

The Summer Wind (Lowcountry Summer Book 2)

By Mary Alice Monroe

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The Summer Wind is the second book in Monroe's Lowcountry Summer trilogy, following the *New York Times* bestselling *The Summer Girls.* This series is a poignant and heartwarming story of three half-sisters and their grandmother, who is determined to help them rediscover their southern roots and family bonds.

It's midsummer and Eudora, nicknamed Dora, is staying at Sea Breeze, the family's ancestral home on Sullivan's Island. For years, Dora has played the role of the perfect wife and mother in a loveless marriage. Now her husband filed for divorce, her child is diagnosed with autism, and her house is on the market. Dora's facade collapses under the weight of her grief and she suffers "broken heart syndrome." Mamaw and the girls rally around Dora—but it's up to Dora to heal herself as she spends the summer prowling the beach, discovering the secrets of the island and her heart. This is a summer of discovery for all the women of Sea Breeze. Carson returns from Florida to face life-changing decisions, Lucille confronts a health scare, and an unexpected visitor has Harper reconsidering her life's direction.

When tropical storm winds batter the island, the women must band together and weather the tempest—both the one outside their windows and the raging sea of emotions within each of them. They must learn again what it means to be a sister. It is up to Mamaw to keep the light burning at Sea Breeze to guide the girls through the lies, the threats, and the rocky waters of indecision to home.

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Editorial Review

Review
"A beautifully written, moving portrayal of three sisters finding themselves and each other after years of separation." --Cassandra King, *New York Times* bestselling author, on *The Summer Girls* (Book 1 of the 'Lowcountry Summer' trilogy)

About the Author
Mary Alice Monroe is the *New York Times* bestselling author of more than a dozen novels, including *The Summer Wind*, *The Summer Girls*, *Last Light Over Carolina*, *Time is a River*, *Sweetgrass*, *Skyward*, *The Beach House*, *The Four Seasons*, *The Book Club*, and *Beach House Memories*. Her books received numerous awards, including the Award for Writing from the South Carolina Center for the Book and the International Fiction Award for Green Fiction. An active conservationist, she lives in the lowcountry of South Carolina. Visit her at MaryAliceMonroe.com and on Facebook at Facebook.com/MaryAliceMonroe.

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The Summer Wind

Chapter One

Sea Breeze, Sullivan’s Island, South Carolina

July was said to be the hottest month of the year in Charleston, and after enduring eighty Southern summers, Marietta Muir, or Mamaw, as her family affectionately called her, readily agreed. She delicately dabbed at her upper lip and forehead with her handkerchief, then waved to shoo off a pesky mosquito. Southern summers meant heat, humidity, and bugs. But being out on Sullivan’s Island, sitting in the shade of a live oak tree, sipping iced tea, and waiting for the occasional offshore breeze was, for her, the very definition of summer. She sighed heavily. The ancient oak spread its mighty limbs so far and wide, Marietta felt cradled in its protective embrace. Still, the air was especially languid this morning, so thick and cloyingly scented with jasmine that it was a battle to keep her eyelids from drooping. A gust of wind from the ocean carried the sweet scent of the grass and cooled the moist hairs along her neck.

She set the needlepoint pattern on her lap to remove her glasses and rub her eyes. Cursed old age. It was getting harder and harder to see her stitches, she thought with a sigh. Glancing at Lucille beside her on the screened porch of the guesthouse that Lucille called home, she saw her friend bent over the base of a sweetgrass basket, her strong hands weaving the fragile strands into the pattern, sewing each row tight with palmetto fronds. A small pile of the grass lay in her lap, while a generous heap sat at her feet in a plastic bag, along with another bag of long-leaf pine needles.

Seeing her longtime companion’s hands lovingly weaving together the disparate grasses into an object of beauty made Marietta think again how imperative her challenge was this summer: to entwine her three very different granddaughters with Sea Breeze once again. Her summer girls.

