

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR

SUSAN MALLERY

Evening Stars

❧ A Blackberry Island Novel ❧

BOOK CLUB KIT

Discover material from Susan Mallery inside this kit to help make your book club a success!



BLACKBERRY ISLAND

Seattle

Getaway Bridge



Evening Stars

An Introduction to *Evening Stars*

Dear Reader,

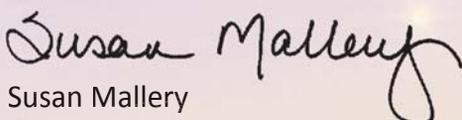
Thank you for selecting *Evening Stars* for your book club. If your group would enjoy discussing the book with me by phone or Skype, please email my assistant Jenel at jenel@susanmallery.com. I'd love to hear your thoughts and to answer your questions!

Evening Stars is the third book of my trilogy set on Blackberry Island, Washington. On Blackberry Island, life is sweet...but sometimes one must fight past a few thorns in order to discover that burst of sweetness. Nurse Nina Wentworth is feeling the sting of thorns as the book starts. She's a giver by nature, but like many women, she may have taken it too far. She sacrificed her own dreams and a chance at love in order to take care of her mother and sister. Now in her early thirties, she feels that life has passed her by...until not one but two men start knocking on her door.

Her sister, Averil, both relies upon and resents Nina's guidance. Averil was a challenging character to write because she doesn't know what she wants. She only knows that she's restless. She wants to make a change in her career, but she feels blocked. She loves her husband, but she's lying to him about something huge.

No spoilers here, but I will tell you this: I write books with happy endings. As a reader, I don't enjoy investing hours, days, weeks of my life into falling in love with characters only to have them end up miserable. So I wouldn't do that to my readers. Nina and Averil and the other characters in *Evening Stars* have to deal with some conflict and pain, but, rest assured, by the end of the book, they will learn the lessons they need to learn and be better people for it. My hope is you will close *Evening Stars* with a very satisfied sigh.

Happy reading!


Susan Mallery

Evening Stars

Suggested Discussion Questions

1. Why did Nina stay on Blackberry Island so long? Why did she put everyone else's needs ahead of her own? Do you know any women like that?
2. If you have a sister, how is your relationship similar to Nina and Averil's relationship? How is it different? In general, do you think brothers' relationships are as emotionally complex as sisters' relationships?
3. One of the themes of *Evening Stars* clearly relates to taking responsibility for one's own life. How were different facets of responsibility explored through the characters of Nina, Averil and Bonnie? Is it possible to be too responsible? Where do you fall on the responsibility spectrum?
4. What other themes did you think about as you read *Evening Stars*?
5. Were you on Team Dylan or Team Kyle? Why? Did your allegiance change as you progressed through the book? Were you satisfied with the choice Nina made?
6. What did you think of Averil's relationship with her husband, Kevin?
7. Early in the book, when Dylan drives Nina home, she sees the house through his eyes. How did her feelings about her home reflect her feelings about how her life had turned out? How would you feel if your first love visited your house?
8. Do you think Bonnie will change? Why or why not?
9. What caused Averil and Nina to begin to see each other differently? What caused them each to see themselves differently and to take positive steps in their lives?
10. Explore a metaphor from *Evening Stars*.

Evening Stars

In Conversation with Susan Mallery

Q: Tell us about your newest novel, *Evening Stars*.

A: Essentially, *Evening Stars* is the story of two sisters who have to learn to let go of others' expectations in order to claim the life they each want. Nina practically raised Averil because their mom took "flaky" to a whole new level. Nina gave up her dream of going to medical school—breaking up with her first love in the process—so she could put Averil through college. But now Averil's back home, dissatisfied with her career and her marriage. How can Averil be unhappy, Nina wonders, after everything Nina did for her?

Then Nina's first love moves home to Blackberry Island, and he wants her back. Suddenly, she has the chance to reclaim the life she thought she wanted all those years ago, but at the same time, she's being tempted by a much younger fighter pilot who also has his eye on her.

