



FIRST TWO CHAPTERS ONLY

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Devastated by the breakdown of her marriage, Allie flees to the one place her heart can seek comfort: Cornwall, where she hopes childhood memories of a holiday with her father will sustain her while she sorts out her plans for the future. But fate has other ideas, and she finds herself drawn into an almost obsessive friendship with a band of strange bedfellows led by Marsha, an intense, ageing hippy with a powerful life force that at once comforts, stimulates and infuriates Allie. Her growing attraction to one of the golden group's men, Adam, bewilders her as she discovers that nothing in life is what it seems, and the only constant is change. Little by little the layers of her past are painfully peeled away. Initially ruffled and confused, and later deeply hurt by what she considers multiple levels of betrayal, Allie once again chooses flight. She heads back to London, but finds that her life-complications only deepen – her husband begs her to come back to him, her estranged father arrives unannounced from France, her loopy mother proclaims yet another marriage, Adam turns up to take her back to Cornwall – and the hardest part is yet to come for them all. Finally, Allie realises that she must confront the secrets and lies of her past – and Marsha's – before she can face her own future.

*Just One More  
Summer*

by

Julie McGowan

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This work of fiction is completely a product of the author's imagination. Any resemblance to actual characters, dead or alive, is purely coincidental. Likewise, there is no such village as Tremorden, which is created from a gathering together of the author's knowledge and memories of several Cornish experiences.

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## **Praise for Julie McGowan's books:**

*'Full of warmth and wisdom. Poignant, funny and realistic. I was really impressed.'* – Katie Fforde

*'TERRIFIC read! Very cinematographic. Thoroughly enjoyable!'* – Barbara Daniels, M.W.A.

*'Beyond enchanting. Highly recommended.'* – Martin Bailie, BBC Radio Cornwall

*'A great read. Very moving.'* – Monmouthshire County Life

*'This book cannot fail to charm.'* – Nick Ramsay, A.M.



*In memory of Sally, a very dear friend.  
1953-2008*

\*

*With particular thanks to:*

*My husband Peter and children Daniel, Catherine,  
Robert and Elizabeth, for their ever-present  
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*And all the people who've taken the time and trouble  
to contact me to tell me that they like what I do!*





## Chapter 1

Okay ... Let's get this straight right from the start. First, this is not yet another story about a nearly thirty-something who is looking for the right man to whisk her down the aisle and spends every working minute agonising over how she'll meet him, or crying because she thinks she's already found and lost him. And spends every non-working hour trowelling on the make-up and propping up a bar in the hope that tonight will be the night, and if it isn't she may as well take the best on offer anyway ... I mean, is this *really* what women have been fighting for, for the last three decades or more?

Second, there won't be any talk of designer labels – except by my mother, perhaps, although she's more into Mondri and Jaeger than Gucci and Chloe. It's all very well if you've got a nifty little job in advertising or the media – which you've somehow obtained by default and miraculously managed to keep, even though you can't use the computer properly and you spend an inordinate amount of time in the ladies' loo. But it's entirely different if you're secretary to a solicitor and the new kitchen units still have to be paid for. The nearest I've ever got to designer clothes is a pashmina of doubtful origin and a pair of Nike trainers in the sales – although at least my underwear's H&M rather than M&S. Even I draw the line somewhere. Third, I haven't got a tumbling mass of red-gold curls which become engagingly unmanageable at a hint of rain; green eyes, skin that has to be shielded from the sun, or a honed and toned body. Think smallish, darkish, straight hair, trim enough body because I walk a lot, and a complexion that turns dirty brown in the heat. An appearance which my mother, had

she been born fifty or more years earlier, would have called ‘common’, but which she now concedes grudgingly at least allows me to get a tan without staying in the sun long enough to get wrinkles.

Oh yes, and I haven’t got the statutory stunningly handsome but gay best friend with whom I can indulge in a bit of mutual shoulder-crying when our respective boyfriends let us down. I’m sure it’s all to do with the solicitor’s office being on the wrong side of the river – Purley, or at least my bit of it, just doesn’t seem to abound with men who have ‘come out’.

