~ ESCAPE WITH ~

JENNY COLGAN



Praise for

JENNY COLGAN



'I loved this novel and every single one of its characters. Supremely heartfelt, hilarious and heartrending – it's an absolute triumph'
Sophie Kinsella

'This funny, sweet story is Jenny Colgan at her absolute best'
Heat

'Fast-paced, funny, poignant and well observed'
Daily Mail

'She is very, very funny'
Express

'A delicious comedy'
Red

'A naturally funny, warm-hearted writer who creates characters to love and care about long after you're finished reading'
Lisa Jewell

'Sweeter than a bag of jelly beans . . . had us eating up every page'
Cosmopolitan

'Jenny Colgan is a masterful storyteller'
Keith Stuart

'A quirky tale of love, work and the meaning of life'
Company

'A smart, witty love story'
Observer

'Full of laugh-out-loud observations . . .
utterly unputdownable'
Woman

'Gorgeous location, dancing dialogue and
characters you'll fall in love with. Irresistible!'
Jill Mansell

'Cheery and heart-warming'
Sunday Mirror

'A Colgan novel is like listening to your best pal,
souped up on vino, spilling the latest gossip –
entertaining, dramatic and frequently hilarious'
Daily Record

'An entertaining read'
Sunday Express



By Jenny Colgan

Mure

The Summer Seaside Kitchen

A Very Distant Shore *(novella)*

The Endless Beach

An Island Christmas

Christmas at the Island Hotel

An Island Wedding

Kirrinfief

The Little Shop of Happy Ever After

The Bookshop on the Shore

Five Hundred Miles from You

Little Beach Street Bakery

Little Beach Street Bakery

Summer at Little Beach Street Bakery

Christmas at Little Beach Street Bakery

Sunrise by the Sea

Cupcake Café

Meet Me at the Cupcake Café

Christmas at the Cupcake Café

Sweetshop of Dreams

Welcome to Rosie Hopkins' Sweetshop of Dreams

Christmas at Rosie Hopkins' Sweetshop

The Christmas Surprise

The Little School by the Sea

Class

Rules

Lessons

West End Girls

Operation Sunshine

Diamonds Are a Girl's Best Friend

The Good, the Bad and the Dumped

The Loveliest Chocolate Shop in Paris

Amanda's Wedding

Talking to Addison

Looking for Andrew McCarthy

Working Wonders

Do You Remember the First Time?

Where Have All the Boys Gone?

The Christmas Bookshop

By Jenny T. Colgan

Resistance Is Futile

Spandex and the City

Jenny Colgan is the author of numerous bestselling novels, including *The Little Shop of Happy Ever After* and *Summer at Little Beach Street Bakery*, which are also published by Sphere. *Meet Me at the Cupcake Café* won the 2012 Melissa Nathan Award for Comedy Romance and was a *Sunday Times* top ten bestseller, as was *Welcome to Rosie Hopkins' Sweetshop of Dreams*, which won the RNA Romantic Novel of the Year Award 2013. Jenny lives in Scotland. She can be found on Twitter at @jennycolgan and on Instagram at @jennycolganbooks.

The *Sunday Times* bestseller



JENNY COLGAN



An Island Wedding



SPHERE

First published in Great Britain in 2022 by Sphere
This paperback edition published by Sphere in 2023

1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

Copyright © 2022 by Jenny Colgan

'Another Day', music and lyrics by Roy Harper, quotation appears
by kind permission of Roy Harper and District 6 Music

Map copyright © 2017 by The Flying Fish Studios

The moral right of the author has been asserted.

All characters and events in this publication, other than those clearly in the public domain, are fictitious and any resemblance to real persons, living or dead, is purely coincidental.

All rights reserved.
No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, without the prior permission in writing of the publisher, nor be otherwise circulated in any form of binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

A CIP catalogue record for this book
is available from the British Library.

ISBN 978-0-7515-8039-6

Typeset in Caslon by M Rules
Printed and bound in Great Britain by Clays Ltd, Elcograf, S.p.A.

Papers used by Sphere are from well-managed forests
and other responsible sources.



Sphere
An imprint of
Little, Brown Book Group
Carmelite House
50 Victoria Embankment
London EC4Y 0DZ

An Hachette UK Company
www.hachette.co.uk

www.littlebrown.co.uk

To Andrea MacDonald, whose commitment to keeping an affordable Highland dance school open and running for the children of Fife, both throughout the pandemic and beyond, is an absolute inspiration



Introduction

Hello there!

