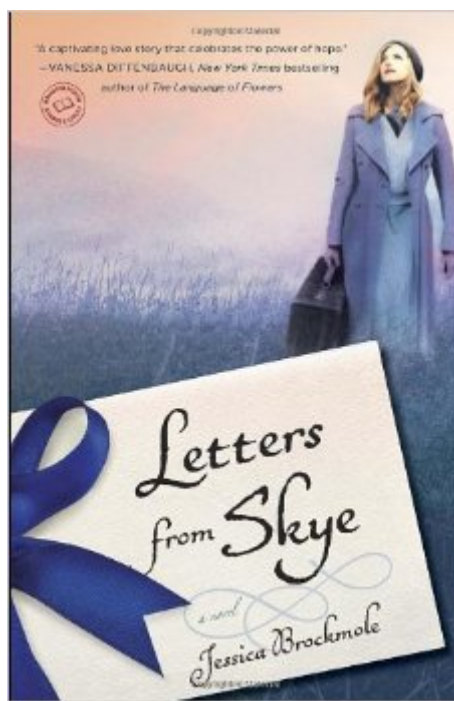


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Letters From Skye: A Novel



Synopsis

NAMED ONE OF THE BEST BOOKS OF THE YEAR BY PUBLISHERS WEEKLY A sweeping story told in letters, spanning two continents and two world wars, Jessica Brockmole's atmospheric debut novel captures the indelible ways that people fall in love, and celebrates the power of the written word to stir the heart.

• March 1912: Twenty-four-year-old Elspeth Dunn, a published poet, has never seen the world beyond her home on Scotland's remote Isle of Skye. So she is astonished when her first fan letter arrives, from a college student, David Graham, in far-away America. As the two strike up a correspondence—sharing their favorite books, wildest hopes, and deepest secrets—their exchanges blossom into friendship, and eventually into love. But as World War I engulfs Europe and David volunteers as an ambulance driver on the Western front, Elspeth can only wait for him on Skye, hoping he'll survive.

• June 1940: At the start of World War II, Elspeth's daughter, Margaret, has fallen for a pilot in the Royal Air Force. Her mother warns her against seeking love in wartime, an admonition Margaret doesn't understand. Then, after a bomb rocks Elspeth's house, and letters that were hidden in a wall come raining down, Elspeth disappears. Only a single letter remains as a clue to Elspeth's whereabouts. As Margaret sets out to discover where her mother has gone, she must also face the truth of what happened to her family long ago.

• Sparkling with charm and full of captivating period detail, *Letters from Skye* is a testament to the power of love to overcome great adversity, and marks Jessica Brockmole as a stunning new literary voice. Look for special features inside. Join the Random House Reader's Circle for author chats and more.

Praise for *Letters from Skye*

• *Letters from Skye* is a captivating love story that celebrates the power of hope to triumph over time and circumstance.

• "Vanessa Diffenbaugh, New York Times bestselling author of *The Language of Flowers* [A] remarkable story of two women, their loves, their secrets, and two world wars . . . [in which] the beauty of Scotland, the tragedy of war, the longings of the heart, and the struggles of a family torn apart by disloyalty are brilliantly drawn, leaving just enough blanks to be filled by the reader's imagination."

• "Publishers Weekly (starred review) [A] tantalizing . . . sure to please readers who enjoyed other epistolary novels like *The Guernsey Literary and Potato Peel Pie Society*."

• "Stratford Gazette [A] [A] An absorbing and rewarding saga of loss and discovery."

• "Kate Alcott, New York Times bestselling author of *The Dressmaker* [A] [A] A sweeping and sweet (but not saccharine) love story."

• "USA Today [A] [A] [A] dazzling little jewel."

