

*When
the Purple
Martins Come*

Rosemarie Fogarty

KW

Kingdom Winds
Publishing

Copyright © 2020 by Rosemarie Fogarty

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, distributed, or transmitted in any form or by any means, including photocopying, recording, or other electronic or mechanical methods, without the prior written permission of the publisher, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical reviews and certain other noncommercial uses permitted by copyright law. For permission requests, write to the publisher at publishing@kingdomwinds.com.

First Edition, 2020.

ISBN 10: 978-1-64590-006-1

Published by Kingdom Winds Publishing.

6 Charleston Oak Lane, Greenville, SC 29615

www.kingdomwinds.com

publishing@kingdomwinds.com

Printed in the United States of America.

The views expressed in this book are not necessarily those of the publisher.

Thank you God for this book, it is Yours.
Thank you Catherine Belvins for the cover artwork and
Elizabeth Peltier for help with ideas and edits.
And a special thanks to my husband, Chip Fogarty for
your unending love and support!

One

Rose Turner looked out the window of her cabin, anxiously awaiting the arrival of the local sheriff in his four-wheel drive police unit. Sheriff Dawson had just been elected to the office. He had met Rose and her neighbors, Cindy and Colleen, when he stopped by their cabins on the mountain campaigning for votes. Because of the ladies' ages and the need to secure every vote he could, he had handed them his business card with his personal number on it and told them to call him any time, day or night, if they needed help.

To his surprise, not two weeks after he was elected, he received a phone call from Rose taking him up on his offer. She needed him to take her to the airport. The ladies lived on a secluded mountain that had a narrow winding road leading up to it. If it rained even a drop, it would become a nightmare to navigate. And for the last couple of days, it had been pouring. The road was a muddy mess, and there was no way to get off or on the mountain except by a powerful four-wheel-drive vehicle.

Rose had been pacing the floor all morning. She was a private person and didn't like to share her life story with people outside her close circle. When she received an unexpected invitation to be the guest speaker at the upcoming graduation ceremony of her alma mater, Ole Miss, it released a rush of emotional ghosts she had gladly locked away many years prior.

When The Purple Martins Come

For days, she wrestled with the decision of whether or not to accept the honor.

She preferred her life peaceful and routine-driven. She was constantly on auto-adjust, making sure never to mop herself into a corner. Not being able to determine the outcome of this trip was driving her crazy. Rose had finally caved in and decided to accept the invitation. She prayed and asked God to keep His right hand on her trip and bless it with a positive outcome and His left hand over her mouth to keep her from saying something she might regret.

Sheriff Dawson had reluctantly agreed to pick Rose up and take her to the airport, but only after she checked his attitude with a quick reminder of his eager campaign promise. Rose was snapped back to reality by a loud rap on her front door. She opened it to find her neighbor Colleen standing at the door wearing an old beat-up hat and toting a shotgun under her arm.

“Stubby, the sheriff’s here. You know, I know him from somewhere.”

Rose rolled her eyes. “Everyone looks familiar to you, Colleen. Put down that gun! Do you want to get yourself arrested?”

“I ain’t putting it down, Stubby. I’m taking it with us.”

Rose stopped her in her tracks. “Colleen, we talked about this. You can’t come with me. We need you here to keep an eye on everything.” She picked up her bag, stepped out, and shut the door behind her.

Colleen followed her off the porch to where Sheriff Dawson

Chapter One

was standing. “Stubby, I told you there’s some crazy people in them big cities.”

A faint voice came from the porch of her neighbor Cindy’s cabin. Cindy was sitting in her rocking chair knitting. “Rose, she saw an episode of *Law & Order* the other day at my house, and she’s convinced that the world outside this mountain is completely lawless.”

Rose scoffed. “Sheriff Dawson, maybe you can ease Colleen’s mind. Tell her it’s not as bad in Mississippi as she thinks it is.”

