

Hi. Jitty here, fearless gal reporter, on the job in Zinnia, Mississippi with the author of the books that showcase my amazing talents. It's a beautiful day in Zinnia, one of those Delta days where the land stretches for miles and miles.

The town is bustling, and Sarah Booth and I are sittin' on the front porch of Dahlia House with a mint Julep and a gentle breeze rustlin' the sycamore leaves.

The town is all abuzz with the murder charges bein' dropped against Sarah Booth and her unexpected display of actual talent as Maggie the Cat in the production of *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*. (Who knew the girl could really act?) Of course, Sarah Booth's desire to be a stage success is what got her charged with murder in the first place, but no one listens to me. I tole that girl again and again to keep her eye on the prize. And that would be a big diamond and a gold band on her left hand and a growing Delaney heir in her womb.

But will Sarah Booth listen to reason? No. Now she's on some half-cocked idea about being a movie star. Anyway, today, Carolyn is going to discuss her books and the reasons why she single-handedly destroyed the love between Sheriff Coleman Peters and Sarah Booth Delaney.

Me: Well, Carolyn, what do you have to say for yourself?

Carolyn: *Don't you think that's a little harsh, Jitty? I didn't destroy anything. I'm merely the transcriber of events. You act as if I were in control of Sarah Booth. You know as well as I do that she's headstrong and impulsive and prone to follow her heart and not stage directions from a mere author. By the way, what's with the smart business suit, heels, and poofy hair? Isn't that a style from the 40s? When I wrote you, I didn't give you a twenty-two inch waist. Where did that come from? Have you been going to the gym?*

Me: Get real. There's no time for workin' out at a gym in Sunflower County. Besides, it's beneath the dignity of a ghost to sweat. I leave that to you mortals. And even if I wanted to work out, you've got me runnin' all over the place tryin' to clean up the messes you've made. But if you must know, the clothes are compliments of Katharine Hepburn in Adam's Rib. I'm the sassy, savvy, female reporter who can do it all. Just like Katharine. She was a woman who could make her way in a man's world and look damn good while she was at it? And let me just say, you got one thing right when you wrote me, I am one fine lookin' woman. But you remember, when you sent me traipsing through the decades to exemplify certain elements of each book, you gave me a lot of power.

Carolyn: *Which you use like a club.*

Me: What was that comment?

Carolyn: *Forget it. But what you just said is a prime example of what I'm trying to tell you about Sarah Booth. I don't control her. Nobody does. In the first book, Them Bones, I had a firm grip on all the characters, including you. Now, though, you all act like a bunch of paparazzi on the trial of poor Brittney Spears. And while I'm on the topic, I have a question for you: How do you think I feel when readers send me letters telling me how badly behaved all of you are. I get racked over the coals because you and the rest of the Zinnia gang misbehave.*

Me: You get letters about me? Folks like me, huh? They get that I've got a tough job and no help from anyone. They relate to tryin' to keep Sarah Booth out of trouble and in the sack with some manly man, don't they?

Carolyn: *I get a lot of mail about Sarah Booth, Tinkie, Cece, Sweetie Pie, Chablis and about you in particular. Trust me, it isn't all flattering.*

Me: Get back! Folks wouldn't complain about me.

Carolyn: *Don't hold your breath. Oh, yeah, ghosts don't actually breathe. But the truth is, I do get a lot of mail about Zinnia and the folks who live there. I shouldn't tell you this, but most readers adore you. Don't get the big head, though, because if I have all the power you credit me with, I could, say, turn you into the Bad Seed at the drop of a hat. Hey, that might not be a bad plot idea. I can see it now, a cold October night. I hear that creepy music from The Exorcist. I see the leaves blowing down the driveway of Dahlia House. And there, in the window is Jitty the ghost wearing a hockey mask. Perfect! Jitty goes bonkers and tries to kill Sarah Booth!*

Me: You wouldn't dare! And I know readers haven't ever complained about me. I'm the conscience for the whole kit and caboodle. I'm the one keeps them thinkin' about the consequences of their actions.

Carolyn: *How did I create a ghost with such an ego issue?*

Me: Well, we're not here to talk about me. It's Sarah Booth Delaney and her empty womb that needs discussin'. Someone needs to get hold of that girl. She's been through seven books and a number of studly, handsome men, and she's still single and still barren! Now get out your pen and paper or your typewriter or that new-fangled computer thing you use and write Sarah Booth a sexy, handsome lover with some viable sperm.