Mamaw sighed softly to herself. They were hardly girls any longer. Dora was thirty-six, Carson thirty-three, and Harper twenty-eight—women now. Back when they were young girls and spent summers together they had been close, as sisters should be. Over the years, however, they'd become more strangers than sisters. Half-sisters, Marietta corrected herself, shuddering at the nuance of the term. As if by only sharing a father, the women's bond was somehow less. Sisters were sisters and blood was blood, after all. She had succeeded in corralling all three women to Sea Breeze in June for the summer, but here it was, only early July, and Carson was already off to Florida while Dora was fixing on returning to Summerville. And Harper . . . that New Yorker had her sights set north.

"I wonder if Carson made it to Florida yet," Lucille said without looking up. Her fingers moved steadily, weaving row after row.

Mamaw half smiled, thinking how Lucille's mind and her own were in sync . . . again. Lucille had been hired as her housekeeper some fifty years back, when Marietta was a young bride in Charleston. They'd shared a lifetime of ups and downs, births, deaths, scandals, and joys. Now that they were old women, Lucille had become more a confidante than an employee. Truth was, Lucille was her closest friend.

"I was just wondering the same thing," Mamaw replied. "I expect she has by now and is just settling in to her hotel. I hope she won't be away long."

"She won't be. Carson knows how important this summer is to you, and she'll be back just as soon as she finds out what's done happened to that dolphin," Lucille said. She lowered her basket to her lap and looked Mamaw straight in the eyes. "Carson won't disappoint you. You have to have faith."

"I do," Mamaw exclaimed defensively. "But I'm old enough to know how life likes to throw a wrench into even the most well thought out plans. I mean, really," Mamaw said, lifting her hands in frustration. "Who could have foreseen a dolphin tossing all my summer plans applecart-upset?"

Lucille chuckled, a deep and throaty sound. "Yes, she surely did. That Delphine . . ." Lucille's smile slipped at the sound of the dolphin's name. "But it weren't her fault, now was it? I do hope that place in Florida can help the poor thing."

"I do, too. For Delphine's sake, and for Carson's." She paused. "And Nate's." She was worried about how hard Dora's son had taken the dolphin's accident. Only a young boy, he had put the blame on himself for luring the dolphin to their dock and getting it entangled in all that fishing line. In truth, they were all to blame. No one more than herself.

"For all our sakes," she amended.

"Amen," Lucille agreed soberly. She paused to sweep bits of scattered grass to the wind. "Don't you fret none, Miz Marietta. All will be well. I feel it in my bones. And in no time you'll have all your summer girls here at Sea Breeze again."

"Hi, Mamaw! Lucille!" A voice called out from the driveway, cutting through the two women's conversation.

"Here comes one now," Lucille murmured, returning to her basket.

Marietta turned her head and smiled to see her youngest granddaughter, Harper, jogging toward them in one

of those skimpy, skintight running outfits that looked to Marietta like a second skin. Her red hair was pulled back in a ponytail, and sweat poured down her pink face.

“Harper!” Marietta called out with a quick wave. “My goodness, child, you’re running at this time of the day? Only tourists are fool enough to run here under a midsummer sun. You’ll have a heat stroke! Why, your face is as red as a beet!”

Harper stopped at the bottom of the porch steps and bent over, hands on her hips, to catch her breath. “Oh, Mamaw, I’m fine,” she said breathily, wiping the sweat from her brow with her forearm. “I do this every day.”

“Well, you look about ready to keel over.”

“It is hot out there today,” Harper conceded with half a smile. “But my face always turns red. It’s my fair skin. I’ve got a ton of sunscreen on.”

Lucille clucked her tongue. “Mind you drink some water, hear?”

“Why don’t you jump in the pool and cool yourself down some? You look to be wearing a swimming suit . . .” Mamaw trailed off, fanning her face as she spoke. It made her hot just to see Harper’s pink face and the sweat drenching her clothing.

“Good idea,” Harper replied, and with a quick wave took off toward the front door. She turned her head and shouted, “Nice basket, Lucille!” before disappearing into the house.

