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First There was Bird

BY LINDA OATMAN HIGH

ILLUSTRATED BY LEO TRINIDAD

First there was Bird. Then there was Bird-Bird. And now, Third Bird. Magnolia's daddy won the beloved cockatiel Third Bird at a carnival, just before he died in a car accident. Magnolia promised to always take good care of Third Bird . . . but then she loses him, when she accidentally allows the bird to fly from his cage at her mama's beauty salon. Magnolia's grief, for her father and for her lost bird, opens up a whole new world of friends as they search not only for Third Bird, but for acceptance and healing. Helping her mama to see that physical beauty is not important (even in a family that comes from "a long line of beauty queens"), Magnolia becomes the star of her small Southern town as she finds hope and light in the healing of her grief and learns that sometimes when you go looking for one thing, you find what you really need.

Comps Include: *Beverly Right Here* by Kate DiCamillo;
The List of Things That Will Not Change by Rebecca Stead



ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Linda Oatman High is the author of more than 25 books for children and teens, with many of her books winning awards and honors. Linda's writing awards include the 2017 Ross Legal Fiction contest from the American Bar Association, as well as the prestigious international shortlist for the Sunday Times short story award. Linda holds an MFA in Writing from

Vermont College, and she is also a journalist, playwright, and poet. Recent publications include the highly acclaimed *Somebody's Someone* (One Elm Books) from 2025. Linda lives and writes in central Pennsylvania.



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that ate the canary, right? Well, if cats eat canaries, I bet they eat cockatiels, too!"

"It didn't eat your bird," Jeremiah says.

"How do you know? Nobody knows!"

"It's too skinny. If it ate an entire bird, it wouldn't

And just then comes Pastor Gene, dressed in shorts and a faded, old Hooters T-shirt.

"I always did love that bird," he says. "Now let's get cracking."



128



CHAPTER 21

Who's A Pretty Girl?

And so here we are, a mish-mash of a search group that includes a man of God in an orange Hooters shirt, an old combat lady in a wheelchair, an ex-convict, a bib-overalled lady who looks like a man, and a bunch of wannabe beauty queens on skateboards and wearing hoodies. Life sure is strange sometimes.

Granny pulls up in her new VW convertible. The car squeals to the curb, and Granny parks fast, hopping out.

"I heard a rumor of a little search party this afternoon," she says, click-clacking down the broken sidewalk in her white sandals, stepping daintily over the cracks. "We are going to find that bird if it's the last thing we do, dang it."

"Amen," says Pastor Gene.

"I just said a tiny silent prayer, asking God to give

129



a sharp breath, and it feels like claws are scratching my lungs. I point at the feather.

"Jeremiah. That's one of Third Bird's feathers."

"How do you know? A million birds could have feathers that look just like that."

I bend over the feather, then go down on my knees in the grass. I pick it up and hold it to the light, and then I sniff it.

"I know my bird's feather when I see it and smell it. This belongs to Third Bird."

I stick the feather in the upper pocket of my bib overalls, right next to my heart.

"So, this means one of two things," I say. "Either this ugly cat killed Third Bird, or he tried to attack

57

"...young readers are likely to enjoy the quick pace and quirky personalities...A heartfelt, ambitious, and often charming story with a significant emotional punch."

—Kirkus Reviews

"*First There Was Bird* lets loose a menagerie of colorful characters! A delightful, funny, and heartwarming story of a girl's search for a bird and her discovery of friendship and forgiveness."

—A. B. Westrick, author of *Brotherhood*

"If you were a runaway cockatiel, where would you go?" It's a fair question...

but not a very common one! In *First There Was Bird*, it is the journey—not the destination—that counts. Readers will be enthralled as they follow the zig-zagging paths of delightful characters such as Magnolia, Delilah, Jeremiah, and Violet who, in their quest to find a lost pet, discover community, friendship, and a deeper understanding of themselves."

—Jen Bryant, Sibert Medal winner, author of *Pieces of Georgia, The Trial, and Ringside 1925*



"Kate DiCamillo meets Harper Lee. Dazzling and thoroughly readable. This tale of hard-won belonging proves there's a place in the heart for everyone."

—Marty Crisp, author of *White Star: A Dog on the Titanic* and *Private Captain: A Story of Gettysburg*