



## Bloodroot

*Susan Wittig Albert*

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Lawyer-turned-herbalist China Bayles returns to the Deep South, where her family's legacy of silence is at last broken—and the past finally, unforgettably, speaks the truth...

A frantic phone call from her mother brings China back to her family's Mississippi plantation—a place she'd forsaken long ago. But the late-spring air is thick with fear—and from the moment of her arrival, China knows that something has gone desperately wrong at Jordan's Crossing. An ancient property deed has surfaced—and the man who uncovered it has mysteriously vanished. And as the fates and fortunes of two very different families collide in frightening, unpredictable ways, China must face disturbing new questions about her family's past—and her own future...

## **Bloodroot Details**

Date : Published January 7th 2003 by Berkley (first published October 1st 2001)

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Author : Susan Wittig Albert

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## From Reader Review Bloodroot for online ebook

### Sue says

August 2016: re-visited via audio because I liked it so much and it was fun to listen to while sewing!

March 2016: I think this might be my favorite of the China series so far, although I love them all. This one does not take place in Pecan Springs, TX but China travels to her ancestral home in Mississippi to help her mother care for her ailing aunt. While there she becomes embroiled in a family history search, which of course was interesting to me, as she tries to track down a genetic disease in the family and discover the answer to all the mysterious happenings in her family. There is a murder and it is the framework for all that happens, but unlike other books in the series, China is not spending her time finding the murderer, but finding the family history. But then the murder becomes the linchpin to the final exciting denouement. It was a very mysterious, atmospheric novel with some ethereal otherworldly hints when an old woman with "the sight" seems to know a lot about China and her family. Very satisfying story.

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### Susan says

All of the China Bayles series books are written with a conversational style, and endearing sincerity. The characters are both loveable and believable as are the places. Albert describes things well enough to give you a picture for your mind's eye without allowing the descriptions to overtake the storyline. If you've never lived in Central Texas trust me when I tell you that this is as close as you can get without moving here! These books are a comfortable, easy read - equally good for rainy days, and excuse to stay in the air conditioning, or by the fireplace.

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### Alannah Davis says

In #10 of the China Bayles series, China responds to an urgent phone call from her mother and goes back to her childhood home in Mississippi - to the family plantation and the past from which she had turned away.

Too many of the cozy mysteries I've been reading lack depth, especially when it comes to characterization. That's why it's so refreshing to read Susan Wittig Albert's work. Her work is always so rich with characterization and history, that I can imagine her writing volumes of backstory in order to immerse herself in her characters and their lives. This truly shows in "Bloodroot."

I think you need to already be familiar with the China Bayles series in order to truly appreciate "Bloodroot." Followers of the series must not miss this book!!! China goes "back to the motherline," as she says, and while solving both old and new mysteries, she learns to appreciate and know the line of southern women from whom she had tried to detach herself. I was especially able to connect with it, having southern connections in my own past and feeling about them much the way China did.

I've been reading the China Bayles series a bit out of order. I'm going to try to rectify that and read the books more in order so I can get a more true impact of what is going on.

Excellent addition to the series, lush with detail and characterization. Five big, fat stars to "Bloodroot"!!!!  
Definitely a must read.

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### **Ellen Moore says**

I found this book very interesting. It was quite different from other books in the series with a different setting--China's mother's homeplace, a Mississippi plantation called Jordan's Crossing, and mainly dealing only with China and her mother Leatha instead of the usual cast of characters. The family history and sordid secrets kept for decades made an interesting story, and the information included about China's great aunt Tullie's genetic debilitating disease, I found very interesting. There were current deaths to investigate and some inexplicable ghost stories that haunted China's visit. It was a good read and a creative plot.

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### **Mandolin says**

Albert, Susan Wittig  
Mystery

China Bayles long ago rejected her Southern roots and the heritage of racial cruelty and prejudice that has been passed down through the Coldwell line, along with Jordan's Crossing, the sprawling Mississippi plantation on the banks of the Bloodroot River. A cryptic phone call from her mother, Leatha, however, sends China packing and wondering if her mother's allusions to ghosts of the past has any relation to her own recurrent nightmare of a body being dug from the garden soil in the dark of the night. When she arrives at her ancestral home, China finds herself in the midst of a centuries' old mystery whose deadly secrets are slowly surfacing, bringing with them fatal consequences for the heirs of the Coldwell and Beauchamp families. China learns, too, that she may be the heiress to a crippling genetic disorder that will destroy her body and mind, as it has destroyed those of her Great Aunt Tullie. As she copes with this devastating news and attempts to piece together the mystery that is her family's story, China learns a great deal about the ethnobotany of the region and the many uses - both good and bad - of the herbs that grow wild on the rich, alluvial land.