Lucille chuckled and returned to her weaving. “Only the young can run like that.”

“I never ran like that when I was young!” Mamaw said.

“Me, neither. Who had the time?”

“No time, and certainly not dressed like that. What these girls parade around in today. That outfit left little to the imagination.”

“Oh, I bet the young men can imagine plenty,” Lucille said, chuckling again.

Mamaw huffed. “What young men? I simply cannot understand why she’s not getting any calls. I’ve seen to it that she was invited to a few parties in town where other young people would be present. There was that nice boating party at Sissy’s yacht club . . . Several eligible young men were invited.” Mamaw shook her head. “Harper is such a pretty girl, with good breeding.” She paused. “Even if her mother is English.” Mamaw picked up her needlepoint and added archly, “Her father is from Charleston, after all.”

“Oh, I wouldn’t say she hasn’t been asked out . . .” Lucille said, feeding more grass into the basket.

Mamaw narrowed her eyes with suspicion. “You wouldn’t?”

Lucille’s eyes sparkled with knowledge. “I happen to know that since she’s been here, several young men have called our Miss Harper.”

“Really?” Mamaw fumed silently, wondering why she hadn’t been made aware of this. She didn’t like being the last to know things, certainly not about her own granddaughters. She reached for the Island Eye newspaper and used it to fan the air. “You’d think someone might’ve told me.”

Lucille shrugged.

Mamaw lowered the paper. “Well . . . why hasn’t she had any dates? Is she being shy?”

“Our Harper might be a quiet little thing, but she ain’t shy. That girl’s got a spine of steel. Just look at the way she won’t touch meat, or white bread, or anything I cook with bacon grease.”

Mamaw’s lips curved, recalling the row at the dinner table Harper’s first night at Sea Breeze. Dora was nearly driven to distraction by Harper’s strict diet.

“She’s only just been here a month,” Lucille continued. “And she’s only staying another two. She don’t have her light on, is all. And who can wonder? With all she got on her mind, I reckon dating a young man is low on her list.”

Mamaw rocked in silence. All Lucille had said was true enough. It seemed everyone had a lot on their minds this summer at Sea Breeze—she certainly did. The summer was flying by, and if she couldn’t find a way to forge bonds between her granddaughters, Mamaw knew that come September, Sea Breeze would be sold, the girls would scatter again, and she’d be sitting on the dock howling at the harvest moon.

The previous May, Mamaw had invited her three granddaughters—Dora, Carson, and Harper—to celebrate her eightieth birthday at Sea Breeze. She’d had, however, an ulterior motive. In the fall, Marietta was putting Sea Breeze on the market and moving into an assisted living facility. With the demands of an island house, she simply couldn’t keep up living alone any longer, not even with Lucille’s help. Her hope was that, once here, all three women would agree to stay for the entire summer. She wanted them to be her summer girls again—as they had been as children—for this final summer before Sea Breeze was sold.

Countless previous invitations of hers had been rebuffed by all the girls over the years, with just as many excuses—I’d love to but I’m so busy, I have work, I’ll be out of town—each sent with gushes of regret and replete with exclamation marks.

So this time, Mamaw had trusted that her granddaughters had inherited some of her ancestral pirate blood, and she’d lured the girls south with promises of loot from the house. And the little darlings had come, if only for the weekend party. Desperate to keep them on the island, Mamaw had resorted to a bit of manipulation when she’d threatened to cut them out of the will if they did not stay for the entire summer. She chortled out a laugh just remembering their shocked faces.

Carson had just lost her job and was pleased as punch to spend the summer rent-free on the island. Dora, in the midst of a divorce, was easily persuaded to stay at Sea Breeze with Nate while repairs were done on her house in Summerville. Harper, however, had thrown a hissy fit. She’d called it blackmail.

Mamaw shifted uncomfortably in her seat. Blackmail, really. Harper could be so dramatic, she thought as she rolled her eyes. Surely there was a more refined, gentler term for the actions of a concerned and loving grandmother set on bringing her granddaughters together? A smile of satisfaction played at her lips. And they’d all agreed to stay the summer, hadn’t they?

