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Humor

The Thirty-Foot Elvis
Jane F. Hankins
Parkhurst Brother
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Readers fond of stories with quirky, empowered females and humor will find themselves hoping Hankins plans to pen another volume in The Peavine Chronicles.

New from author Jane F. Hankins comes the hilarious second volume detailing the goings-on and intrigue of mobile-home park residents in the delightfully folksy town of Peavine, Arkansas, in 1984. The statue of the king of rock 'n' roll mentioned in the title of *The Thirty-Foot Elvis* represents only one of the recurring story lines in this amusing romp that examines themes of love at every stage of life, psychic abilities, and the power of neighbors coming together.

Rhonelle DuBoise, owner of Peavine's mobile-home park, struggles to move on with her life after her friend's death. She tries to keep abreast of new relationships forming in her community, while contemplating whether she wants another chance at love. The humorous cover of two women, one wearing cat's-eye framed glasses, staring up at the leg of a statue of Elvis in his trademark white jumpsuit, showcases immediately the gentle humor and local color found in this novel.

The hand-drawn and hand-labeled map of Peavine gives readers the sense that they are about to enter a quirky small town. With small-town touches such as an annual poodle pageant, and people with names like Shirleen and Vaudine, one feels transported to a close-knit community in the mid 1980s. The book's era, and consequent lack of cell phones, warms the heart when the mobile-home park denizens go door-to-door to check in on one another after a rare snowstorm results in electrical outages.

Some of the book's humor stems from Rhonelle's ongoing conversations with the spirit of her grandmother, who appears, visible only to Rhonelle, at awkward times. Granny Laurite gives her gently amusing pep talks in her French Creole accent. For example, Rhonelle thinks,

“What is wrong with me? I’m not usually this sentimental,” to which her grandma responds, “It’s about time you softened up a bit … Dat a good ting … shows you really livin.’” Also humorous are descriptions of Granny and her cohorts looking down knowingly from heaven as Rhonelle struggles to make sense of her relative’s sometimes cryptic foreshadowing.

Marking the passage of long stretches of time with hand-drawn fluffy clouds adds another whimsical touch to the book. Although all the relationships depicted here are troubled with realistic miscommunication, Hankins deftly makes light of each situation without trivializing her characters. The author deserves praise for having Rhonelle and Laurite find companionship, effectively smashing the stereotype that those with gray hair lack romantic feelings.

This chortle-worthy novel will keep readers laughing well past the end, where the book closes with a denizen of Peavine interviewing the author about her story. Readers fond of stories with quirky, empowered females and humor will find themselves hoping Hankins plans to pen another volume in The Peavine Chronicles.

Jill Allen