• "Richmond Times-Dispatch

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Customer Reviews

LETTERS FROM SKYE, a novel in letter form, begins in 1912 with David Graham, an eighteen-year-old student in Urbana, Illinois, writing to Elspeth Dunn, a twenty-four-year-old poet who had never left the Isle of Skye in Scotland. The first letter is an ordinary fan letter; Graham had just finished reading one of Dunn's books. Opening the novel with this simple fan letter, which grows into much more, catches readers' attention right away and keeps readers' attention until the very end. Not only are there letters between Graham and Dunn before and during World War I, but also letters written by Dunn's daughter Margaret during World War II. Margaret has fallen in love with a soldier, and her mother tries to warn her against it - or at least to give the situation due thought. The style of this novel is spot-on for the type of work it is. There are times when the authors of the letters take their time, and other times when the authors of the letters are so tired or busy that they simply dash off a few words. As a college student, Graham finds himself in some fairly typical scrapes, and later, as an ambulance driver during World War I, he tells Dunn as much as permitted about where he is and what he's been doing. (There are comments about incidents and places Graham describes that didn't pass the wartime censors and were literally cut out of the letters.) This work really kept me reading because it posed many questions. Dunn is married; will she and Graham end their relationship? Who is Margaret's father - Iain, Dunn's husband, or Graham? (Readers do find out later.) Why is Dunn so close-mouthed to Margaret about the past? Yes, this novel is rather formulaic; readers do get a "been there, done that" feeling at times. However, the author does manage this formula well and offers an excellent light read.

Letters from Skye is a sweet and simple book that ultimately disappointed me because the author seemed to believe that the cliched plot twists and insubstantial characters and setting could be saved by a charming concept. I love the idea of a novel told in letters or diaries and just last week read and reviewed a great example of this type of novel - Margaret Forster's *Diary of an Ordinary Woman*. But to make that kind of novel succeed you have to have a strong narrative voice, a sense of a real person setting events down in real time. Unfortunately, all of the letter writers in Skye sound the same - there's no differentiation in voice between an American college student and a Scottish poet in 1912 or a young woman and her boyfriend in the midst of WWII. I've read interviews with the author and she seemed to have done a great deal of research on the language of the time. The words may have been correct but her diction and language structure was completely off - the letters read like zippy emails back and forth, full of jokes and some fairly explicit conversations between a man and a woman in 1912. I suppose I'm inclined to nit-pick because I have all the letters between my great-grandfather and his parents, covering a time period from the 1880s-1930s. People wrote very differently back then and spoke about things in a far more poetic way than we do. I didn't feel any of that in Skye. I reached a point about halfway through the book when I realized it wasn't going to work for me. I plowed through to finish it as I'd received a review copy and kept myself occupied by wondering what the novel might have been like as a straight-forward narrative with the key letters interspersed throughout. I think this could have been a very good novel in the vein of a dual-timeline, Kate Morton-type story full of secrets. The different settings - the isolated Isle of Skye, college life in the U.S. in the early part of the 20th century, the battlefields of France during the Great War and Blitz London. What amazing settings! What an opportunity for a sweeping novel showing the impact of war on families. None of that comes through in Skye because of the limitations imposed by the letters. I'm sure many readers will not be bothered by these problems and can accept this as a sweet, generic love story. Unfortunately, I feel as though I've read this book many times and had hopes for something more. Disclaimer: I received an advance copy of this book for review.

I am fond of stories that are told through letters. Using only correspondence between characters to tell the story is tricky business. Characters are developed and explained only through whatever has been written so the author must be skillful in crafting the letters. It starts with a letter from David, an American student, to Elspeth, a poet living on the Island of Skye in Scotland. A seemingly innocent piece of fan mail becomes a love story that starts in WWI and continues through the next generation and WWII. Jessica Brockmole has the spare writing style and even hand that lends itself well to this

type of book. She starts with nothing more than a few lines and moves onto introducing other characters and parts of the story line. It is almost summer and I retreated with this book to the library for the comfort of the A/C and a sprawling sofa. I was carried away to Scotland and London in the midst of two wars. A delicious story that kept me wrapped up for several hours. I have to admit to being somewhat disappointed as I came to the end. The plot isn't unique. It is a basic love story but it is how it is organized and told that makes this such an enjoyable read. At first I was confused by Elspeth but then I became hungry to hear her story. What would happen with David? Would Margaret be able to forge a relationship with Paul? If you enjoy an easy reading love story...this is a good choice for you. Just allow yourself to be swept into the pages and enjoy the ride.

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