And while I think of it, there won’t be lots of F-words scattered about either, to inject a bit of realism. Yes, I know it’s supposed to be everyone’s favourite expletive these days, but quite honestly it hasn’t infiltrated my part of sedate suburbia to that extent yet. True, Will used it a few times when we were having a mega-row, but that really was in extremis – and I did have one good friend who had a fondness for the word, but I hardly see her these days. Will didn’t really like her, you see, so our friendship sort of petered out. And why didn’t he approve of her? Because of her foul mouth apparently, which he didn’t like in women ... which more or less proves my point, I think. Or else it’s the dreary world of solicitors’ offices to blame again – I don’t mix with people who dare to be so bold.

I haven’t even got a handsome but scary boss whose taciturn manner disguises the fact that he is rapidly falling for the darkish looks, straight hair, etc etc, along with my endearing stupidity. Mine is portly and avuncular and breathes heavily from defective sinuses, not passion. Or at least he did up until yesterday, when he ceased to be my boss.

Because as from yesterday I am no longer a solicitor’s secretary, just as I am no longer a wife. Now I am an ex-secretary and an ex-wife, soon to be divorced, sitting on the floor of what will soon be my ex-flat, wishing my mother hadn’t shown up just at this precise moment.

At this point in my life I really could have done with a mother who wasn’t quite so composed, so smart, so *sophisticated*, as mine. Come to think of it, there were lots of times in my life when I would have preferred my mother to be one of those homely bodies who gave out lots of good advice without sounding too much like Claire Rayner and was always there with a comforting bosom to cry on. This was simply another of those times.

She was standing, small – that’s the only similarity between

us – and elegant in crisp cream linen, with a look of distaste on her face as I crammed a few more T-shirts into my already overstuffed bag.

“But *Cornwall!*” she kept repeating, as horrified as if I had said I was off to war-torn Baghdad. “Why *Cornwall?*”

“Because I’ve had enough of London and I need a break – which is exactly what you told me I needed several weeks ago.”

“For the *whole* summer? Allie, darling, what on earth will you *do* there?”

I pulled a strap tight on my suitcase and turned back to her. “Very little I hope. At first, anyway. If I do get bored or short of money, I’m sure I can get a job in a pub or something just for the season – or I might decide to stay there forever; I don’t know.”

“But why not something more exotic? Crete, or somewhere – lots of sun and plenty going on?”

“And plenty of men ready for a short summer fling which will help make me feel wanted again?”

My mother ignored the sarcastic tone in my voice. “Well, it wouldn’t be such a bad thing, would it?”

“Yes it would. I’ve told you, I don’t want to meet anyone else – and definitely not some holiday Romeo whose brain is in his trousers and is only interested in a quick wham-bam-thank-you-ma’am.”

Juliet (she’d insisted that I call her by her Christian name after she finally divorced my father when I was twelve and was hoping to find a younger man – even going so far as to knock a couple of years off my age as well as hers when necessary) had stayed in a villa in Lindos during her first honeymoon in 1970, high above the little town’s only burgeoning disco. So she refused to believe that any of the Greek islands would have changed since then, and winced at my choice of phrase.

“But *Cornwall,*” she persisted as I continued to arrange luggage all around her. “It will be full of families and will probably rain for most of the time.”

I sighed and stopped what I was doing so that I could face her squarely. She clearly hadn’t remembered, and I wasn’t going to remind her and get into a conversation which would begin: *Ah, yes, your father ...* and then be full of barbed comments which I didn’t want to hear again.

“But it will be *normal,*” I said instead. “I don’t want a fairy-tale existence for a few months in an artificial setting surrounded by artificial people, because I’d still have to face

reality afterwards. And jetting off abroad is no fun on your own, and even if I had someone to go with – which I haven't – I would be lousy company and just spoil their holiday as well. You told me I should have a break," I went on quickly before Juliet could say, *but I'll come with you darling if you're going to be lonely*, "and that I should get away from it all, so I'm doing exactly as I'm told." I forced a bright smile. "So you ought to be very pleased that your advice is being taken. Leave me to get on with it, and go back to your Floral Society and all those men who want to make an honest woman of you at the Conservative Club."

