



CHERRY PIE ISLAND



The



Vintage

Ice Cream

Van

Road Trip



JENNY  
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The Grand Reopening of Dandelion Café - Book 1

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# **The Vintage Ice Cream Van Road Trip**

## **Cherry Pie Island**

Jenny Oliver

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JENNY OLIVER

wrote her first book on holiday when she was ten years old. Illustrated with cut-out supermodels from her sister's Vogue, it was an epic, sweeping love story not so loosely based on Dynasty.

Since then, Jenny has gone on to get an English degree, a Masters, and a job in publishing that's taught her what it takes to write a novel (without the help of the supermodels). Follow her on Twitter @JenOliverBooks

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# Chapter One

‘Have a look! Have a look! Quickly! You’re going to crash... You’re going to crash! Have a LOOK! Oh god.’

Holly Somers started jogging up the river bank, shielding her eyes from the sun so she could see the full impact of the chaos on the water in front of her.

Two junior rowing eights were careering down the river, blades all askew, panicking from the adrenaline of the side-by-side race, the umpire shouting at their coxswains to get them to move apart from one another as their blades crashed, while the crowds on the bank were cheering and pointing or hiding their eyes with their hands, because they knew disaster was coming.

‘Crews, move apart!’ the umpire shouted again, waving his white flag, but no one was listening. This was the youngest Cherry Pie rowing team, the crew members just thirteen – awkward, gangly and not the most accomplished – and this was their first race. Panic had overtaken reason.

‘They’re gonna hit the bridge,’ said Holly’s dad, head coach of the senior rowers. He was cycling up to the start but had paused next to Holly.

Holly had her hands up to her face, ‘STOP!’ she shouted again from the bank but to no avail.

Everyone had come to watch. Martha and Annie, from the cafe, had stopped serving teas and had run over to the water’s edge in their aprons, the crews waiting to boat had abandoned their equipment and grouped together to point and peer and shout instructions at the tiny, inexperienced, panicking rowers on the water.

And then the inevitable happened, the two boats, locked together by their oars, hurtled into the bridge, the noise of wood splitting, carbon fiber cracking, disgruntled swans flapping, and the yelps and screams of eighteen thirteen year olds filled the warm late

spring air. The spectators in the hospitality tent let out a great roar of delight. This is what they'd come for – a bit of action and drama to go with their champagne.

Holly's dad sped off on his bike to the finish line to orchestrate the rescue efforts. 'That's two grand's worth of equipment written off, Holly,' he threw back over his shoulder. 'Maybe you should go back to rowing rather than coaching,' he added with a dry laugh.

Holly refused to rise to the bait. Ever since she'd quit, post-Olympics, he'd taken every opportunity to encourage her back into a boat. He thought it was wasted talent. Wanted her to keep going forever. She hadn't crushed his dream completely by telling him that stopping had been like taking off a pair of sunglasses. The world suddenly brighter, sharper, hers to explore however she wanted.

But then neither had she then been able to tell him that she'd possibly explored it a little too much. Been a little too free.

She jogged to where the launches were tied up and jumped into one of the boats. The kids in the water, over their panic, now thinking it was hilarious, were splashing each other and swimming around in the sunshine. One of the rowing boats had snapped in two and the other had lodged itself upside down in the reeds on the bank. Some of the rowers were clambering out the water while the little coxswains were bobbing about like Violet Beauregarde in Willy Wonka and The Chocolate Factory, their life-jackets having inflated on impact of the crash.

'Wait!' shouted Annie, Holly's friend and owner of the Dandelion Cafe, who was serving tea and cake at the regatta. 'You can't go and help on your own!' she scolded.

'Annie, I'm fine,' Holly hissed.

'Get Matt to help you.' Annie looked around for her boyfriend.

'He's on the water already,' Holly said, 'He's the next race.'

'Well I'll come with you then,' Annie said, starting to untie her apron. 'You can't go and start hauling out kids from the river in your condition.'

'Annie!' Holly snapped. 'Keep your voice down.'

Annie looked around. 'No one's listening, they're all watching that-' She pointed to the broken boats, the sopping wet kids, the blades snapped and broken that were floating forlornly downstream, then she jumped in the passenger seat of the motorboat. 'I'll do any lifting, you just drive.'