Evening Stars is a sometimes painful, often humorous story of moving past regret and reaching for your dreams. My hope is that readers will finish the book with a happy sigh of satisfaction and a new determination to play an active role in their own lives.

Q: What inspired you to begin writing women's fiction stories after focusing on your popular contemporary romance novels?

A: Romances are relationship stories, and so are my women's fiction novels—they're simply about different relationships. The relationships between sisters, mothers and daughters, husbands and wives... I consider my women's fiction novels such as *Evening Stars* to be a natural extension of the books I've written for years. And because I think love is essential, romance still plays a big role in each of my women's fiction books.

Q: In *Evening Stars*, who is your favorite character and why?

A: The character I identify with most strongly is Nina because I share her sense of responsibility for the people I love. As women, we often put a burden on ourselves to take care of everyone in our lives, whether they want us to or not. We want them to make choices that we think will make them happy, and it's physically painful to us when they behave in what we perceive as self-destructive ways. The lesson that Nina had to learn—and one with which I still sometimes struggle—is that she can't make choices for anyone but herself. And, ultimately, the choices she makes will determine the life she lives.

Evening Stars

In Conversation with Susan Mallery

Q: Tell us a little bit about younger sister Averil.

A: Averil is a good person who has found herself in the uncomfortable position of living someone else's dream for her life. She went to school where Nina thought she should go. She lives where Nina thought she should live. She likes her job as a magazine writer but isn't fulfilled by it. She loves her husband but finds herself lying to him about being ready to try for children. She isn't happy, but she doesn't know why, and she doesn't know what she wants. Averil has to go backward—move home to Blackberry Island—before she can move forward.

Q: The bonds of sisterhood and family are strong themes featured in *Evening Stars*. Do you have any siblings, and in what ways are your own family relationships similar or different to those of the Wentworths?

A: I'm an only child of only children, so not only do I not have any siblings, I don't have any cousins. I think this is a big part of the reason that "finding family" is a recurring theme in many of my books. I've created my own family through marriage and by developing close, lifelong friendships. Many of my characters are in similar circumstances, building a family by choice rather than by birth.

Nina and Averil's relationship was very interesting to me. They are sisters, yes, but in a very real way, they also have a mother/daughter relationship. They're only four years apart, but when Nina was twelve and Averil was eight, their mother began to leave them alone for weeks at a time while she traveled. So Nina was the one who was responsible for paying the bills, getting dinner on the table. And Nina is the person against whom Averil feels compelled to rebel. They love each other, but they have to restructure their relationship.

Q: Your descriptions of Blackberry Island are beautiful and inviting, both in the book and at www.BlackberryIsland.com. What was your inspiration behind the setting?

A: I live in Seattle, and there are several picturesque islands in the Puget Sound area nearby. Blackberry Island isn't modeled after any of them specifically, but it certainly was inspired by them. Blackberry Island is within commuting distance of Seattle, but in terms of pace of life, it's a world away. Most people travel to Blackberry Island via ferry, though there is a bridge to the mainland, as well. The island is dotted with wineries and fields of daisies. Readers who want to learn more about Blackberry Island's history or see pictures can visit the website.

Evening Stars

In Conversation with Susan Mallery

Q: Romance also plays an important role in *Evening Stars*, as Nina unexpectedly finds herself juggling two very different and equally exciting men. Were there any challenges to writing two heroes and deciding which one would claim her heart?

A: I'm a one-man woman, so it was challenging for me to put myself in Nina's shoes and date two men. It was challenging for her, too! I mean, how do people handle that kind of thing smoothly? I have no idea. I'd be completely overwhelmed. Nina's dating dry spell had lasted for years, and suddenly, she has not one but *two* men romancing her. While it's exciting, it's also very nerve-racking. And, might I say, pretty hysterical at times.

The biggest challenge for me was to try not to telegraph to readers which man—if either—Nina will decide upon. I want readers to take the journey along with her, and I'll be very interested to hear whether they think Nina made the right decision.