Before the Sheriff could get any words out of his mouth, Colleen slapped her leg and let out a hoot. “By dog, I knew you done looked familiar. You’re old Dodo Dawson.”

The sheriff shuffled around nervously for a moment. “Ma’am, if you are referring to me, my name is Donald Dawson.”

Colleen moved closer and gave him the once over. “Yep. You’re Dodo, all right.”

Sheriff Dawson was becoming irritated. “Ma’am, you must have me mistaken for someone else.”

Colleen leaned on the barrel of her shotgun. “Ain’t you got a paw named Delmus? He done run the local store when I was a kid.”

The sheriff’s face turned crimson. “Yes, ma’am. That was my father.” Colleen reached over and slapped him on the back. Rose and Cindy gasped. They were sure Colleen was going to be arrested.

“Well, how the heck are you doing, Dodo?” Colleen

When The Purple Martins Come

turned toward Rose and Cindy. “Let me tell you how I know old Dodo.”

The sheriff gazed uncomfortably down at his watch. “That was a long time ago, Miss Colleen, and I’m wasting time burning taxpayer dollars. Miss Rose, if you’re ready?”

“We got time, ain’t we, Stubby? Well, you see, my paw would take me to Delmus’s store every two or three weeks. I figure I was about eleven or twelve, and old Dodo was about five or six. Anyway, everybody in town knew Dodo. He would sit under the checkout counter where his paw was working and bark and growl at everybody who’d walk in the store. Now, old Dodo took a shine to me. When I would come in to do some shopping, he’d follow me around just like a dog. I could tell him to sit or stay, and he would.”

“Ma’am, I really need you to be quiet so we can be on our way.”

Colleen waved off his request. “Stay, Dodo. This’ll only take a minute.” To the shock of Rose and Cindy, the six-foot, 230-pound, grey-headed man did as he was told without protest. “When I would finish up my shopping, my paw would always let me get some gum, and I would make Dodo sit and open his mouth. I’d give him a piece of my gum, pat him on the head, and tell him not to swallow it.

“One day, I come into the store, and there was old Dodo, just a barking and growling. I weren’t in no good mood, and I kept trying to shoo him away. But he just kept on a following me, barking and trying to lick my hand. I had had enough. I had a package of my paw’s chewing tobacco in my back

Chapter One

pocket, so I figured I was going to teach Dodo a lesson. Well, I pulled out some of that tobacco and rolled it in a ball. After I finished with my shopping and got my gum, I told Dodo to open his mouth, and I shoved that wad of tobacco in just as far as I could. I patted him on the head and told him not to swallow it. Then, I left.

“A couple of weeks later, I went back to the store, and Dodo weren’t there. I done asked Delmus where he was. He said Dodo didn’t want to come back in the store no more. He said not too long after I had left, Dodo was sitting there under the counter just as quiet as could be. After a while, Delmus heard a grunt and a groan come from under the counter. When he looked down, Dodo was sitting there as green as a tree frog. His paw said Dodo ran outside and threw up and that he ain’t never seen nobody that sick before.”

Rose was stifling her laughter, trying not to make the situation any more uncomfortable than it already was. Cindy kept on knitting, seemingly unphased by the story, and Colleen just stood there, completely unaware that she had just embarrassed and insulted one of the most powerful men in the county. All eyes were on the sheriff, waiting and watching for his reaction.

After a few minutes of silence, Sheriff Dawson spoke. “I hope you understand, Miss Colleen, that that was a very dangerous thing you did. I was sick for days.”

“Don’t get your drawers in a wad, Dodo. Just think, if I hadn’t a done it, you’d still be under the counter at your paw’s store barking at everyone. I figure I’m the reason you got that shiny metal on your chest.”

Before the situation could get worse, Rose took Colleen

When The Purple Martins Come

by the arm. “We really need to go.” Colleen moved out of the way, and the sheriff picked up Rose’s bag, putting it in the back of his police unit before they got in.