Holly sighed. 'Fine,' she said and they drove over to where the safety boats, the umpire's launch and a couple of friendly tourists in a rent-a-boat were helping pull the giggling kids from the river.

'Hi, miss!' One of them, Julian, a lanky blond, shouted from where he was treading water, 'Sorry about that!'

'It's fine, Julian,' Holly said. 'You getting in here or are you going to swim? We need to clear the race course.'

'I'll swim, miss.'

'OK, off you go.' Holly stood up in her seat making the boat wobble and Annie grip onto the sides. 'You lot, start swimming to the edge, let's go, come on!' She ushered them all across the river. 'Stop messing.'

'We crashed, miss, did you see?'

'Yes,' Holly said to an eager red-head, 'We all saw. As crashes go, it was very impressive.'

'Holly!' A voice shouted from the bank. 'Is that you! And Annie! Hi, guys!'

They both turned and saw a woman with big, bouffant blonde hair standing on the bank in front of the hospitality tent. She had a glass of champagne in one hand, her sunglasses in the other and a turquoise straw trilby on her head.

'Emily!' Annie waved from the back of the boat. 'What are you doing here?'

'Drinking champagne!' Emily laughed.

'Get the river clear, Holly,' Holly's dad shouted through a megaphone.

'Hello, Mr Somers!' Emily turned to look in Holly's dad's direction and waved enthusiastically.

Holly's dad gave her a nod but was more interested in getting the regatta back under way and boomed some more instructions through his megaphone. 'I'm going up to the start, Holly, can you get that half of the eight that's stuck by the bridge, drag it over and then we can get going.'

Holly sat back down. All the kids were now either clambering out by the bank or in the safety launch, so she started to drive towards the broken bit of carbon fiber. Annie sat forward in her seat. 'You haven't told him, have you?'

Holly didn't say anything.

'You have to tell him, even just so you aren't dragging great bits of boat out the river. Here, stop, Holly, I'll get it.' Annie reached forward from her seat and caught hold of two of the metal riggers on the broken boat and, hooking the oars across their motorboat, managed to secure it like a sidecar so Holly could drive them slowly back towards the bank.

They watched as all the soaking-wet kids congregated where Holly was about to moor, all bursting with stories to tell of the crash. Holly glanced over her shoulder at Annie. 'I will tell him. I just...' She shrugged. 'I think I have to believe it myself first.'

Annie smiled, 'Are you looking after yourself? Taking folic acid?'

'Ssh!' Holly glanced back around, checking no one could hear.

'Holly, they've got no bloody idea what folic acid is!' Annie laughed, pushing cropped blonde hair away from her face. Her clothes were wet from where she'd pulled the boat out the water. 'It's quite refreshing actually, being covered in river water! It's so hot,' she added, 'And I've got to get back in that ice cream van.' For the duration of the regatta, the Dandelion Café had decamped into an old blue ice cream van that was parked on the left of the boathouse. Previously owned by the late island matriarch Enid, it had been pulled out of retirement for the day's events.

Holly tried to land the motorboat, but it was too hard with the addition of the broken rowing eight and reversed so she could get a better angle.

'We'll get it, miss,' shouted Julian.

'No you stay there...' she started but, ignoring her, all eight of them plopped into the water again and swam over to unhook the bit of boat.

'Ah, you're so good,' Annie said as they swam-walked it back to the bank. 'They're lovely, your lot, and they clearly worship you.'

'Annie...' Holly glanced over her shoulder, 'I know what you're doing.'

'I'm not doing anything, I'm just – well – I want you to know that I think you'll be a lovely mum.'

Holly glared at her, worried that people on the bank might hear.

But Annie just leant forward and nudged her on the shoulder, saying excitedly, 'You're having a baby!'

Holly exhaled slowly and turned to look at the next race coming down the river.

'Oooh, it's Matt,' Annie said and got up on her knees to start cheering from the boat.

Holly watched the race coming towards them. Cherry Pie Island Regatta was always her favourite day of the year. The sun was usually shining, the blossom was out, big, fluffy white balls of it, the petals getting in people's hair and landing like confetti in the water.