But now, only midsummer, and Carson had already left—though she promised to swiftly return—while Dora had one foot out the door.

Mamaw closed her eyes, welcoming another soothing ocean breeze. She couldn't fail in her mission. Eighty years was a long time of living. She'd survived the loss of a husband and her only child. All she had left that mattered were these three precious jewels, her granddaughters. Mamaw's hands tightened to fists. And come hell or high water—or hissy fits—she was going to give them this one perfect summer. Her most private fear was that when Sea Breeze was sold and she'd moved on to a retirement home, the fragile bond between the sisters would break and they'd scatter to the four winds like these bits of sweetgrass that fell loose from Lucille's basket.

"Here comes another one," Lucille said in a low voice, indicating with her chin the sight of Dora rounding the corner of the house.

Mamaw's gaze swept over her eldest granddaughter with a critical eye. Dora was dressed in a khaki suit and a blouse the same pale yellow color as her hair. As Dora drew closer, Mamaw noted that she was wearing nylon stockings and pumps. In this heat! She could see pearls of perspiration already dripping down Dora's face as she dragged a suitcase behind her through the gravel toward the silver Lexus parked in the driveway.

"Dora! Are you off?" Mamaw called out.

Dora stopped abruptly at hearing her name and turned her head toward the guesthouse.

"Hey, ladies," she called out with a wave, upon seeing the two women sitting side by side on the front porch. "Yes," she replied, pasting on a smile that didn't quite meet her eyes. "I've got to dash if I'm going to get to my lawyer's appointment on time. It's going to be a long morning."

Dora left her suitcase and came over to join them. "Look at you two, sitting there like two birds on a wire, chirping away the morning." Dora stepped up onto the porch and into the shade.

Mamaw set her needlepoint aside and gave Dora her full attention, studying her eldest granddaughter's face. Of all three women, Dora was the one who could best mask her emotions with false cheer. Had always done so, even as a child. On her wedding day, her father, Mamaw's only child, Parker, had arrived at the church unforgivably drunk. Dora had smiled as she walked down the aisle with her stepfather instead of her biological one. She'd smiled through the whispers behind raised palms, smiled during Parker's rambling toast, smiled while friends escorted Parker to the hotel to sleep it off.

Mamaw studied that same fixed smile now. She knew too well the sacrifices Dora had made to present the facade of a happy family. This divorce was striking at her very core, shaking her foundation. Yet, even now, it seemed Dora was intent on giving off the impression that she had everything under control.

"You look very . . . respectable," Mamaw said, choosing her words carefully. "But isn't it a bit steamy today for that suit and nylons?"

Dora lifted her blond hair from her neck, to allow the offshore breeze to cool the moisture pooling there. "Lord, yes. It's so hot you could spit on the ground and watch it sizzle. But I've got to make the right impression in front of Cal's lawyers."

Bless her heart, Mamaw thought. That suit was so tight. Poor Dora looked like a sausage squeezed into its

casings.

Dora dropped her hair and her face shifted to a scowl. “Calhoun’s being flat-out unreasonable.”

“We all knew when you married him that his elevator didn’t go all the way to the top.”

“He doesn’t have to be smart, Mamaw. Only his lawyer does. And I hear he’s got himself a real shark.”

“You called the Rosen law firm like I recommended, didn’t you?” Dora nodded. “Good,” Mamaw said. “Robert will catch that shark on his hook, don’t you worry.”

“I’ll try not to,” Dora replied, smoothing out wrinkles in her skirt. “I still want to set a good precedent, though.”

Mamaw reached up to the collar of her dress and unpinned her brooch. It was a favorite of hers. Small pieces of bright coral were embedded in gold to form an exquisite starburst. Her granddaughter needed a bit of starburst in her life right now.

“Come here, precious,” she said to Dora.

When Dora drew near, Mamaw waved her hand to indicate Dora should bend close, then she reached out to pin the large brooch to Dora’s suit collar.

