



DO WAH DIDDY DIE ALREADY

by Pauline Baird Jones

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DO WAH DIDDY DIE ALREADY

Luci Seymour eased her little 4x4 into the garage, and did it without scraping anything. Clearly she was in that zone place that normal people were always talking about and she liked it. It was the *zone*.

As evidence, look at Luci's Aunts' Bed & Breakfast. It had been open for three months now and, contrary to Mickey's expectations, no one had died—not even of food poisoning.

That was probably because Luci had hired a new cook-cumhousekeeper-cum-au pair, though she still missed Louise. Saffron talked. *A lot*. Of course, she hadn't killed anyone either, and Luci's three-year old adored her—so much so, she wanted to have multi-colored hair, too. So far Mickey was holding out against that, but Luci's money was on their daughter wearing him down. He was pretty much wrapped around her tiny pinkie.

Luci still had trouble wrapping her brain around the idea that her aunts' housekeeper, Louise, had been the one who killed Miss Gracie all those years ago, leaving her to haunt the house in typical Seymour style. No real surprise the denouement had been mixed up in the birth of her and Mickey's daughter. All the aunts, dead and alive, had put in a bid to have the little girl named after them, but it seemed right to name her after Miss Gracie.

Mickey had been afraid the now-dead aunts would start haunting them, too, but while they hadn't completely passed into the next life, they didn't seem inclined to hang around the way Miss Gracie and Delaney, Mickey's former partner, did.

Luci had toyed with the idea of using their gentle haunting as a selling point for the business, but the two ghosts had decided to take a vacation. Since Miss Gracie hadn't left the house in over fifty years, she'd certainly earned it and Delaney went where Miss Gracie went. He'd been smitten with her before he got shot.

She missed them and she missed Louise, who was out on bail, awaiting trial. Mickey wouldn't let her come back to work. Men were so unreasonable. It's not like she'd killed anyone else. Okay, so she thought she'd killed someone else, which is why she'd killed Miss Gracie, but she hadn't actually killed her former boss when she pushed him down the stairs for groping her. And she hadn't held Luci hostage that long. When labor started, she stopped. For all Luci knew, being held hostage had started her labor, something she was very grateful to get going. She'd been pregnant for like, fifty months or something.

Mickey's real grievance against Louise wasn't the murder. No, he was mad at her for not talking for all those years. He thought she couldn't talk and used the chalk and blackboard for a real reason—not because Louise was afraid if she talked she'd confess what she did.

He'd only lived with the squeaky chalk for a couple of years. Louise had to live with it for most of her life. Wasn't that punishment enough?

Luci squeezed out of the truck and leaned over the side of the bed, digging through the grocery sacks, looking for the items that needed to go into the freezer. It wasn't the same freezer her aunts had kept in the garage for so many years.

Mickey had hauled that one to the curb before the last aunt was cold in her grave, even though Louise had cleaned it very thoroughly after the body was removed. Okay, so it had been a naked body and it was kind of icky to think of the frozen, bare buns against the bottom, but it still worked. Seemed a waste to buy a new freezer when there were so many other things they needed to buy.

If finding bodies was the criteria for getting rid of something, then the bougainvillea should be history, too, but it was still blooming in the garden. And they still had the chimney in their bedroom. And that chair in the sitting room...

Luci paused to think. Yeah, she was pretty sure that was all the locations bodies had been discovered—if she didn't count the spot in the garden where Miss Gracie had been killed, but there was some dispute about the actual spot. Luci had studied the crime scene photos, but the garden had changed a lot in fifty-plus years.

Usually Luci could think about Miss Gracie and she and Delaney would materialize close by. She missed them, but they deserved a vacation, now that the house had central air conditioning. Their death chill had been a godsend during August. The pair planned to be back in time for Halloween, though.

Luci had some ghost hunters booked. With any luck, the aunts would put in an appearance, too. Mickey had booked himself into a cop convention in Vegas for that weekend. Family reunions made his eye twitch, particularly if most of the family in attendance was dead.

Luci lifted the lid of the freezer and tossed the frozen stuff into the wire basket fixed near the top. She turned back to the Nash to get the non-freezer stuff and was actually bending to pick up a sack when what she'd seen finally registered.

She stopped. Started to turn around—stopped.
Did she really want to verify what image her eyes had sent to her brain? Because if she'd seen what it seemed she'd seen...

Mickey's eye was going to start twitching again.
And they'd need a new freezer.