And welcome to the island of Mure. It is, I will tell you, writing this, a blustery spring day, and the sun keeps popping its head in and out of the clouds and then changing its mind. I wanted to write a few quick words if you're new, or actually even if you've read other Mure books: we're all so busy and have a lot going on.

So! Here is a quick reprise just so you are up to date. (I find it particularly tricky reading on download if I have to check who somebody is and it's hard just to flick back a few pages.) Also, I am not crazy about books that do it all in exposition – you know the kind of thing I mean:

'Hey, Peter! How's your sister Jane?'

'Jane, my younger sister of age twenty-eight, you mean? Who just lost both legs in a terrible traffic accident in Minsk?'

'Yes, that's the one. The one whose wedding we – by which I mean you and me plus your brother John, thirty – are all here to celebrate.'

So I am going to get you up to speed, whether you've just joined us (welcome!) or whether you have just finished reading all the others.

Okay, Flora MacKenzie moved back to the tiny island of Mure, off the north-eastern coast of Scotland, where she grew up, after her mother died. Her father and three brothers still run the family farm there. She opened the Seaside Kitchen, a small café, and has now taken over the fancy Rock hotel following the death of its proprietor, Colton.

She is also engaged to be married to Joel, her complicated American boss from London, who was raised in a series of foster homes and has found settling down something of a challenge. They have a baby called Douglas who is now almost one.

Lorna MacLeod is the primary school headmistress, who is having a secret relationship with Saif Hassan, the local GP, who is a refugee from Syria. They are nuts about each other. His two sons are on the island (and attend Lorna's school). His wife was lost in the war in Syria; Saif has recently seen a photograph in which she appears to be not only remarried, but pregnant.

Of Flora's brothers, the widowed Fintan is very relieved he doesn't have to run the Rock any more; Innes is giving his marriage another shot while trying to raise his daughter Agot; and Hamish is just being Hamish. He doesn't change very much.

And okay, I think we are all caught up!

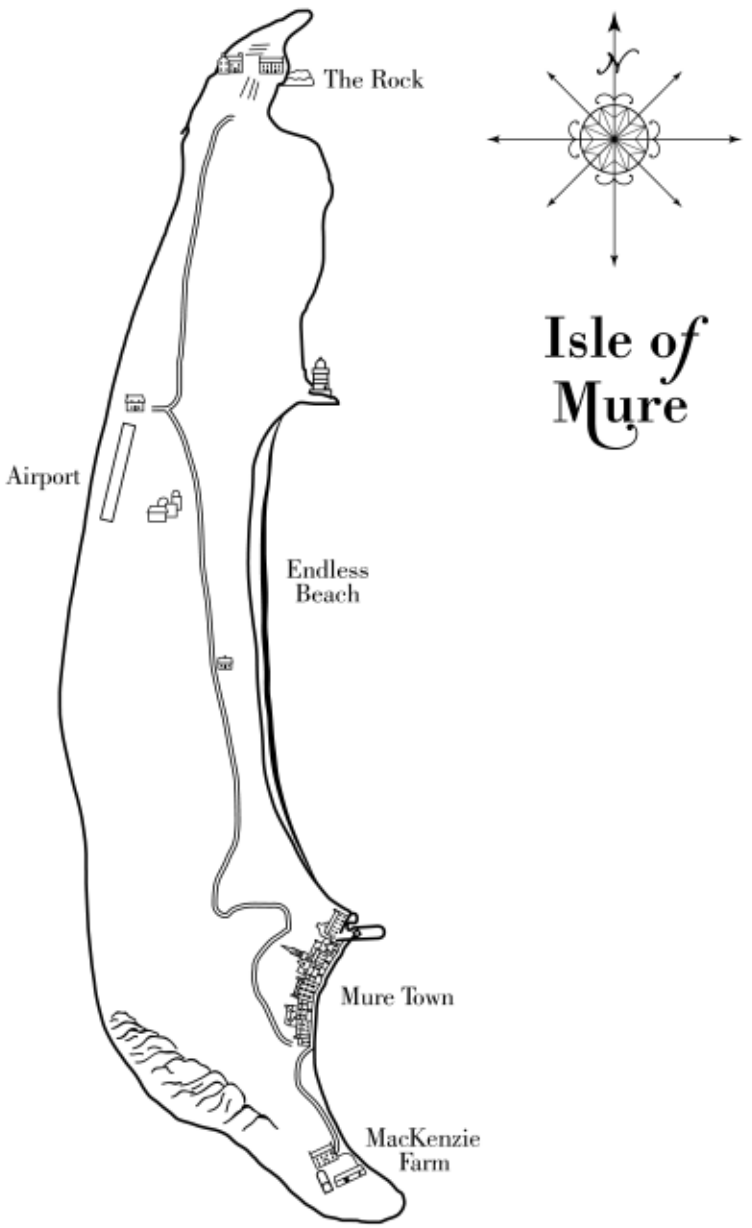
Normally I like writing books, but if I had the chance to make films, now you would definitely see one of those little breezes, just a little one, that comes out of nowhere, and it would flap the pages a tiny bit . . . and there would be a salty tang to the air, and suddenly I would have one of those soaring camera shots – you know the ones I mean, that go really fast over the sea, faster and faster, zooming towards a tiny dot in the distance, that becomes