Matt's crew was winning by no more than a foot. The crowd on the bank were shouting and cheering. The two boats stormed past them like great, thundering racehorses, kicking out a wash that rocked their little launch. Annie wobbled and had to sit back down again.

This world Holly understood. But the world that was coming her way, she had no idea about. People often asked her what it was like at the Olympics. How she'd managed to cope with all the pressure. But it was like her old coach said to her, 'There's no such thing as a bad race, Holly, just bad equipment and bad preparation.' She couldn't have been more prepared when she'd sat on the start line of the Olympic final. Mentally, physically, she was in top shape. This, however, this now, this little lemon-sized baby, this was bad planning and bad preparation. And she was absolutely terrified.

Matt's crew won. The crowd let out a roar. She watched her dad punch the air from where he'd just skidded his bike to a halt. Corks popped from the hospitality tent. Someone inside the ice cream van flicked the switch and the nursery rhyme tune blared out. Matt and all his crew saluted, dressed in their matching Cherry Pie pink racing kit.

In the motorboat, Holly drew them up level with the landing stage and cut the engine as Annie hopped out and tied it to the mooring.

Then, grabbing a megaphone that was on the bank, Annie shouted, 'Free cherry pie all round.' Then she grinned, held out her hand to help Holly out the boat, and when they were side by side, nudged her again and said, 'It's so exciting, Hol. You're having a baby!' Then, checking no one was coming over, went on to say, 'Are you sure you don't want to tell me who the father is?'

## Chapter Two

The kids all went wild for free cherry pie and ran to queue at the ice cream van where Martha and Ludo from the Dandelion Café were serving from the little hatch.

As Matt's crew pulled up to the landing stage, triumphant, he called Annie over as she was heading back to the ice cream van to serve. As she got close, he pulled her into a great sweaty kiss that made all the kids cheer and then the rest of his crew prised them apart and chucked Matt into the water.

Holly was dragged by the hand over to the line of rowers waiting for cherry pie slices and the story of the crash was recounted to her in great, excited detail. Then she saw Julian get distracted by something behind her, put two fingers in his mouth and do an ear-splitting wolf-whistle.

'What's that for?' Holly asked and glanced over her shoulder to see Emily Hunter-Brown, the woman from the hospitality tent, sashaying towards them. She moved like a Praying mantis, long legs and arms almost feeling the way in front of her, stepping over a fallen tree trunk as elegantly as she could in six-inch peep-toe ankle boots, a denim mini-dress and a huge leopard-print scarf that hung off one shoulder like she'd just dragged it on as she stepped out of bed. She was holding her turquoise hat in one hand and had taken down her ponytail so Holly could now see that half her white-blonde hair had been dip-dyed blue. Over her eyes were sunglasses the size of melons.

It felt like the whole boat club turned to look, the guys carrying their single sculls from the water paused with their boats on their shoulders, the umpires stopped mid-manoeuvre in their motorboats, even Matt paused as he towelled himself dry after his soaking.

'Darlings...' Emily called when she was within earshot. 'Holly!' She waved. 'Annie!' She looked beyond Holly to where Annie had got back into the van and was helping to serve the cherry pie and

tea. 'I haven't seen you for ages, Annie. And, Holly, we hardly got to catch up the other month. You did an amazing job on the vocals. I was so impressed.'

Holly smiled almost shyly. Since she'd given up rowing she'd done some ad hoc sessions for Alan Neil who owned the Lighthouse Recording Studio and had been working for him the week The Rolling Stones had come in to record. Emily had been there as part of their exclusive entourage.

Decades ago Alan had noticed Holly's vocal talent when she sang in the school choir, but it was around the age that she'd chosen rowing over singing. It wasn't a choice she regretted – rowing had taken her across the world, introduced her to amazing new people, pushed her to limits she had never thought possible, all the while offering her a focus away from her crumbling home life. But she was never a hundred percent certain whether she'd chosen the rowing path to spite her mother who was so keen on the singing one, or whether she'd just acted on an instinct that happened to clash with her mother's preference. She hoped it was the latter – but she remembered her fourteen-year-old self as being very stubborn.