* * * *

"You all right, Miss Luci?" Saffron tipped her brightly colored head to the side, then flopped it to the other.
"You look like you seen a ghost?"

Luci blinked a couple of times, then shook her head. A ghost wouldn't be a problem. She was used to seeing ghosts.

"I'm fine."

For now. Not only was there a body in the new freezer, it was one of her guests. The guy in the Miss Weena suite. Charles Stewart. He'd checked in early for the mystery weekend, but she'd bet money he hadn't planned on being the body.

While Luci mused, words bubbled out of Saffron's mouth, a wandering discourse that took her from the time she thought she'd seen a ghost, through some gastric distress, eventually arriving at the recipe she wanted to try out for breakfast tomorrow. When she paused for air, Luci broke in.

"I need to call Mickey." She didn't want to call Mickey. She could call her dad, but he tended to twitch worse than Mickey. And he and Lila were babysitting Gracie. She looked at her watch. If she hurried, they'd be at the zoo until CSI finished with the crime scene.

She started down the hall to her little office, but just as she reached the door, the front door opened and—Charles Stewart came in—minus the bullet hole between his eyes.

Luci felt *her* eye twitch.

"Afternoon, Mrs. Ross. Beautiful day, isn't it, but a tad on the chilly side?"

"Yes." Luci felt herself nod and sort of smile.

"Thought I'd pop back and grab a sweater."

He started up the stairs, but paused part way up to look back and say, "By the way, thank you for the Benadryl. Those fire ants are really nasty!"

"Yes, they are."

He turned and continued on up the stairs, his bite-dotted foot in view for what seemed like a long time. Luci noted that the bites looked like pimples now.

He passed from view and she heard him unlock the door to his suite and go inside. She looked back the way she'd come, then turned and retraced her steps. Once again in front of the freezer, she hesitated, before lifting the lid.
No body.

Apparently he'd climbed out and gone to get his—sweater.

* * * *

Mickey looked at Luci, wondering if he needed to be worried. She was awfully quiet this evening.

He'd been anxious she wouldn't be happy giving up law enforcement when Gracie was born, but then she'd decided to do the bed & breakfast thing. Then he'd been concerned about how that would work out, having strangers in the house, as opposed to just having strange *people* in the house. But so far it was going fine. Even the most annoying guest had a hard time making any headway against Luci when she went Seymour. And she seemed happy with the project.

Their private quarters were isolated from the guests and with his schedule, he was lucky to see his girls, let alone any guests. Gracie was already in bed this evening. She'd stirred when he bent to kiss her round, flushed cheek, then subsided back into her intense, three-year-old sleep.

He found he didn't mind the late supper with his wife. She looked the same as the first time he saw her, standing in the airport looking around, her green eyes wide and interested. Her dark hair was a bit longer than back then perhaps, but her jaw was still square and determined and her mouth still lush and full and very kissable.

And he knew for a fact that her legs still stopped traffic.

As if she felt his gaze, Luci looked up, her quick smile sending a shiver down his back, despite six years of marriage.

"How's the new partner working out?"

Mickey frowned, then shrugged. "He's okay."

He missed Delaney. Didn't understand why he and Miss Gracie had to take a vacation. It's not like they got tired. The dead didn't get tired. And they couldn't send postcards telling their friends where they were. Even dead, Delaney was the best partner he'd ever had. Actually, in some ways he was a better partner now that he was dead.

The ability to pass through solid objects, such as walls, gave them a definite edge against the bad guys.

"They'll be back."

Mickey looked up. "I know."

Luci grinned. "No, you don't. Every time they go anywhere you worry they're going to go toward the light."

Mickey grinned reluctantly. "What if the light sucks them in?"

Luci's brows arched. "It didn't suck the aunts in."

Mickey tensed, his hand going to his cell phone. It was still there, not under the phlox. "Have they been back?"

He was always afraid they'd come back and do something to his computer. Or his television. Or the air conditioning. They'd been anti-technology in life. Didn't expect dying to change that.

Luci shook her head, her lips curving up again.

"You worry too much."

"Is that why you're not telling me what *you're* worried about?"

Her eyes widened.

Even after six years, she thought that just because he was a guy, he was totally clueless. Every now and again he got a clue. It was one of the requirements of being a homicide detective.

"You know I have ways of making you talk," he added, arching his brows devilishly.

Now Luci grinned. "Really? Cool."

"That's why you won't get to see them until you talk."