It was Juliet's turn to sigh. "Well, if you're sure ..." she began doubtfully.

"Of course I'm sure," I said, more positively than I actually felt because I didn't want Juliet to say *but Cornwall!* again. "And if you really want to help you can keep an eye on this place for me while Sarah is staying here, and remember to leave your answerphone on in case I want to get in touch."

Okay ... So you'll have gathered by now that I'm an almost thirty-something, and I might be broken-hearted, but I'm definitely not looking for anyone else to whisk me down the aisle. Once was enough and I'm not going to spend my waking hours looking for a replacement. What we're talking about here is your everyday marriage, which nevertheless meant everything to me, going to the dogs because my husband, Will, found that he preferred the company (not to mention the bed) of another. It happens all the time – lavish wedding, exotic honeymoon, possibly just enough time for a kid or two (if you haven't had them before the wedding), and then the divorce. Only we hadn't got as far as the kids, just the kitchen units, and those will eventually be paid for by Will as part of the same guilt package which includes letting me have his share of the flat.

Juliet was still hovering uncertainly whilst I moved my bags into the hall, flapping her hands in the 'helpless female' way which has become second nature to her. Nobody would guess at the steely core which has seen off a second husband with an even larger divorce settlement than the first, profited from the substantial gifts of several wealthy admirers in recent years, and even now has a rich Conservative or two panting like overweight pugs at the end of her lead. All of which has led her to view my own predicament as a bit of an occupational hazard best overcome by finding a replacement

as soon as possible.

“I’ll phone you after the weekend,” I promised as I ushered her through the front door. “And don’t worry – Newquay isn’t far away, and that’s the ‘new Riviera’ – it will be heaving with surfers, so you never know ...”



## Chapter 2

Why is it that no matter how hard you imagine yourself in a place or a situation, the reality is never what you thought? For instance, I'd selected the guest house because it hadn't imposed a supplement for a single room, but I hadn't quite been prepared for its distance from the sea. The blurb, which had included 'Sea view, B&B, *en-suite* to all rooms' would have been better as 'See view ... ', because whatever views the rooms had, they definitely didn't include the sea.

A narrow road, its tarmac disintegrating here and there at the sides, led steeply upwards from the Edwardian villa and was banked by grassy hummocks, which sheltered Tremorden Bay from sight even from the upper windows. I could smell the salt air, though, tantalising enough to fill me with a childish excitement and making me turn back from the window to tackle my luggage.

It was only just after midday; the early morning Western railways service had performed with an uncommon punctuality and there had been a taxi sitting outside the station. Now the rest of the day was before me.

When I'd unpacked my few belongings into the cavernous wardrobe which looked as if it had been installed when the house was built, I went swiftly downstairs in search of the sea, pushing away the unbidden thought that it would have been nice had Will been here to share it with me. Ridiculous thought anyway, because had we still been together we would have been spending our hard-saved money on a much more exotic location, of the type which Juliet would have definitely approved.

In the hallway, on a highly-polished half-table, was a selection of leaflets describing Walks and Excursions and Things To Do, but I ignored them. I certainly didn't need outings and coach trips and people being convivial in sun hats and white sandals. I would find my way about alone.

I couldn't avoid the enquiring figure of the proprietress though, who wasn't going to be put off by my curt nod. Another mental picture shattered, because she was the antithesis of the stereotypical Cornish landlady who had inhabited my imagination. Instead of the buxom farmer's wife with a round rosy face and sturdy outdoor arms, like in custard adverts, Gwen Jarrett had a long narrow face with a large amount of chin, giving her a horse-like expression that made you want to offer her a bag of hay. Her ironing-board figure was encased in a pristine white overall which suggested that the door on the left might be a dentist's clinic, had it not had a metal plate on it stating: *Residents' Lounge*.