Now, the work at the recording studio offered the option of a different path and was like a second chance, a breath of new air. The week Emily had been there had been the best week Holly could remember and she'd loved it – the smell of the studio, the intensity of the work, the camaraderie and then the ensuing buzz and the wind-down that had led to lock-ins at the The Dog and Cherry, champagne in the cherry orchard and, as rumour had it, some naked midnight swimming in the river. It had been such a contrast to her life up to that point that she'd felt freer than she thought possible.

But then she'd made one classic mistake and now she was pregnant. And her mind was still clinging desperately to that sense of freedom, willing it back, willing it to stay.

'Emily Hunter-Brown. Well, look at you!' Annie jogged over and gave her a kiss on both cheeks.

'Annie!' Ludo called from where he was working furiously inside the van, 'She comes, she goes, she does no work! Nothing!'

'Sorry, Ludo,' Annie laughed, then made a guilty face to Emily and Holly and sloped back to the van. 'I've spent all week stuck inside the café with the builders. If I'm not there they do nothing. How hard can it be to fix a café roof?' she added as she pulled the van

door open and hauled herself inside.

'I heard you've taken over the café?' Emily said to Annie, wandering over and resting her elbows on the shelf of the ice cream van.

'Off!' ordered Ludo, bashing her arms away with his spatula, 'There's too much work for chatting.'

'Aye, aye, tiger,' Emily said with a giggle. 'He's a feisty one, isn't he?' Then she took a step back and ran her hand along the side of the ice cream van, 'I loved this van. It's so sweet... Do you remember it was every afternoon after school in the summer it'd be by the park gates? God and you used to work in it, didn't you, Hol? I forgot about that. And Enid would always get cross cos you gave us free Mini Milks. Ha, have you got any Mini Milks, Annie?'

'Fraid not, just cherry pie, Victoria Sponge, tea and coffee. It's Holly's van now, did you know that? Enid left it to her.'

'Is it?' Emily turned Holly's way. 'I'm so jealous. I just love it.'

Julian sauntered over in just his tracksuit bottoms, his bare thirteen-year-old chest puffed out and said, 'We cleaned it yesterday.'

'Did you now?' Emily said with a smirk, humouring his seriousness.

'Oh yes. I can give you a tour if you like. Show you all the work we did?'

'I think I'm OK, actually,' Emily smiled. 'But thanks for the offer.'

'Well, anytime,' Julian said, chucking his T-shirt over his shoulder and loping away, trying to look like a real dude. Emily scrunched up her nose at Holly to show how sweet she thought he was.

Holly laughed.

'So what are you going to do with it? The van? Do you rent it out?'

Holly walked over to join her next to the window and the little shelf that had flower pots of cutlery and blossom twigs in jam jars on it. 'I don't know really, as Julian said, I've only just got it out from beside the boathouse. It took the whole day to scrub it down. I have no idea what I'm going to do with it.'

'I'll hire it.'

'What for?' Holly frowned.

'You know my mum's getting married. Again. In the South of France. She'd go nuts for this van. Like totally nuts. She loves ice

cream.’ Emily walked round to the front and traced her hands over the little round vintage headlights, ‘Weirdly, her favourite flavour is vanilla. Who has vanilla as their favourite flavour?’

‘I like Ben & Jerry’s Karamel Sutra,’ shouted Julian from where he was packing up his bag.

‘Oh god!’ Emily giggled and shook her head. ‘I’m old enough to be your mother, so stop flirting.’

Emily Hunter-Brown founder and CEO of EHB Cosmetics, was best known to the public as the girl left at the altar by Hollywood megastar Giles Fox. Branded by the paparazzi as a romantically-doomed, eternally-single party-girl, Holly and Annie knew her because she’d been at school with them for a year after being expelled from a flash boarding school in London. Her father had died when they were little, leaving more debt than money, and their mother had subsequently married a variety of very rich, very old men who kept them in the manner to which they’d become accustomed, but some were nicer than others. For their few years on the island, they’d lived in the old manor house on the other side from the boathouse, near the new-build estate. It was an old Georgian building with sprawling grounds and an east and west wing.