She gave an exaggerated sigh. "Not sure there is anything to tell." She frowned, tracing a pattern on the tablecloth with her finger. She looked up, her expression rueful. "You worry about Delaney going toward the light, while I—worry about becoming my aunts."

"Eccentric? Or...crazy?" He covered her hand with his and pulled her onto his lap.

"Crazy. Let's face it, I'm already eccentric."

She had a point.

"So, what makes you think you're crazy?"

She rested her head on his shoulder and sighed.

"I thought I saw a body in the new freezer. Charles Stewart. The guy in the Miss Weena suite."

"But you—didn't?"

"When I came inside to call you—he came in. Said he was cold and needed a sweater."

"I'm guessing you went and looked in the freezer again—and..."

"No Charles Stewart."

Mickey frowned. It wasn't like Luci to make a mistake like that. Granted, she was eccentric. All the Seymours were, but Luci also had a large dose of her cop dad in her genetic make up, as leavening for Seymour weird. And she was a fully trained police officer. She'd been chief of police in Butt Had, Wyoming, for three years prior to their marriage.

"How long were you in the house?"

"Maybe five minutes. Stopped to talk to Saffron for a minute."

Probably more like ten. Saffron was the polar opposite of Louise—though Mickey didn't miss Louise's chalkboard—her method of communication—or the sound of her chalk against it. Just thinking about it sent a chill down his back again.

* * * *

"Just close your eyes and let yourself relax."

Mickey's voice was calm and reassuring in her ear and Luci tried to quiet her mind. Her thoughts tended to spin in several directions at once. She'd never been that good at focusing.

"You're opening the lid to put your stuff away. Now open your eyes and look. Are they in the same place you put them?"

Luci did as directed, staring down into the freezer, trying to keep the memory of what she'd done in front of her mind.

"As far as I can remember, it's the same." The freezer had some baskets that she'd piled her stuff in. The body had been under them. If someone had—moved it, all they'd have needed to do was lift out the baskets, then replace them. And if Charles Stewart were actually dead. Which he wasn't. She looked at Mickey. "At least he wasn't a naked hallucination."

"That would actually make more sense than one of your guests," Mickey pointed out. "That would be a flash back."

"But he's not dead." She looked at the house. The light was on in Miss Weena's room. "Not even a dead man walking. Just a man getting ready for bed."

She turned and slipped her arms around his waist. She liked hugging him. Her knees went weak. Who'd have thought she'd go nuts for a crisp, clean guy with blue eyes? Not that she expected to go nuts for any guy. It had been a long-standing family tradition for the Seymour women to eschew marriage for a life of extreme eccentricity.

Luci's feet had been firmly set on the family path until she ran into Mickey and found herself wondering if traditions could be set aside—if a Seymour woman could change.

The answer to both questions had been a resounding yes— thanks to a pointed nudge from her dead aunt, Miss Gracie. She'd given up true love for tradition and died to regret it. Happily, she'd found romance in the afterlife with Delaney after he got shot.

Luci leaned her cheek against Mickey's chest, listening to his heart thumping in her ear.

"Thank you."

"For what?"

"For not believing I'm crazy."

He kissed her. "One thing I've learned from hanging around you, the obvious answer isn't necessarily the right one. In fact, the obvious answer is probably the wrong one."

He hugged her.

"Let's go to bed."

* * * *

The next morning, Luci decided to take care of Charles Stewart's room herself. Not that she planned to snoop through his belongings, but maybe she'd see something that would tell her a little more about the guy.

Boy, a ghost sure would have been helpful right now. Not that Miss Gracie liked sticking her head in people's suitcases, but she could be persuaded, if the cause was good. Or bad. After all, she had stuck her head in the ground looking for a body back when Mickey wasn't sure he wanted to kiss Luci or kill her. And she'd actually passed through the body in the chimney. After that, everything was pretty much uphill.

Luci grabbed a stack of clean bedding and her master key and headed upstairs. She knocked on the door, waited a minute, then let herself into the room. The curtains were still drawn, so Luci flipped on the overhead lights, then went and pulled them back. She threw open the windows, too.

Even after all this time, she could sometimes smell Miss Weena's heavy perfume in the air. She leaned her elbows on the sill, looking down on the garden. It looked pretty good, considering they just had a guy who came by once a week. During her aunts' time, Boudreaux, Louise's husband, had taken care of the garden. Good thing he died before it came out about Louise icing Miss Gracie, or he'd have gotten even more incoherent.

