



Unlucky Charm Summer

Alyssa Wilkinson

Chicken Scratch Books (May 5, 2026)

Softcover \$12.99 (272pp)

978-1-953743-59-6

Intrepid sisters brave a secret-laden circus in Alyssa Wilkinson's splendid mystery novel *Unlucky Charm Summer*.

Left on the steps of an orphanage as a baby, eleven-year-old Duke is sure her parents are out there, waiting, somewhere. She has a mysterious charm bracelet and a note to prove it. When placed with a new foster family, Duke learns that she has a twin, Daisy, who was left with an identical bracelet. Together, the sisters set out to unravel the mystery of their origins.

Duke narrates with equal parts bravado and vulnerability. Her fierce independence belies her tender heart, which yearns for the family she cannot remember. Her longing complements the action scenes well, as when she dresses to meet the Winchesters and imagines that her soft new dress feels like "a mama's whisper at bedtime." She and Daisy are a winsome pair, with Daisy's cautious nature balancing Duke's impulsiveness. Daisy, too, wrestles with complicated, conflicting emotions, eager to find her biological parents while feeling disloyal to her beloved adopted family.

The Southern setting heightens the building tension. Lazy summer days set to the tune of buzzing cicadas are interrupted by jarring incidents including slashed bike tires; it becomes clear that someone is determined to stop the girls. Undeterred, the sisters approach the glittering Deveraux Brothers Circus, where a colorful cast propels their quest, including Hopscotch, a gentle clown "kept young by laughter," and Alastair, a ringmaster whose initial charisma hides darker motives. Symbolism—the planting of a new tree, the return of a pair of bluebirds—draws out the story's thoughtful themes of forgiveness and family, and a cheerful twist ending promises new beginnings for all.

Family secrets and circus chaos abound in the delightful mystery novel *Unlucky Charm Summer*.

VIVIAN TURNBULL (May / June 2026)

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