The year that Emily had been at school with them had been the funniest, naughtiest year they’d known. She was like this bright burst of flame; a devil-may-care, live-for-the-moment, try-anything-once-kind-a girl with an infectious, dirty laugh and a face like a pixie.

‘How’s your brother?’ Annie asked as Emily finished inspecting the van and came back to stand with Holly.

‘Oh Wilf’s the same as always. Gallivanting around. I don’t see him that often at the moment. He came to the island though, with me the other month when The Rolling Stones were recording. We had so much fun, didn’t we, Holly?’

Holly, whose heart had started beating really loudly in her ears at the mention of Wilf, nodded as casually as she could.

Emily paused and seemed to study her more closely. ‘I thought you and Wilf seemed to get on particularly well, Hols.’

‘Not really.’ Holly shook her head, knowing she’d said it too quickly. She felt Annie glance up from the tea she was making and look her way.

‘Yeah you did, I thought you looked very cosy in the pub,’ Emily

winked.

Holly shrugged. Annie's mouth started to open.

But they were interrupted by a shout behind them. The kids, who were meant to be washing down boats, putting blades away and generally tidying up, had all got bored and started throwing sponges at each other and flicking water from their water bottles.

'Stop it!' Matt, who had dried himself off and was now dressed in jeans and a T-shirt, shouted again as he got sprayed with water meant for Julian.

On the river the last two boats were racing, storming down side by side as all the spectators in Alan's hospitality tent were roaring drunkenly. The kids paused their water-fight to stop and watch and Matt cupped his hands together to cheer for the losing Cherry Pie team. Holly watched her dad cycle down the tow-path, red-faced and shouting furiously at his crew. Emily, completely uninterested in the racing, kicked off her boots and bent to pick them up, 'My feet are killing me. Holly, listen, I'm serious about hiring out the van. My mum's been looking for something like this for ages but the idea of sorting it from France - nightmare! Her theme is all boho chic and she wants all these little vintage touches. We've been collecting bloody jam jars for yonks for the flowers - I had to carry them over in my suitcase last time I went over there. If they'd stopped me at customs they'd have thought I was nuts. This couldn't be more perfect because she adored Enid and this would tie it all up so brilliantly. She'd probably love to have you there too, she always thought you were marvellous. Much better than me,' she laughed, 'Come on, how would it work? Who would drive it? Would I drive it? I'm a terrible driver.'

Holly shook her head. 'Emily, I have no idea. I'm not even really hiring it out.'

'Will Wilf be at the wedding?' Annie asked, not really taking her eyes off Holly.

Emily nodded, 'Definitely, he's just invested in a bar with my mum's new husband.'

Annie looked pointedly at Holly, 'You should do it, Hols. You should go with Emily.'

Holly ignored her.

'I'll pay you. What are you thinking, cost wise? You name it, I'll double whatever you're thinking if I can make this happen.' Emily looked at Holly, her face serious, as if she'd suddenly snapped into

business mode.

Holly watched Annie lean down at the window and wait to listen to what Holly would say. She knew Holly needed money. She had no steady job, she'd taken the last seven months off and had very little savings left. Now she was about to have a baby to support and only the minimum government maternity allowance to do it with.

'I don't know,' Holly said in the end. Behind her she could hear Matt shout again as the kids started to chuck water at each other again, 'If you lot spray me again, I'll put the hose on you. Julian! I'm warning you.'

'I really think you should, Hol,' Annie said, eyebrows raised.

'Why are you using that tone of voice, Annie?' Emily asked. 'Is this to do with Wilf? Holly, did something happen with you and Wilf, because you know I thought something did and I asked him and he said that nothing happened, which is unusual for him, but I was sure something happened. Did something happen?'

'No.' Holly shook her head. 'Nothing happened.'

But as she said it, she was caught in the midst of the full-blown water-fight that had broken out between the juniors and Matt, who had just turned the hose on full force.

'Oh my god!' Holly held her hands up against the water.

A second later, they were all dripping. Emily's bare legs and the hem of her denim dress were soaked. Annie's choppy blonde fringe was flattened to her head. But Holly had got the brunt of it and was wet from head to toe. Auburn hair darkened to black, skin glowing with water, eyelashes all clumped together, black leggings wet through and baggy white T-shirt now see-through and sticking to her body.