bigger and bigger on the horizon, a cool breeze blowing even under sunny morning skies, a great long stretch of golden sand appearing that reveals itself to be the Endless Beach, followed by a lighthouse and then the Rock, right at the top, and on the other south side of the beach, you can make out a jumble of little friendly buildings in different colours – red, yellow, pink – and the slightly faded black and white of the old Harbour's Rest hotel. And now you are slowing, just gently dipping over the top of the fishermen's clattering masts with their jolly flags, and now you are being deposited gently on the grey cobbled wharf, just in front of where the Caledonian MacBrayne ferry is puttering up on its first run of the day, with papers and parcels ready to be unloaded from the mainland, with the captain looking out on the wharf, manoeuvring carefully. Bramble the dog is padding past with the paper in his mouth, heading back to Eck, Flora's dad, at MacKenzie farm, and the door of the pink building – the Seaside Kitchen – is already open, and you can already hear BBC nan Gàidheal playing some fiddle music inside, and smell good coffee and fresh cheese scones, so you may as well come in and sit down for a while, next to the Fair Isle knitting group, take a little break for yourself and watch the comings and goings at the harbour – welcome back to Mure.

Love,

Jenny

xxxxx


The Rock
Airport
Endless
Beach
Mure Town
MacKenzie
Farm
N
Isle of
Mure

‘I loved you a long time ago, you know
Where the wind’s own forget-me-nots
blow, you know’

‘Another Day’, Roy Harper



Chapter One

It was the tail-end of March, and the Rock hotel on Mure was booked absolutely solid. The visitors had got lucky too: the end of the Atlantic storms had brought snow and ice well into the third month of the year, but for the last week the sun had shone bright every day.

As long as you had a decent coat and some stout shoes (the hotel would of course lend you some wellingtons), the island looked glorious: the sand on the Endless Beach was so pale it was practically white, the water lapping turquoise and clear, the sky huge and blue as a child's painting. The little brightly painted houses lopsidedly leaning against each other in the harbour were jolly and gay, and the fishing boats were freshly painted and eager to take to the waves.

'It is absolutely. Sodding. Freezing,' said Flora, stepping out into the bright sunshine, going round to check the gardens around the back of the house, where the daffodils were in full bloom.

Her fiancé Joel, on the other end of the phone, let out a barking laugh.

'It's because you heat that hotel so much you've got soft.'

Flora sighed. This was almost certainly true. In the MacKenzie farmhouse, where she'd grown up, the windows were single-paned and draughty and you had to hurtle to the damped-down peat kitchen fire every morning, your feet freezing on the icy stone, to stir it up again, then heat your chilled fingers around a warm, strong cup of tea.

The Rock, on the other hand, a huge old grey stone building, had been converted into a hotel by a rich Texan who couldn't bear discomfort of any kind. The traditional-style windows were triple-glazed; a heat pump had been installed, giving out vast amounts of cheap energy; and every bathroom had underfloor heating. There were thick rugs and cosy blankets everywhere, as well as deep carpets in the library and sitting rooms. Colton, Flora's brother Fintan's late husband, had basically compared living at the very northern tip of the British Isles to living in a ski resort, and built accordingly. Except, as a newcomer to Scotland, he had gone for what he thought would be a design to blend in with the locals, and as a result there was tartan carpet of deep greens and blues and stags' heads everywhere. At first, Flora had thought it was naff and ridiculous. Now, she rather loved it. It reminded her of Colton every time she strolled the long corridors or opened the door to the restaurant (then quickly shut it again, if Gaspard the temperamental chef was shouting at someone in the kitchen).