She stepped in front of me, blocking the light from the open front door and lifting herself onto the balls of her feet; unnecessarily, as she was already a couple of inches taller than me. She swayed for a moment, but managed to maintain her equilibrium and smiled at me as she murmured, "Everything all right?"

"Yes, thank you," I replied, standing very still and staring at the glimpse of her dress in the 'V' of the overall – a blue silky number etched through busily with swirls of pastel colours like an impressionist's palette – so that the woman would move away.

But she stood her ground. "Off to do some exploring?"

"Hopefully."

"It's still a bit quiet here yet, for young people, being early in the season." Her voice was like Margaret Thatcher's, carefully cultured to hide her origins but not quite succeeding.

"I wanted somewhere quiet."

Her pale eyes surveyed me speculatively, as if weighing up the possibilities as to why I should be here, alone. She stood to one side to let me pass, smiling in what could have been a benign way, but actually looking even more horse-like as the top of her dentures revealed themselves.

"We don't do evening meals of course, but you're welcome to some afternoon tea if you want to come back for a little rest later," she said. Perhaps she was marking me down as recuperating from a long illness and would try to swop anec-



dotes about her gallstones or somesuch, once I'd been here a few days.

"Thank you," I answered, holding my beach bag in front of me as I squeezed past so that I didn't brush against her rigid form. I could still feel her eyes on me as I went through the door, so it was good to step out into the fresh air. Trust me to choose a place that was probably Cornwall's answer to the Bates Motel! I had a brief flash of Will's face smiling indulgently at my aptitude for such errors, in the days when it was still an endearing quirk, not an irritation.

I didn't follow the steep little road, but strode out across the rough grass, the taller spikes pricking my bare legs, the light sea breeze sending only the smallest of puffball clouds scudding across the sky. The hummocks became sand dunes, occupied here and there by families sheltering from the breeze or an excess of sun, or from the enquiring eyes of other holiday-makers as they changed their clothes. I wound my way between them, the soft loose sand burning my feet as my sandals sank into it. I paused every now and again to scan the horizon and take deep appreciative breaths. This was what I remembered. Momentarily I was eight again.

The tide had gone out a long way and I took off my sandals to walk on the cool compact ridges it had left behind. It was too soon for the school holidays, so there were only a few families with very young children dotted about, building sandcastles and playing beach cricket with arbitrary rules and sponge balls, but I decided I wanted still more isolation. I walked purposefully across the curve of sand to the beginning of the headland where large rocks jutted out almost to the water's edge. Reaching them, I selected a large flat dark grey one, its front, where water had only recently sprayed it, as sleek and shiny as sealskin.

I made it my own. My towel was spread across it, my canvas shoulder-bag dropped by its side, my sandals neatly placed nearby, a paperback (selected impatiently with little real interest in its contents) laid on the towel – all these actions carried out with an economy of movement which I'd developed since I'd been on my own. Many times over the last few months I'd watched myself performing tasks with a precision which was totally alien to the person I'd once been.

Sitting on the rock, feeling its dry heat emanating through the towel, I hugged my knees and squinted out to sea, the midday sun too strong even for my very dark glasses. Every-

where was calm. Some sort of large funnelled boat moved slowly across the horizon, and the voices of the families on the beach, carried in the opposite direction by the breeze, were indistinguishable: faint, high-pitched hummings.

I exhaled very slowly. This is what I'd come for. Time to clear my mind, to think, to plan now that I was free.

*Free?* The word mocked me, a shallow substitute for *bereft*, *adrift*, a euphemism for *rejected*.

I hadn't thought it would be as bad as this. When I'd overcome the initial shock of Will's desertion, had absorbed his announced intention of setting up home with Lauren and had finally recognised the futility of clinging on to a marriage that was clearly dead, I'd expected to come to terms with it in as short a time as the split itself had taken.

