird anymore, but like shy, quiet Joe. When he finished, Lavinia said, "Bird sang his heart out."

Bird and I practiced over the Thanksgiving weekend. He was still having problems, but memorized a few more lines; however, time was moving faster than Bird was learning his lines.