They were ready to start down the mountain when Colleen tapped on the sheriff’s window with the barrel of her gun. “Hold your horses, Dodo. Where am I gonna sit?” Sheriff Dawson jumped out of the car and grabbed Colleen’s shotgun right out of her hands. He opened the chamber, took out the shells, and handed the gun back to her. Colleen shook her head with confusion. “What in tarnation did you do that for?”

The Sheriff shrugged his shoulders. “After I was reminded of the tobacco incident, I figured I better. You really need to be careful with the way you wheel around that dangerous weapon.” Rose was out of the car now. She put her hand to her mouth. There was one thing you never did and that was mess with Colleen’s shotgun. She just knew that she’d be bailing her out of jail before this was over.

Suddenly, Colleen burst out laughing. “You see, Dodo. That tobacco put hair on your chest. It done growed you up. You ain’t no scrawny little scaredy boy no more.” Colleen walked over to the sheriff and gave him a bear hug.

A smile crept over his face. “Miss Colleen, we’re gonna get along just fine.”

Colleen laughed. “Yep, just fine. Now give me back my shotgun shells and them keys. I’m gonna drive.” The sheriff gave Rose an exasperated look.

“Cindy, “I need your help!” Rose shouted to the frail woman who, with visible effort, got to her feet.

Chapter One

“Colleen,” she called back, “you know I’m not well, and I really need you to stay with me,”

Colleen stopped and looked from Rose to Cindy. “I’m sorry Stubby, but I guess I’d best not leave her when she’s so sickly. You think you’d be okay without me?”

The sheriff chimed in. “She’ll be fine, Miss Colleen. I’ll look after her.” Colleen seemed satisfied with this, so he and Rose finally got back into the car. They were just about to leave again when another tap came on the sheriff’s window. He rolled it down. “What now, Miss Colleen?”

Colleen stuck her head inside. “Now, Stubby, if you get into any trouble, you just turn to the sheriff and say, ‘Sic ‘em, Dodo.’” She slapped the sheriff on the arm and, slinging her shotgun over her shoulder, gave Rose a thumbs up.



Rose’s flight had been late arriving that night. When she finally reached her hotel room, she opened the door and haphazardly threw the newspaper that the bellman had given her on top of the nightstand. She was drained from her trip, so after unpacking her suitcase, she went straight to bed. Rose awoke the next morning filled with energy and positive purpose, until she picked up the newspaper off her nightstand and read it.

An article at the bottom of the front page jumped out at her. It was titled “Pioneer in the War Against Racism to Speak at U Miss Graduation.” The byline read “James Byers, reporter

When The Purple Martins Come

for *The Mississippi Sunrise*.” Rose quickly read the article. When she finished, she threw the paper on the floor. “I haven’t been in town twenty-four hours and that Byers guy couldn’t wait to start drama. The nerve of that man. I see he even weaseled his way into introducing me today at the graduation. He better hope that I don’t kick him in the rear. He has no idea who he’s dealing with.” Unfortunately, Rose had enough time before the ceremonies to build up a head of steam; all morning she obsessed on the words that James Byers had penned.

“I just don’t have time for this! That reporter’s got no business sticking his nose in my life. I don’t know what this boy thinks he’s doing. He’s all up in my world thinking he’s Oprah or something. Violated! Yeah, I feel violated. I feel like someone’s broken into my bedroom and rummaged through my underwear drawer! Now, I have to go and be with him on that stage and keep my mouth shut.

“Oh Lord, I haven’t asked You to help me with my mouth in a long time. Please let me remember that my tongue is sharper than a two-edged sword. I can see it right now; me standing up there all fired up, chopping him up into little pieces with my mouth and leaving him lying there like roadkill all over the stage. There’ll be babies crying and old people falling out in the audience. It’ll be outright mayhem! Please, God, help me!”