Saffron must have opened the kitchen windows, too. Luci heard Gracie's high-pitched voice mingling with Saffron's deeper one.

It was a bit chilly, though. Luci was glad. Last year they hadn't had a winter or a spring. Just a never-ending summer.

Luci straightened and turned to face the bed.

It was a shock to find it still occupied.

Charles Stewart—with the neat hole back between his eyes. He was fully dressed, but seemed to have removed the sweater. Of course, this time he wasn't in a freezer, so maybe he didn't need the—sweater.

And maybe she *was* losing it.

Luci stared at him for what felt like a long time. He didn't move.

Not that she expected him to—exactly.

She turned and left, carefully locking the door behind her. Down in her office, she had her hand on the phone, but instead of calling Mickey, she grabbed her cell phone, and went back upstairs again. She opened the door.

The body was gone.

Again.

* * * *

Mickey came straight home and found Luci standing in front of the door to the Miss Weena suite, her arms crossed, a militant expression on her face. Without speaking, she handed him the master key and stepped aside.

Mickey pulled his weapon, unlocked the door and went in. The bedding was thrown back on the empty bed. The curtains moved from the breeze passing through, bringing the fresh smell of spring to edge out the heavy smell of Miss Weena's perfume that still clung to the room.

He approached the closet and pulled the door open. Empty. The bathroom was equally devoid of occupants, dead or alive. He did a sweep, checking anything that might remotely be used to hide a body.

And found nothing.

He leaned out both windows.

There was a trellis beneath one that someone could have used to get in, but how could anyone get a body out

that way and so quickly?

He turned to look at Luci. "I can get some crime scene people here, see if they turn up anything."

Luci hesitated, and during that pause, he heard someone coming up the stairs. He wasn't surprised when Charles Stewart came into view.

He didn't like the look it put in Luci's eyes.

* * * *

Mickey decided he had to tell Captain Pryce about Luci's "dead man walking" guest. If Pryce found out about it from anyone else, his ass would be grass.

Not that his ass wouldn't be grass anyway. It would just be more grass.

Anything went wrong with Luci, Captain assumed it was Mickey's fault. It was pretty much a lose-lose situation. The Captain hadn't liked him much before he married Luci. Not even doing his part in producing the nearly perfect Gracie had helped.

Mickey suspected the Captain liked to pretend it was an immaculate conception. Whatever helped him get through the day.

When he finished talking, the Captain looked as annoyed as Mickey had expected him to look.

"She's not crazy."

"No, sir."

"Then what the hell is going on?"

Mickey wished he knew. "Maybe someone is trying to gaslight her?"

"Why would anyone want to do that? It's not like she solved any major crimes in Butt Had."

"And Artie is still in jail." Artie was probably the only perp with a real grudge against Luci, but he'd gotten a long sentence for all the bodies he'd left lying around. Fern and Donald Smith, the hit couple Artie had hired, had gone the way of Luci's aunts—though probably down, rather than up.

"Can we get a crime scene team in there while this Stewart is out of the room?"

"If you'll approve it, I can set it up." Stewart was scheduled for a cemetery tour later in the afternoon. He'd be out for a while, should be long enough for Mickey to get the room swept. Since he was the homeowner, he was also going to have them sweep the whole house, top to bottom. There had to be something they weren't seeing. Luci wasn't crazy. He knew it. Pryce knew it. Luci was the only one who didn't know it. That had to change.

* * * *

Two, long hours later, the head investigator shook her head and stripped off her gloves. They hadn't even found a spot of blood to analyze.

"I do have some prints to run, but the place is very—clean."

Mickey had noticed that about Saffron, too. Only her hair was untidy. But their Gracie was *not* getting her hair done that way. Never going to happen.

"Thanks—and thanks for keeping a low profile." He'd had Luci move her 4x4 out of the garage, so they could park the CSI van in there. No reason to speed up the hearts of their neighbors. They were pretty old hearts.

Mickey walked with them back to the garage, standing by the freezer while they began to pack up their gear. He wasn't sure why he decided to open it. He just did.

"Wait."

This time it didn't look like Charles Stewart would be walking through the front door.

* * * *

Gloves on, Mickey opened Stewart's suitcase. Crime scene hadn't searched his belongings, just the room. Nothing too interesting in there. Just what you would expect to find in a suitcase. Mickey checked out the stuff in the bathroom. Again, just what one would expect to find.

He went back in the bedroom, stopping in the doorway to study the room. There had to be some reason why someone killed him. There had to be some reason why Stewart would pretend to die—twice. Might not be a good reason, but a reason.