Anyone who was looking would notice, before she turned away to grab her sweatshirt, that she was probably about three months' pregnant. And, of course, Emily was looking.

'Oh Jesus,' Emily said as Holly stood there, trying to get her jumper on as fast as possible. 'Are you preggers? You're not...? You are!' She held her hand to her lips for a second, then asked, 'Is it Wilf's?'

'Can we just not talk about it?' Holly said, waving her hands to try and make Emily be quiet.

'Holly, this is all the more reason to come to France. You could sound Wilf out.'

When Holly didn't reply, just looked around to see who might be within earshot, Emily added, 'the worst thing you could do is not tell him, Hol. He doesn't trust people very easily at the best of times.'

'And how do I tell him?' Holly whispered, not looking at Annie, who seemed to exhale with relief that she'd finally admitted who the father was. 'I can't just text him and say, by the way, I'm having your baby.'

'Why not?'

'Oh please.'

'I could tell him for you.' Emily shrugged and got her phone out of her pocket.

'Don't you dare!'

Emily laughed as Holly tried to snatch it from her. 'So come to France, then! Please. It'll make my mum love me and she's been in a filthy mood since that whole Rolling Stones nightclub paparazzi incident. And you can tell Wilf all softly, softly in lovely warm South of France-esque surroundings. Pleeese.' Emily held her hands together and stared at Holly with her big blue eyes. 'If nothing else, do it for the money.'

'The money would be useful, Holly,' Annie added.

Holly looked up at the van, at the blue and white striped awning and the inside patterned with tiny blue forget-me-nots. She wondered what Enid would have told her to do. Enid was always about straight-up honesty. Except Annie had found a government letter in the café clean-up addressed to Enid about a guy injured in the war. A guy who wasn't Enid's husband. So maybe she wasn't so honest after all.

She thought back to when she was an angry fourteen year old. Holly remembered sitting on the fridges in the van, eating a 99 with chocolate sauce. It was just after her mum had left. Ran off with one of the men she cleaned for. They'd apparently been having an affair for two years. Two years Holly and her dad's life with her had been a lie.

Two years.

She remembered a conversation she'd had with Enid, who had subtly stepped into the void left by her mother. She was there keeping watch, always just checking...

'Coach Billy says you haven't been training for two weeks,' Enid had said while serving a little boy a lemonade lolly.

‘Why is he telling you?’

‘Well, if he tells your dad he knows he’ll probably take it a bit too seriously. And if he tells you, he knows he’ll get some smart-arse response. So, seeing as I have to put up with you every afternoon, not really working—’ She’d turned to look at her. ‘Am I paying you to sit on the fridge? Or to clean the fridge?’

‘Clean the fridge,’ Holly had said, crunching on the cone of her 99.

‘Well clean the bloody fridge. Jesus Christ, girl. Your mother has a lot to answer for.’ Enid pulled a couple of 99 cones for a group of school kids and then wiped her hands and took a swig of her Coke. ‘You make your own future, Holly. Don’t let your mother’s mistakes mess up yours. You’re a good little rower and you could go far. I want to be cheering for you at the Olympics, not watching you getting stoned round the back of the playground like the kids I’ve seen you messing about with. Go and find Annie, be nice to Emily – she’s not all bad – and get back in a boat. OK? You have potential. Yes?’

Holly slid off the fridge top and went and got the Mr Muscle.

‘Yes?’ she said again.

Holly stared down at Enid’s orange flip flops. ‘Maybe.’

‘For as long as I’ve known you, you’ve never been afraid of anything. Don’t start now.’

Back in the present, Holly looked from Emily to Annie and back again. Emily was watching her, all big eyes and nodding. Annie’s eyes were narrowed, clearly unsure which way it might go.

‘OK. OK.’ Holly nodded, and Emily clapped her hands together. ‘It’s not a bad idea. I know I have to tell him, and yes, this could be a good way of doing it.’

‘Awesome,’ Emily said, standing back to admire the van. ‘The ferry leaves tomorrow evening.’