Rose was used to talking to herself, but today, she was ranting and raving. She knew she had to get her temper in check. Remembering the calming words Cindy always said to her when she went off the deep end, she thought, “Breathe in, breathe out, chase out that devil.” As she slowly repeated these

Chapter One

words, her respiration began to slow. Rose glanced again at the article. She couldn't let it get to her. Today was too important.

Today, she was to be the commencement speaker at the University of Mississippi. She had been one of a group of African American students who had broken through the racial barrier and graduated from UM in 1972. Not only did she break through the racial barrier, but she also broke through the academic barrier, going on to be valedictorian of her graduating class. Rose had always held herself to a higher standard.

After graduating from U Miss, Rose applied and was accepted to Meharry Medical College in Nashville. With her stellar academic record, she could have easily been accepted by any one of the topnotch medical schools on the East Coast, but time lost settling in a new area would be time wasted, and Nashville was as far as she wanted to venture. Besides, she hated cold weather.

That time was crucial in Rose's life. She was filled with ambition and excitement. But it was a time when she was also filled with anger. The racial injustices around her kept her bogged down in resentment and a desire for revenge. She had something to say, and the world was going to hear her. But a whole lot of years and a whole lot of self-knowledge stood between then and now. You wouldn't be able to guess that, however, by looking at her. Rose didn't look her age, nor did she act it. Her rich coffee-colored skin had been spared wrinkles, and her deep brown eyes were bright and alive. As she peered into the hotel mirror, she tucked a loose strand of her gray-tinged hair back into the neat bun on the back of her

When The Purple Martins Come

head and took a deep breath. As she stood there, a suspicious thought came to her mind.

“That reporter can’t be up to any good. Why is he so interested in my life? That’s old history, and this isn’t the time or the place to dig it up.”

Rose picked up her cap and gown and started for the door. As she was about to exit her hotel room, her cell phone rang. On the other line was a strong female voice. “May I speak with Rose Turner?”

Rose, not being one to bite her tongue, replied abruptly, “Speaking, unfortunately.” The caller introduced herself as a producer at CNN. The conversation wrapped around the article in the *Mississippi Sunrise*. Apparently, that pushy reporter who had broken the story of her commencement invitation had aroused the attention of major news sources.

CNN wanted to feature her on one of their talk shows. Rose didn’t trust reporters, having dealt with them in the past, so she made sure to choose her words carefully. “First of all, I don’t do interviews, and second, the whole article is trash. In fact, it’s so full of trash I had to swat the flies off it.”

The voice on the other line tried to sound empathetic. “Ms. Turner, I have just read some very interesting information about you online. You are a newsworthy woman, and I think our viewers need to hear your story. We’re not only interested in your civil rights background, but we also want to do a piece about you and the other two ladies who were trapped with you on the mountain in North Carolina.”

Chapter One

At that point, Rose cut her off. “This is no one’s business but mine.”

The producer on the other line insisted, “We feel there is more to this story, and the public ought to hear the truth. If you are agreeable, we will have Mr. Byers interview you and tell your story on our news channel.”

Rose was in a hurry. She snapped, “I can’t have anyone twisting my life story around to fit an agenda. Unfortunately, for me, I read his article this morning. That Slim Jim of a reporter at the *Mississippi Sunrise* has missed the point completely. But, you know, you’re right, the truth needs to come out, and I’m the one who’s going to tell it.”

She abruptly hung up and glanced one more time in the mirror. Straightening her jacket and smiling at herself confidently, she opened the door. “Slim Jim’s gonna eat his words. If he wants a story, he’s going to get a story. But if he wants the real story, he’s going to have to deal with all three of us.”

Rose had never run away from a fight, but It had been years since she had felt that old combative energy. That nosy James Byers’s article had lit a fire in her that would burn hot until she got her point across. She was just about to shut the door when she remembered her speech. Turning to grab her notes, she paused and laughed to herself, “When have I ever followed directions?” She crumpled the papers and threw them in the trash. As she walked down the hotel corridor, she felt the surge of adrenaline rising in her body. Yep, she was ready to meet that cocky writer.