If someone were after Luci, he wanted to know about it and stop the culprit. He was a pretty easygoing guy, well, actually he wasn't easygoing. That had been Delaney's thing. He'd always been the good cop, with Mickey on the bad cop detail. And if anyone were messing with his wife's head, well, bad cop would so be there.

A beam of sunlight fell across the fireplace and for the first time, Mickey noticed a bit of ash on the brick inlay. That was odd. As the crime scene techs had noted, Saffron kept the place pretty clean.

As he stared at the dirt, it was hard not to remember that Artie once used the chimney to hide a body.

But they'd found Stewart's body.

He didn't want to look.

He had to look.

If there were—something up there, it would eventually start to smell. Probably the body, if it had been stashed there, was the one in the freezer.

Probably.

He crossed, crouched and took a peek.

He wasn't as surprised as he should be to see feet dangling just out of sight.

He stood up and turned toward the door—as Charles Stewart stopped in the doorway.

“What the hell is going on?”

It was a good question, but Mickey didn't have an answer.

* * * *

Mickey had a definite feeling of *déjà vu*. This particular parlor had been the gathering point for the two previous murder investigations. Luci almost delivered Gracie in this room.

Lila, Luci's mom, had been happy to take Gracie out for an ice cream. Mickey wasn't sure who was more surprised that Lila turned out to be a pretty decent grandmother, Luci, Captain Pryce, Mickey—or Lila.

Something had happened when Gracie turned her solemn gaze on Lila. Lila's eyes had widened. She'd held her finger out and when the tiny hand closed around her finger, she'd—sighed.

She was still a Seymour, still a difficult mother-in-law and probably a bit challenging as a wife, but when she was with Gracie she was—a grandma.

Now Pryce, Luci and Charles Stewart watched him quietly, while Mickey tried to figure out where to start. Some uniforms had canvassed the neighborhood and turned up zip. No one saw anyone arrive or leave the house.

And they had some pretty nosy neighbors. With really old bladders, so they could have missed something—though it would surprise him if they had. They probably all wore Depends so they wouldn't miss anything. There was no doubt that the Seymours were good value for nosy neighbors.

The body that had been extracted from the chimney was obviously Stewart's twin—as was the body found in the freeze. The only problem, Stewart said he was an only child.

He didn't know of any reason why anyone would want to kill him. He was in the dry cleaning business. Not married. Not involved with anyone—or anyone's wife. He wasn't particularly religious or politically active. He didn't gamble, in real life or online. He didn't even have a dog.

He was—medium. He wasn't that rich or even that interesting.

Captain had already done some preliminary checking on the guy and unless he had a really secret life, he was as dull as he looked.

Just looking at him made Mickey want to go take a nap.

Probably the most interesting thing he'd done was decide to come to New Orleans for a mystery weekend—and arrive early.

“Why did you decide to arrive early?” Mickey asked, more to break the silence than from any feeling that the answer would shed light on the mystery.

Stewart looked sort of surprised. “I'd never been to New Orleans. Wanted to have some time to explore the city before the mystery weekend started.”

Mickey nodded and pretended to write it down.

“How did you like the cemetery tour?” Luci asked.

Stewart looked rueful. “I missed it. I stopped to get some beignets and lost track of time. So I just wandered around the Quarter instead.”

So he didn't have an alibi. It wasn't a huge fact, however. Why would he want to kill—himself? Twice.

Luci, who sat frowning through what had to be the most boring interrogation of all time, looked up suddenly, her gaze connecting with his.

“Just a minute.”

She left the room so abruptly Mickey didn't have time to ask her why. In a few, she returned, holding the door for Saffron, who was carrying a tray with a pitcher of lemonade and glasses.

“I thought we could all use something to drink,” Luci said.

It was a flash from the past. She'd offered him and Delaney lemonade after they'd been dealing with the first body in the freezer, the morning after his car got shot up at the airport, when he was trying not to fall in love with her.

He smiled at her. She smiled back. The moment drew out and finally Pryce cleared his throat. Mickey cleared his throat.

“Let's see, where were we?” He looked down at his notes, but all he saw on the page was the big question mark he'd been embellishing.

"I guess you didn't hear anything, did you Saffron?" Luci's voice was so casual, the question was almost a throw away.

Mickey gave Luci a look. Now she'd start talking.