She found her way round to the side of the hotel which faced the water; there was a little dock there, and many people arrived by boat. The gardens by the wall hosted a suntrap the wind could not reach, and they had benches for people to sit and

watch the big boats go by in the distance, on their long journeys up and over to the fjords. In the direct sun, it was incredibly pleasant. She sat down for two seconds' break from the endless demands of running a hotel and a café – nobody could see her from here, but it wasn't hiding exactly – and she continued her conversation with Joel.

'How's it going?'

Joel sighed in a way that indicated he didn't think he'd be back soon. He administered Colton's trust fund, which had contributed to the development of a global vaccination programme. It had made him busier than they had ever thought possible, particularly after he'd moved to Mure for a quiet life.

'That well?' said Flora, glancing at her watch. It was 6 a.m. where he was, in Mexico City.

'It is going well,' said Joel. 'This is a problem. They think it might be down to me.'

'Because it is,' said Flora. Joel was the best and smartest man she'd ever met, in her opinion. The rest of the world catching up to this fact didn't surprise her in the slightest.

Joel harrumphed. 'I think several thousands of actual scientists might have something to say about that. Anyway. I am desperate to get home.'

Flora looked out at the sea. It was habit, scanning the horizon for whales. There was a pod due, she felt it in her bones, though the horizon was choppy but clear. Everyone on the island knew the MacKenzie women were descended from selkies, the seal people. It was clear as day in their pale hair and translucent eyes; creatures who came from the sea, who might one day return. Of course it was absolute nonsense, Flora would harrumph. Nonetheless, there was no denying she did have a connection with the wild creatures around the shores of

the island. She did feel a kinship, particularly with the whales. But surely every islander felt that way, she told herself.

'Come back before the whales come,' she said. 'Then the whole of summer will be ahead of us.'

'Okay, my selkie girl,' said Joel, smiling to himself. He liked thinking of Flora as a sea spirit sometimes. Joel himself, although he had used to be a keen lap swimmer, did not like the deep seawater at all. He kept this from everyone but Flora, and was trying to get over it by joining the RNLI.

'I'd better get back to it.'

'Be careful,' said Flora frowning. 'Is it dangerous where you are?'

She could hear the smile in Joel's voice.

'Everywhere is dangerous compared to Mure,' he said. 'It's not rational, what you think is dangerous.'

That was true. Ewan Clark, the local policeman, worked pretty much full time on his farm, was only occasionally called to an altercation outside the Harbour's Rest hotel late on market day, or to sort out some optimistic parking by tourists who didn't quite understand that the strong discouragement to bring cars over on the ferry also applied to them. Children roamed free most of the year, and everyone knew everyone else, more or less.

'How's Douglas? Walking yet?'

'Stop pressuring Douglas!'

All the MacKenzies had been, apparently, 'nine-month walkers' and, now that Douglas was almost one, the pressure was on.

'No, I don't want him to walk! I want to be there!'

'Oh well. In that case, he's pretty much still all drool and snot.'

'Good, good,' said Joel, who as someone who had never known much parenting himself had nonetheless turned into the most devoted father imaginable. 'Also, we need to talk about … Oh, it can wait.'

'What?' said Flora, sitting up straighter. Nothing good ever came from the phrase 'we need to talk' in her experience. 'What do we have to talk about? What?'

'Oh, nothing, honestly; wait till I'm back.'

'That's not for days! And now I will panic and think it's something bad.'

'It's nothing bad,' said Joel. 'At least I don't think so.'

'What? Oh my God oh my God oh my God *what*?'

'Nothing! Honestly!'

'TELL ME!'

'When I'm home . . . Can we talk about the wedding?'

'*Our* wedding?'

'No,' said Joel, 'all those other weddings I take a deep and abiding interest in. Probably a Kardashian one.'