There'd been well-meaning platitudes from friends and family who thought they understood, but clearly didn't. The words of comfort eventually did nothing but grate on my already shredded nerves, and I'd had to force myself not to voice the hot retorts which remained trapped in my head instead.

"At least you're young enough to start again – it would have been much worse if you were ten years older." *Why? Because I would have a much harder time trying to find a replacement for the obviously defective model I was lumbered with last time? 'This one no good Madam? Well, don't worry, we'll have more in stock shortly.'*

"Thank goodness there are no children involved – it makes everything much simpler to cope with." *And after all, children would have perpetually reminded me that once upon a time I was wallowing in a happiness that must have been built on sand.*

And from my grandmother: "It could have been worse. You could have been widowed like I was and had your heart broken forever." *But why does a divorce imply that your fractured emotional state is only a temporary one?*

At times I wanted to shout that I wished Will *had* died. Because then he would have remained, in my mind and everyone else's, the person I'd been prepared to commit myself to for life, and the virtues I'd loved would have stayed intact and enshrined in the sanctity of the dead. Because then everyone would have accepted my lament for the happy times we'd shared; would have listened to my endless memories of our ecstatic early years; would have allowed me to have a past

worth mentioning; would have accepted my grief as a genuine state and not a torrent of bitterness as they supposed and therefore tried to suppress. And would not have implied from what they said, and from what they omitted to say, that the marriage I'd entered into with all the optimism of one truly in love, and at the time loved in return, must have faltered through something lacking in me.

"You need taking out of yourself," declared Jodie, the only girl in the office younger than me, and she had insisted on taking me to wine bars and clubs and introducing me to her friends. But my barbed retorts to the less than inspired chat-up lines of men who had initially found my aloofness beguiling had been seen by Jodie and her friends as ingratitude, so that they had stopped asking me. And when I filled the interminable office hours with a new determination to keep my desk tidy, my filing up-to-date and my in-tray empty, Jodie had retreated even more puzzled, with suggestions that I seek counselling urgently.

But I'd already analysed my actions and didn't need anyone else to identify the reasons behind my altered behaviour. I found comfort in the repetitious tasks, rather like an abandoned child rocking backwards and forwards in its cot. I knew that by concentrating and completing every task in front of me I could push away the unwelcome reflections on what had happened, the hurt of rejection and the ugly pictures of my hopeless pleadings with him not to leave.

The tranquillity of the scene in front of me gradually ebbed the confused thoughts swirling round my head, and I knew that having allowed them their rein they would not intrude again at least for today. Now my head was filled with nothingness, a suspended state where I could think and feel little and which often, lately, came upon me at strange times so that making even the simplest decision, like what to have for supper, became impossible .

Suddenly, out of the corner of my eye, I became aware of a slight movement nearby, but resolutely refused to turn to it.

"It's all right," came a gravelly voice, "I'm not going to bother you. It's just that there are only two flattish rocks around here, and they're close together. And as you're sitting on the one I usually have, I'm going to use this one."

I turned then, ready with a hot retort, in case there was hidden animosity in the words. A tall, thin woman, in her late fifties I guessed, had flung her belongings onto the rock and

was unbuttoning a pair of very faded shorts, revealing equally faded bikini bottoms. Her tan was as deeply ingrained in her skin as a fisherman's, so that she had to be a local who spent all summer outdoors. Light brown hair, bleached from the sun in places and showing signs of grey in others, which either had a natural wave in it or had not been brushed for several days, was pushed back from her face with a wide hairband, below which sapphire blue eyes surveyed me for a moment. Then, without any hint of self-consciousness, a T-shirt was pulled over her head to reveal a pair of bare breasts which sagged slightly as they settled back onto her chest, as brown and weathered as the rest of her.

"Don't worry," she flashed a grin at me, "that's as far as I go. No skinny-dipping – this is Cornwall, after all!"

The grin was infectious and I found myself smiling back. "Would you like your rock?" I asked.

