

# BOW WOW

A BOWSER AND BIRDIE NOVEL

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**A** CAR BEEPED OUTSIDE OUR HOUSE AT 19 Gentilly Lane. *Beep beep*. The *beep beep* of a horn hurts my ears in a way you probably wouldn't understand, since my sense of hearing is a lot different from yours. I didn't say *better* than yours, so don't be upset. But just between you and me, it is better! I hear sounds humans don't hear all the time! For example, that *drip drip drip*, right now, under the kitchen sink? Down in the cupboard with all the cleaning supplies, including some tasty sponges? But never mind the sponges. The point is someone should do something to stop that *drip drip drip*—except they won't because they don't even hear it. There's going to be a big puddly mess, and soon!

The humans in our family all turned to me: Birdie, Mama, Grammy. “What the heck is that blasted barking about?” Grammy said.

Someone was barking? I listened my hardest, heard no barking. This was a strange day already, and it had hardly even started.

“Maybe he’s upset you’re leaving, Mama,” Birdie said.

Mama bent down, gave me a pat. “Is that it, Bowser? Upset that I’m leaving?”

“Bull pucky,” said Grammy. “How would he even know you’re leaving?”

Whoa! Mistakes were going by so fast I could hardly keep up. Why wouldn’t I know Mama was leaving? Wasn’t that her suitcase, the sturdy metal kind with straps, all packed and standing by the door, her hard hat perched on top? But that wasn’t why I was upset. Not that you could call me upset. I’m known as a pretty steady customer around these parts—these parts being the little bayou town of St. Roch, the nicest little bayou town you’ll ever see, and if you happen to be passing through, stop by! And maybe bring a treat, chewies always welcome if nothing else comes to mind. Although here are some hints: steak tips, sausages, hamburger patties. No cooking necessary—I’m not fussy.

But where were we? Something about . . . being upset? Me? Why would I—

*Beep beep.*

That was it! The beeping! My ears! I was just about to let everyone know how I felt about that beeping in no uncertain terms when Mama said, “Well, kiddo,” and wrapped her arms around Birdie, holding her close. “My chariot awaits.”

Chariot? That one blew right by me. Maybe here's a chance to describe the family, before we've really gotten going. If not now, how will I ever squeeze it in later? I'll try to be quick. How about we start with Mama? Mama's Birdie's mom, but she's not Grammy's daughter. Grammy's son was Birdie's dad, a police captain who got killed down in New Orleans when Birdie was just little, and not too long ago we found out who did it! And even why! Neither of which I can remember at the moment. Mama's tall and strong, with deep, dark eyes and light brown hair, usually in a ponytail, like now. In these parts we've got some farms and ranches, so you get to know ponies. I love how they use their tails to swish away flies, and I'm sure Mama will figure out how to do that with her own ponytail one day. Mama was an oil platform engineer, which must mean she's pretty smart, and pretty smart means way smarter than any pony, and then some.

Mama's got powerful hands and so does Grammy, even though Grammy's half Mama's size, and kind of old and bony, smelling like stacks of yellowed newspapers down at the town library. Grammy's eyes are washed-out blue and don't miss a thing. Birdie's eyes are also blue, but bright and shining, like the big, blue sky at the nicest time of the nicest day. And is there time to mention Birdie's smell, all about soap and lemons and these lovely yellow flowers that grow on the edge of the bayou, beautiful flowers although

not particularly tasty? Probably not—so back to the little front hall at 19 Gentilly Lane, where those deep brown eyes of Mama’s seemed kind of damp. “Won’t be long, honey,” she said.

“Three months,” Birdie said. “It used to be two.”

“This new company has different rules. But we’ll do lots of Skyping.”

Birdie nodded. Her eyes seemed to dampen, too. She blinked a few times and gave her head a quick shake, like she was trying to blink and shake that dampness away. Uh-oh. Was Birdie unhappy about something? Not on my watch! I squeezed myself in between them, pressing my head against Birdie to let her know that there was nothing to be unhappy about, not with ol’ Bowser in the picture. Birdie’s got great balance, so she didn’t quite fall down, not all the way to the floor, and the next thing I knew Mama and Birdie were laughing—although not Grammy, who might have been shooting a somewhat severe look my way—and the front door was open.

A car waited in the driveway, a man and a woman in front, luggage on the roof rack. Mama gave Grammy a quick hug.

“Don’t work too hard.”

“Hrrmf,” said Grammy.