Bloodroot takes readers away from China's beloved Pecan Springs, Texas to a world whose history and lore Albert probes expertly, giving the reader a deep, insightful book that, despite the relatively slow-to-develop mystery, is a truly rewarding read. Albert's depth as a writer continues to astonish me. Unlike many of her contemporaries who find a certain character that works well and repeatedly use them, in different costumes and settings, through their work, she creates unique, realistic characters that never seem the same. From sweet and slightly sassy Miss Potter to bold feminist China to the delightful ladies of the Darling Dahlia garden club, each series' heroines perfectly fit their surroundings and never seem to be mere variations on a common theme. This book takes her above even her standard of quality, with its sensitively critical view of the American South as well as racism, genetic disorders and the importance of blood and family. That could be the recipe for a dry, boring read but this book is anything but. Set against the beautifully described Mississippi landscape, it draws slowly but surely to a satisfying climax that leaves the reader feeling both enriched and entertained. Superb writing in every way!

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## Wayne says

Wow. I was not expecting this. I've read the nine previous China Bayles books leading up to this one but was not prepared for how fantastic this book was. Actually, this hardly felt like a genre read as all the others felt. Albert truly made strides with her writing in this book.

Bloodroot is a Southern Gothic novel dealing with family secrets, ghosts, murder and insanity. Yes, all those sound like the makings of an overwrought book written in the Southern style. But, Albert picks through a complicated family history with logic. I never felt the story was being manipulated in order for the pieces to fit together.

I have to say, it was a real treat that the book took place away from Pecan Springs. As much as I like the China Bayles series, Pecan Springs is a bit of a bore. I can understand Albert having a soft spot for Texas. But, the section of Texas she chose for these books is, for me, not very interesting. The Mississippi setting of Bloodroot was much more interesting. Plus, as nice as the Ruby character is, I didn't have to deal with her New Age attitudes which was a good thing.

Even if you have not read any other China Bayles books, I can recommend Bloodroot. The book does not rely on past events in the series. This could very well be a standalone novel. The writing fits the mood of the book and the story fascinates as it unfolds. I enjoyed reading this and I found it to be the best in the series thus far.

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## Lorraine says

I needed something light after two dark books back to back. I got it in this fun romp in the Mississippi Delta. China's mother has been caring for her Aunt Tulie who has run the family plantation for years. She asks China to come for a visit because there are problems & she needs her expertise as an attorney. China reluctantly agrees. It soon becomes obvious there are big problems. Aunt Tulie is suffering from Huntington's Disease which has made unpleasant changes in her personality and made her movements very erratic. China learns that the plantation manager had visited them with a deed that would give him claim of their home as well as the best parts of the plantation. Aunt Tulie had hit him on the side of the head with her cane when this happened. At the same time, China has a dream that she hadn't had since she was a child - where she saw a body being dug up and Aunt Tulie sobbing. However, she begins to think that it's just her vivid imagination. Then the pajamas she wore that night appear in her bureau drawer, washed and neatly pressed, and her great grandmother's journal appears on her desk in her room. She had put it where she found it in the library but not before smelling lily of the valley. Now it is suddenly on her desk. Nobody will admit to doing that. This book isn't hard to figure out as you read it. The only surprise was one that came out of the blue more or less relating to the death of the plantation manager. It's in there more as an afterthought in many ways. Still this was a fun and relaxing quick read. You also learn a LOT about herbs including some really interesting ones in this book.

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## **Jasmine Giacomo says**

China Bayles goes home, to her ancestral manor house in the swamps of the South, looking for answers to the mysteries of her own family tree.

This was my first China Bayles mystery, and I enjoyed it. The herbalism, the pervasive, odorous mugginess of the swamps, the heavy feel of generations of conflict and mystery--it was all good, baby.

The plot, a straightforward investigation into whether a newly-missing man possessed a claim to the land under China's ancestral home, quickly spun off into curling detours and tangents that delved into previous generations and their secrets, as well as hereditary illnesses they may have passed on to the current generation. There were several characters who had vested interests in various outcomes. The only real letdown was the killer.

For the most part, the characters were awesome in this book, both the living and the ancestors. From Aunt Tullie, with her Huntington's chorea, to the mysterious Marie Louise, to the Chocktaw gardener, Judith. Other characters were flat or forgettable, never really connecting with me throughout the book. The killer never really felt fully fleshed out, as if the point of the book wasn't who killed the victim, but China's history, and the killer was just an excuse to bring that into the light. A pair of sisters, Dawn and Alice Ann, had the same effect on me; they seemed to float through the book without ever really seeming real.