Q: Do you have a favorite scene from *Evening Stars*?

A: Many. One that comes to mind takes place in Chapter One. Nina's car has broken down, and it's pouring rain—which it often does in the Pacific Northwest. She's in a cellular dead spot on the island, so she can't call for help. She has no choice but to walk home in the rain. In her Betty Boop nurse's scrubs, makeup running, wet hair hanging limply into her face, thighs chafing as she trudges down the muddy road...she's not exactly looking or feeling her best. Which, of course, means that *this* is when her first love will come back into her life.

Dylan has never looked better. Naturally. Isn't that just like a man? He's a doctor, driving a new car that costs more than Nina makes in a year, and he offers her a ride.

Nina keeps walking.

Makes me laugh every time I think of it! I hope it'll make readers laugh, too. In that moment, I am 100% on Nina's side. I love her!

Q: Describe your ideal writing space. How does it compare to where you usually write?

A: My ideal writing space is quiet, filled with light, and my little dog is nearby. I bounce ideas off her, and she approves them all very enthusiastically. She's not discerning, but she is encouraging. I'm fortunate to have an office where I write, so unless I'm traveling, I write in my ideal environment. I have a very exacting writing schedule. In order to meet my many deadlines, I need to do everything in my power to nurture my creative needs.

Evening Stars

In Conversation with Susan Mallery

Q: Can we look forward to more Blackberry Island stories in the near future, or are you working on any new exciting projects?

A: *Evening Stars* is the final book in the Blackberry Island trilogy, but it does lead readers toward a new series I'll begin in 2015, set in Mischief Bay, California. That's where Averil and her husband live, so readers will get a small introduction to Mischief Bay in *Evening Stars*.

On the romance front, I'll release three Fool's Gold books in paperback this year—*When We Met*, *Before We Kiss* and *Until We Touch*—plus an ebook novella, *Yours for Christmas*.

Evening Stars

Blackberry Island Recipes

“Where Life is Sweet”

BLACKBERRY CHIPOTLE SAUCE

- 2 cups of blackberries, fresh or frozen
- ¼ cup sugar
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 small onion, minced
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 2 tablespoons – ¼ cup canned chipotles in adobo sauce, chopped (the more, the hotter)
- 1 teaspoon cumin
- 1 tablespoon balsamic vinegar
- ½ teaspoon kosher salt

Heat the blackberries and sugar in a heavy-bottomed pan over medium heat, stirring constantly. When they're warm, mash them with a potato masher.

Lower heat and continue cooking for a few minutes. Pour the mixture into a wire mesh strainer over a bowl or measuring cup. Discard solids, reserve liquids.

Heat olive oil over medium-low heat. Add onions and garlic, sauté until onions are translucent.

Add the blackberry juice, chipotles, cumin, vinegar and salt. Simmer for five minutes, stirring constantly.

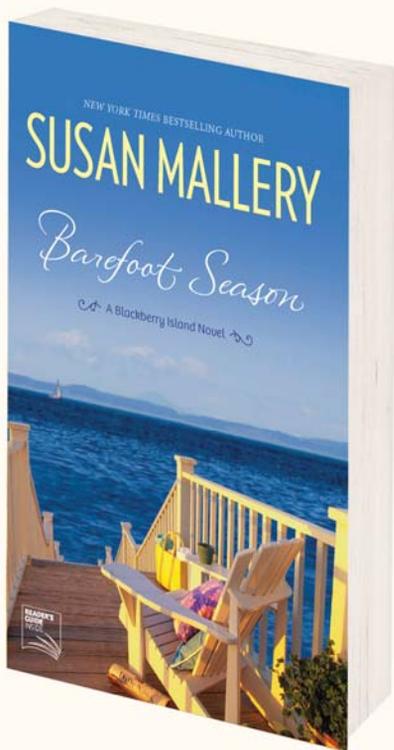
BLACKBERRY CHIPOTLE CHEESE AND CRACKERS

- 1 8-oz package cream cheese, softened
- ½ cup Blackberry Chipotle Sauce
- Crackers

Easy: Place the block of cheese on a rimmed plate and pour the Blackberry Chipotle Sauce over it. Serve with crackers.