“There,” she said, sitting back and gazing at her handiwork. “A little pop of color does wonders for you, my dear. The brooch was my mother’s. It’s yours now.”

Dora’s eyes widened as her stoic facade momentarily crumbled. She rushed to hug her grandmother with a desperate squeeze. “Oh, Mamaw, thank you. I didn’t expect . . . It means a lot. Especially today. I have to admit, I’m nervous about confronting Cal after all this time. And his lawyers.”

“Consider it ceremonial armor,” Mamaw replied with a smile.

“I will,” Dora replied, standing erect and smoothing out her jacket. “You know, I’m so tickled I can fit back into this suit. Between Carson not letting us have any alcohol in the house and Harper getting us to eat all that health food, I’ve actually lost a few pounds! Who would have thought?”

A genuine smile lit up Dora’s face, and Mamaw suddenly saw a flash of the dazzling young woman who once had enchanted all who met her with the warmth of that smile. Over the past ten years of an unhappy marriage and caring for a child with special needs, Dora had committed the cardinal sin of a Southern wife—she’d let herself go. But worst of all, her sadness had drained the sunlight from inside of her. Mamaw was glad to see a glimmer of it resurface in her eyes this morning.

“Is Nate going with you?” Lucille asked.

Dora shook her head and grimaced. “I’m afraid not. I just came from his room. I begged him to come with me, but you know Nate when he’s got his mind made up. He barely said more than one word—no. I don’t think he likes me very much right now,” Dora added in a softer tone. “It was like”—her voice choked with emotion—“like he couldn’t wait for me to leave.”

“Now, honey, don’t pay him no mind,” Mamaw said in a conciliatory tone. “You know that child’s still hurting from what happened to that dolphin. It was traumatic for him. For all of us,” she added.

“Carson should be calling with news about that dolphin soon,” Lucille said comfortingly.

“And I just know it will be good news,” Mamaw agreed, ever the optimist. “I’m sure Nate will come around then.”

“I hope so . . .” Dora replied, and hastily wiped her eyes, seemingly embarrassed for the tears.

Mamaw slid a glance to Lucille. It wasn’t like Dora to be so emotional. Dora checked her watch and gasped. “Lord, I’ve really got to go or I’ll be late,” she said, all business now. “Are you sure y’all can handle Nate while I’m gone? You know he can get squirrelly when I leave.”

“I feel sure that three grown women can handle one little boy. No matter how testy,” Mamaw said, arching one brow.

Lucille laughed quietly while her fingers worked the basket.

“Yes, of course,” Dora muttered, digging into her purse for car keys. “It’s just he is particularly difficult now, because he’s all upset about that dolphin, and that I’m going to see his father.”

Mamaw waved Dora off. “You go on and don’t worry about anything here. We’ll all be fine. You have enough to contend with getting your house ready for the market.”

Dora’s eyes narrowed at mention of the house. “Those workmen had better be there or I’ll raise holy hell.”

Mamaw and Lucille exchanged a glance. That was the Dora they knew. Pulling out her keys, Dora turned to go.

“Dora?” Mamaw called, stopping Dora as she made to leave. Dora stopped, turned her head, and met Mamaw’s gaze. “Mind you remember who you are. You’re a Muir. The captain of your own ship.” She sniffed and added, “Don’t you take any guff from the likes of Calhoun Tupper, hear?”

The brilliant Muir blue color flashed in Dora’s eyes. “Yes, ma’am,” she replied with heart, and straightened her shoulders.

The two old women watched Dora rush to her car, load the suitcase into the trunk, and roar out of the driveway, the wheels spitting gravel.

“Mmm-mmm-mm,” Lucille muttered as she returned to her basket weaving. “That woman’s hell-bent on taking her fury out on all the men in town today.”

Mamaw released the grin that had been playing at her lips all morning. “I don’t know who I feel more sorry for,” she said. “The workmen at the house, or Calhoun Tupper.”

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