But the woman was already spreadeagling herself on the other one. "No, this one's fine. I'll just have my daily dose of ultra-violet and all those other dreadfully harmful rays which do wonders for my poor joints and then I'll be gone." Her eyes were closed, but as I turned away she went on in a forthright way, "You'd better cover yourself with lashings of cream if you burn easily, though – the breeze hides the strength of the sun."

I lay back on my own rock, feeling ridiculously over-dressed in shorts and top, and returned to my thoughts. My intentions on coming away alone like this had been so varied, depending on the state of my emotions and my hormones, that now I'd arrived I couldn't decide just what I wanted. Solitude, where I could wallow in my grief but kid myself that I was 'recuperating', vied with the pragmatic side of my nature which told me that I should get down to making some concrete decisions about my future.

And despite what I had told Juliet, after months of enforced celibacy there *were* often sudden urges to have a wild fling with an impossibly handsome stranger who would find me irresistible, thus restoring my self-esteem while also exacting revenge on Will's treachery, even if I was the only one who knew about it.

My vacillations became lulled into a torpor by the soothing sounds of the sea and the heat of the sun. I had no idea how long I'd been drowsing when the woman's voice seeped into my consciousness again. "Time to go. The tide has turned, and it moves pretty quickly here. These rocks will be submerged soon."

She was already standing, pulling on her T-shirt, as I, still dragging myself away from the confusion of semi-sleep, sat bolt upright in befuddled alarm.

The woman laughed. "It's all right. You're not about to be engulfed immediately, I just thought I should warn you."

"Thank you," I said, easing myself off her rock and gathering my belongings in an unhurried fashion to show the woman that I was fully aware of the situation. I turned my back as I packed things in the canvas bag, expecting the woman to stroll away, but she stood watching me until I was ready to move off.

"Where are you staying?" She fell in beside me as we played stepping-stones back over the rocks, her long tanned legs and slim hips like those of a twenty-year-old. The wounded side of me hadn't intended to fall into conversation or strike up any sort of rapport with strangers to whom I might have to explain my present sorry state, but it was impossible not to reply.

"The Lansdowne."

The woman stood still and stared at me incredulously. "That dreadful place? On your own?" Then, before I could utter a word in defence of my choice, she went on: "Now you're going to tell me that Gwen Jarrett is a favourite aunt of yours and I will have put my big foot in it once more!"

But the wide grin back in place showed that she didn't really care if she'd offended anyone. Again, I found myself responding. "It sounded nice in the brochure."

"Oh, it undoubtedly is if you're over sixty, can't stand noise or kids and don't really like the seaside but come anyway because that's what you've done all your life."

"I thought I wanted peace and quiet when I booked it," I found myself divulging, in spite of myself.

The woman's eyes narrowed shrewdly as she glanced sideways at me. "And now you're here?"

It was my turn to stand still. "Now I'm not sure," I said.

"Well, at least it's only B&B, so you can get out and about all day. There's lots to do in the bay you know, and plenty of good places to eat and make friends – if that's what you decide you want." She thrust out her hand. "I'm Marsha, by the way. Everybody here knows me. Came here well over thirty years ago with a band of free-loving hippies, but they all eventually drifted back to London and became bank clerks or whatever, and I ..." She gave a short laugh. "Well, I just stayed. Come and search me out if you need a bit of company."

Her grip was strong and dry. If we'd met at a formal gathering, with her straightforward manner and rather eccentric easy confidence I would have put her down as an army officer's wife who in earlier times might have helped shape the sub-continent.

"I'm Allie," I replied. "Thank you; I may take you up on that."

Marsha nodded, and then purposefully moved off, striding along the beach at a quickened pace which indicated that she herself had no further need of my company for the present.

When she was quite some distance away, she turned and called, cupping her hands round her mouth so that I could hear. "A crowd of us will be at the Smugglers' tonight - join us if you like!" She didn't wait for me to call back, but simply waved and went on her way, and I found myself envying the easy ability to be friendly.

It had been a long time since I'd felt part of a crowd.

END OF FIRST TWO SAMPLE CHAPTERS