Flora headed into her office after the phone call, wondering what he meant exactly – presumably he didn't mean 'cancel' the wedding if he was making jokes about the Kardashians, but even so. He'd proposed at Christmas, and it had just been wonderful and gorgeous and there seemed no reason to delay having it this summer – but he had been rather cagey about discussing actual wedding details and the like. Flora would have been perfectly happy if he had said 'do what you like' given she had a hotel, a chef and a lot of good pastry at her disposal, but he hadn't said that either. And if they did want to do it this summer, they had better get moving . . .

She looked out at the north end of the Endless Beach. Tourists had taken up residence in wildly optimistic swimsuits

and more realistic windbreakers. Every so often someone would dare go up and touch the water, pale blue as a Caribbean shore, lapping gently up to the perfect white sands – then jump back in absolute horror as they felt the temperature. Flora smiled. It didn't really matter how hot the sun shone: it was still the North Atlantic. They had lots of so-called wild swimmers who turned up all winter with lots of expensive kit and huge dry robes talking about how wild swimming was amazing and had completely changed their lives and how fantastic it was, before running in and out for five minutes. On Mure, they just called it swimming.

The phone rang in the office the second she opened the door, and Flora looked out of the window as she picked it up. Oh, there they were – she thought she'd run into them on her way to the garden. Eck, her dad, and Hamish, one of her three brothers, were trying to persuade Douglas into a standing position. Agot, the daughter of Flora's brother Innes, who had followed her in, looked out and sniffed dismissively.

'That Baby is RUBBISH at walking. *Tha e gòrach*.' Agot was learning Gaelic at school and liked to mutter in it, particularly remarks too cheeky to say aloud.

Flora's funny, serious-looking baby, the spit of his dad, was sitting in the grass, toggled up in the nine layers of knitted wool considered essential by Mure knitters, i.e., most of the population, and eyeing them suspiciously. It was a look Flora knew well from his father, and it said 'whatever you think you're talking about, I'm going to do exactly what I think is right in my own good time'. It was what made Joel an excellent lawyer and an occasionally frustrating partner.

Still, they made a pretty sight, three generations of MacKenzie boys – plus Bramble of course, who was looking

for the muddiest patch of the flower beds to roll in, and avoiding the enthusiastic attentions of Bjårk Bjårkensson, the huge and rambunctious kitchen dog. They really shouldn't have a kitchen dog, Flora thought, for the nine thousandth time, as she answered the phone.

'Hello? The Rock hotel.'

'Yah, hello?'

The voice was calm and flat. It was, from the first syllable, a voice that sounded used to getting its own way.

'Am I speaking to the proprietor of the Rock hotel?'

Flora's heart sank. Whatever they were selling, she didn't want to buy it and couldn't afford it anyway.

'Yes, hello, this is Flora, but we're not really in the—'

'Jan MacArthur gave me your number.'

Ah. Jan MacArthur née Mathison Jan was a local woman who ran camping and survival courses and had an entirely inexplicable dislike of Flora, who had got off with her husband years ago. Way before they were married, in fact, but somehow this didn't seem to let Flora off the hook.

'Oh, great!' Flora said brightly.

'Actually, she tried to discourage me, but I'd seen your article . . . '

A journalist had come to the hotel last Christmas to sneer, but had ended up thoroughly enjoying herself and had written a massive rave.

'Anyway. I want to talk to you about weddings.'

Flora was ready for this.

'I'm sorry, we don't do weddings,' she said apologetically.

The plan was that soon they absolutely would do weddings; they got called all the time about them, and a more photogenic spot could barely be imagined. Once Flora was confident that

the hotel, which had only been open for three months, could handle it, that Gaspard wouldn't have a meltdown, that guests wouldn't throw up in the flowerbeds, that they could serve a hundred people at the same time, then she was definitely going to start running it as a wedding venue. She and Joel were going to get married first – well, at least, that was the plan – as a test run, and after that they'd go for it.

But there was a little more to it than that: she couldn't forget Colton and Fintan's wedding. It had been the most glorious day, the most perfectly planned occasion, wonderful in every way – weather, food, guests, toasts, speeches, everything a dream under a bright blue sky – and it hadn't saved him from the cancer that had spent the following year eating him from the inside out, breaking Fintan's heart in the process. It had made everyone a little superstitious.

'Jan said you would make an exception for us? My name is Jacinth; I'm calling on behalf of her sister?'

Flora's eyes went wide.

'*Olivia?*'

'Yah!'