Carolyn: *Jitty! That's way too pushy?*

Me: Pushy! You think that's pushy, look what you've done to Sarah Booth over the past years. She's been shot, knocked in the head, held captive, poisoned, slapped, did I say shot? She's been in love with two men at the same time, which you made her choose between and she ended up without either one of them, and now you're sending her out to Hollywood to hang with the likes of those movie-stars. Why not just change her name to

“chum” and watch them feed on her? Sarah Booth is a home-grown girl. She’s cotton and fine china and horses and hounds down to the core. She draws her strength from the land of Dahlia House. This is where the bones of her ancestors have been laid to rest. She don’t need no movie deal or Hollywood hustle. She needs a man and a crop growin’ right there in that cotton field and one in her belly.

Carolyn: *Don’t you think Sarah Booth deserves a chance to follow her dream of being a star?*

Me: Her dream is right here in Zinnia. She has Dahlia House and Reveler, Miss Scrapiron and Sweetie Pie. She has her pick of all the handsome, eligible Delta men, several of whom would make fine daddies. She has her partner Tinkie Bellcase Richmond, a Daddy’s Girl with a lot of grit, and the Delaney Detective Agency. And she has me. Shoot, if you’d quit muckin’ things up with murderers and mayhem, she’d be singing “Over the Rainbow” with some good lookin’ man lickin’ her toes.

Just remember, Miss Writer Carolyn Haines, she can’t just click her heels together and say she wants to come home. You took her out there to Lalaland, so you need to get her back. Play actin’ in movies is all well and good for folks who don’t have a heritage, but Sarah Booth has plenty to do right here in town.

Carolyn: *She wouldn’t be the woman she is if she didn’t strive for her vision of happiness.*

Me: And what about Coleman, that handsome, sexy sheriff who loves her? What about him and his happiness? What about that, Missy?

Carolyn: *I don’t have all the answers, Jitty. Like I said, I’m only the author. Coleman is a man of honor, but sometimes honor is a cold companion. To my way of thinking, a woman can’t come in second all the time, even if honor is what’s at the top of the list.*

Me: Well that business with Coleman ain’t done ‘til the fat ghost sings, and I’m not plannin’ on stackin’ on any pounds. Let’s talk about the future. What’s in store for Tinkie and her husband Oscar?

Carolyn: *Well, Tinkie and Sarah Booth will be partners to the end. No doubt about that. Don’t go blaming me again, but Tinkie has some hard times ahead.*

Jitty: Not Chablis! You wouldn’t let anything happen to the dustmop.

Carolyn: *You jump to amazing conclusions.*

Me: I don’t trust you! Ever’ time I turn around, you bring some stranger to town with a desire to kill someone. Or some deep dark secret from the past comes bubbling’ up to the surface and someone has to die. Have you noticed that whenever you poke your nose into

Zinnia, the Angel of Death is right on your heels? Did it ever occur to you that maybe we could have a quiet story with lots of sex and some babies and no dead bodies?

Carolyn: *Where would be the fun in that?*

Me: You are a sick woman. You need some therapy.

Carolyn: *That could be true. I'm being interviewed by a fictional ghost who is obsessed with viable sperm and the conditions of the Delaney womb. Therapy might be in order.*

Me: What about Hamilton V, that hunka, hunka burnin' love? Will he return?

Carolyn: *I refuse to answer on the grounds that I might incriminate myself.*

Me: And Harold? Are you gonna leave him managing the bank or is he ever gonna have a real shot at courtin' Sarah Booth?

Carolyn: *Again, I plead the fifth.*

Me: You're about as slick as ...I can't say that word in an interview, but it's what runs out of a goose's be-hind. Instead of writing books, maybe you should just go into politics. You lie well, and you wouldn't know the truth if it bit you on the butt.

Carolyn: *When I need a career consultation, I'll be sure and give you a call, Jitty. Until then, I bid you aieu. There's this tiny little complication I have to address. Something about a haunted mansion and a Hollywood vendetta.*

Me: What are you sayin? What's goin' on?

Carolyn: *I guess you'll just have to read Wishbones. All I can say is that some myths about ghostly abilities are put to the test, and Sarah Booth finds that all that glitters isn't found in the Hollywood stars.*

Me: Get those fingers flyin'. I can't wait to see what happens. Folks, I'll step aside and let Carolyn get back to work. Life ain't fair, and we can't find out what happens until she writes it. One day I'm gonna figure out how to use that computer thing and then things will straighten up in Zinnia. Until then, though, please keep readin' about us.