There were several smaller themes throughout the book, which tied in nicely with herbal notations at the start of the chapters: herbal abortifacients, lily of the valley's various meanings and uses, plantation behavior on the part of the master, and of course all the implications and uses of the bloodroot plant itself. In most regards, these sort of gave away the secret, as it were. The same thing happened with the killer, whose name was given as a nickname for a certain plant, far earlier than they were listed as a suspect. As the only character with a plant name, that made them stick in my mind, and ruined the surprise; it was just a matter of figuring out why they did it.

This type of foreshadowing starts at the beginning of the book, where it's revealed who died, as well as a couple other facts, before the story technically even starts. Talk about ruining the surprise! In a mystery book, that seems like the sort of thing you specifically want to avoid doing.

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## **Megan Bodwell says**

I do like this series. This installment may be my favorite so far, for two reasons I think. First, I am doing my own family's genealogy and the family history links in the story were really appealing to me. Second, I really enjoyed the recipes that Albert included in this book. I have been hoping to see more herbal recipes in the series and these look particularly good.

This series has done a great job in continual development of the main character, China Bayles. She remains herself, yet constantly seems to be growing as a person. Author Albert also changes the setting of the stories frequently and the central characters to the plots are rotated so the reader does not get bored or get the feeling that they have "read this one before." A simple thing, to be sure, but it is surprising how many authors aren't

able to do this.

I like this series more with each installment I read!

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### **Teesa says**

My favorite of the series so far...not my favorite location, can't wait until China gets back to Pecan Springs and the usual cast of characters.

"she ain't who you think she is" sums it up for me. I was totally prepared to just get thru this book and on to the next in this series but enjoyed this read and its cast.

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### **Margaret says**

Took me a little while to get into the story - I'm not usually all that interested in Deep South generational tales - but somewhere after 50 pages or so I became interested. I really like that China (maybe being an ex-lawyer?) is a thinking amateur detective and does not (for the most part) impulsively confront suspects and get herself unwittingly into dangerous situations. I liked following her thought process and that she consciously decides who to tell what rather than blurting it all out at the wrong person. I think this is only the second book I've read in this series and I know she was out of her usual environment so we didn't get much of Ruby, McQuaid or the son. I will definitely read more in this series as I come across them.

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### **Catherine Woodman says**

China Bayles has an ambivalent relationship with her mother Leatha. Leatha spent most of China's childhood and adulthood in an alcoholic fog. Leatha is now on the wagon, but with so much baggage the relationship is still difficult. Leatha is staying with her sick Aunt Tullie on the family plantation in Mississippi, and there is something very wrong. The manager, Wylie, has announced to Leatha and Tullie that he has a deed to the land under the plantation's main house, is assaulted by the angry old woman and disappears. Leatha, naturally very worried, begs China to come out and help her solve the problem. Reluctantly, China drives to Mississippi to resolve the problems, but they are deeper and more difficult than she realizes.

This is a much more personal mystery for China. In her other stories, she always seems just a little removed from the action. In this one, she is deeply involved with each and every one of the main characters, and related to most of them. Her family has more secrets than she or Leatha ever realized. The ghosts are a nice touch. They add to the atmosphere of the old house. This is a very enjoyable mystery. China Bayles fans will love it and it will appeal to many others who would not otherwise read one of these mysteries.

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### **Lily says**

Loved this story. It was chance to see China at her best, AWAY from McQuaid and Brian. The thing I didn't like was the fact that she believed Amanda's story too quickly. She should have demanded a DNA test before

she let her anywhere near the old lady. Also, and this is a minor thing, the family tree chart includes Brian as her son. He isn't a blood relative so there should've been a notation indicating that he is a stepson. At least an asterisk or something. Other than that it was a fun addition to the continuing series.

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### **David says**

In Bloodroot (Berkley, 2001) Susan Wittig Albert has written a novel that probes the depths of generational family secrets through a multi-layered story of kinship bonds and lost loves. China Bayles, Albert's venerable protagonist of (currently) seventeen published novels and many short stories, has left the relatively comfortable confines of her herb business in Pecan Springs, Texas to join her mother, Leatha and Aunt Tullie at Jordan's Crossing, the Coldwell family plantation in the Yazoo Valley of Mississippi. What is supposed to be a short trip to help her mother and Aunt Tullie get the plantation affairs in order turns into a labyrinthine exploration of the generations of families who have lived on the plantation, and the mysteries surrounding their legacies. Full review at: [http://staymore.blogspot.com/2009/04/...](http://staymore.blogspot.com/2009/04/)

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### **Sallee says**

This has been one of my favorite China Bayles's mysteries. Her description of the southern plantations of her ancestors made you feel the sultry heat and smell the honeysuckle. The story has multiple twists and turns and as always, she keeps you guessing right up to the end. I could hardly stop reading it yesterday and finished it first thing this morning. That's the kind of book I like.

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