"No, ma'am." Her eyes glistened with ghoulish excitement. "I was working on the scones for tomorrow's breakfast and then I cleaned the fruit for the marmalade I was going to make. I thought it would be fun to have an English breakfast morning for the start of the mystery tour. I found some heavy cream and I got some Earl Grey tea—that just has a lovely sound, doesn't? I love the way Captain Picard says it. Earl Grey. Hot. His voice is to die for, don't you think..."

"Did you leave the kitchen any time?" Luci cut into the flow, her voice still noncommittal.

"Well, Gracie needed to make bathroom. That girl is so sweet. She didn't flush her panties down this time either..."

"So Gracie was in the bathroom when you let him in?"

"That's right..." Saffron's eyes widened. "Let who in ma'am?"

Luci pointed to Stewart. "Him. He's the one who moved the body both times, isn't he?"

"Luci?" Mickey didn't just feel like he'd missed something. He knew it. Pryce looked confused, too.

"It's the only explanation," Luci said. "There were only two people in the house yesterday. Saffron and me. I didn't let him in."

"I wasn't here to be let in," Stewart put in.

Luci looked at him, her eyes wide and calm. Mickey had seen that look before. It was her version of a cop look.

"You're not Charles Stewart. I don't know who you are, but you're not the man who checked in two days ago."

Stewart almost looked uneasy. "Why would you say that?"

"Well, first off, you don't have fire ant bites all over your ankle."

They all looked down. Both ankles, visible because of his sandals, were clean and clear.

"And the Charles Stewart who checked in was meeting someone. He didn't say who, but I'm guessing it was his brother. Identical triplets are rare, but possible. It shouldn't be hard to prove you're all three related with a DNA test. Probably separated at birth, but I don't think you knew there were three of you? Must have been quite a shock when your dead guy showed up alive."

Stewart almost nodded.

Saffron glared at Stewart. "Don't say anything, Artie."

Artie again? And the housekeeper—again?

It was déjà vu all over again.

"But why Saffron?"

"He had to have someone on the inside. I'm going to go out on a limb here and say it's not our Gracie. That leaves Saffron."

The fake Stewart and Saffron looked at each other then looked away.

"I want a lawyer."

Stewart sighed. "Me, too."

Pryce beamed at Luci. "That's my girl." The look he sent Mickey was—less beaming. "I'll get some uniforms to take care of these two."

He left the room. Luci looked at Mickey.

"Now can Louise come back?"

Mickey sighed. Maybe it was better to have the murderer they knew, than some stranger offing their guests. And it might stop Gracie from wanting multi-colored hair.

Pryce returned with the uniforms, who cuffed the two and escorted them out. He looked like he wanted to chew on somebody. Mickey braced for it, but before Pryce could start—a chill filled the room.

Luci was smiling by the time Delaney and Miss Gracie materialized over their heads, then drifted down.

Pryce looked like he wished he'd left with the uniforms.

"What did we miss?" Delaney wanted to know.

"Saffron had to quit," Luci said, "but Louise is going to fill in until we can find someone else."

Miss Gracie beamed. "The place hasn't been the same without her."

Okay, did she not remember Louise had shot her in the back?

Gracie drifted close. "You need to move on. It was over fifty years ago."

Delaney looked at Mickey, one brow cocked in a question.

"So, who died? They aren't going to hang around, are they?"

Luci's gaze collided with Mickey's. "If they do, I'll tell them to go toward the light—though not until after the weekend. They did pay in advance."

He gave her a look—or as much of one as he dared with her dad looking on.

“What?” Her eyes were wide and slightly wicked. “It’s not like I can refund him his money.”

Later, his eyes promised her. She grinned, then turned to Miss Gracie. “So tell me about your trip. Did you see some cool stuff?”

“Yeah,” Miss Gracie looked around, “but there’s no place like home.”

ABOUT AUTHOR PAULINE BAIRD JONES

Pauline Baird Jones is the award-winning author of nine novels of science fiction romance, action-adventure, suspense, romantic suspense, steampunk/science fiction romance, and comedy-mystery. She's also written two non-fiction books, *Adapting Your Novel for Film* and *Made-up Mayhem*, and she co-wrote *Managing Your Book Writing Business* with Jamie Engle. In addition to a Dream Realm award, Pauline has received a Bronze IPPY (Independent Publisher award), an EPPIE, the Dorothy Parker Award and is a two-time Romantic Times Reviewer's Choice Award winner. She also has short stories in several anthologies. Originally from Wyoming, she and her family moved from New Orleans to Texas before Katrina.

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