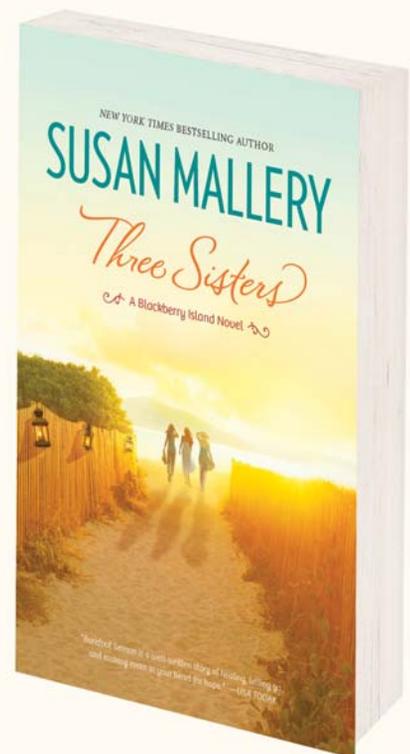
Easy-ish and impressive: Whip the cream cheese until it's light and airy. Scoop into a bowl, creating little peaks. Pour the Blackberry Chipotle Sauce over the cheese. Serve with crackers.

Discover more incredible stories in the *Blackberry Island* series



It'll take more than a successful season at the Blackberry Island Inn for two women to move beyond their devastating past, but with a little luck and a beautiful summer, they might just rediscover the friendship of a lifetime.

Thrown together by fate and geography, and bound by the strongest of friendships, three women are about to discover what they're really made of: laughter, tears, love and all.



NOW AVAILABLE!

www.BlackberryIsland.com

Evening Stars

SUSAN MALLERY

With more than twenty-five million books sold worldwide, *New York Times* bestselling author Susan Mallery is known for creating characters who feel as real as the folks next door and for putting them into emotional, often funny situations readers recognize from their own lives. Susan's books have made *Booklist's* Top 10 Romances list in four out of five consecutive years. *RT Book Reviews* says, "When it comes to heartfelt contemporary romance, Mallery is in a class by herself." With her popular, ongoing *Fool's Gold* series, Susan has reached new heights on the bestseller lists and has won the hearts of countless new fans.

Susan grew up in Southern California, moved so many times that her friends stopped writing her address in pen, and now has settled in Seattle with her husband and the most delightfully spoiled little dog who ever lived.



Photo Credit: Annie Brady

Visit Susan online at www.SusanMallery.com.

Evening Stars

Praise for Susan Mallery's Blackberry Island novels

"An engrossing tale of emotional growth and the healing power of friendship as three 'sisters' meet life's challenges."

—*Library Journal* on *Three Sisters*

"Susan Mallery gives us a candid, honest look into the turmoil of family life when tragedies and personal crisis occur...Mallery never disappoints her readers and *Three Sisters* is no exception. It's a winner and should be on everyone's short list of must reads."

—*Fresh Fiction*

"*Barefoot Season* is a well-written story of healing, letting go, and making room in your heart for hope."

—*USA TODAY*

"Gritty and magical, angst-ridden and sweet."

—*Publishers Weekly* on *Barefoot Season*

"Susan Mallery weaves a tale of broken friendship with enough twists and turns to keep even the most seasoned reader of commercial women's fiction guessing about where the story will lead."

—*Book Reporter* on *Barefoot Season*

"Mallery skillfully reveals insights into each woman's life to create a poignant tale of forgiveness, friendship renewed, and family."

—*Library Journal* on *Barefoot Season*

"Mallery has set the bar high.... The characters...come to life in their small-town setting and will touch readers' hearts and funny bones."

—*RT Book Reviews* on *Barefoot Season*