



# Jump

Stories of Life, Love  
and Fear

Paula Kelly-Ince

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The characters and situations in this book exist only in the author's imagination and, possibly now, in yours too.

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# About the Author



I live in the north-west of England and I'm a mum, nana, writer and performance poet – pretty much in that order. I recently reached the glorious age of forty-seven and along with an expanding waist line, creaky knees and the suspicion that I really would benefit from taking up yoga, middle age is offering me lots of new

perspectives. The most shocking of these is the realisation that my youthful dreams of being a well-rounded, fully-functioning human being, like my adolescent dreams of being the next Madonna / Mother Theresa / Enid Blyton (dreams alternated, depending on my mood and current level of altruism), were indeed just that; dreams. Consequently, my dreams have been adjusted and re-named goals (goals sound much more achievable); I now aspire to be dysfunctionally happy.

## Jump

My feet are right at the edge. In the distance the sea merges into sky and I can taste the salt in the air as the breeze lifts my hair whipping it into my face. 'You're sure it's safe?' I ask. But I don't even hear the reply, all I can hear is my heart pounding in my ears. My breath keeps catching and I realise I am shaking and I'm about to step back when I see his face, his perfect face. His eyes, fringed with dark lashes, are gently shut.

*My hair is plastered to my damp head.*

*Michael puts a straw to my lips and as I sip gratefully, I look into his brown eyes which are brimming with unspoken sympathy that I can't bear to see, so I close my eyes and focus on breathing in. I smell of sweat and blood and the smell fills me, distracting me for a moment before I feel the pain starting to build like a tidal wave. 'I can't do it.'*

*'You're nearly there sweetheart, you're doing really well.'* The midwife looks into my eyes, urging me to focus.

*I open my mouth to reply but the pain builds and my awareness slips as it breaks over me.*

*'Breathe,' she says.*

*I suck air in, trying to focus on the movement of the breath through my nose down into my lungs, forcing myself to blow the breath out through my mouth. The pain is starting to ebb but already I feel another building. 'Drugs, I want drugs,' I manage to say.*

*'It's too late honey, there's no point, you're too close.'*

*What does that mean? I'm going to die, how can I be too close to anything? I hear grunting and I want to ask who is making that god awful noise but I'm awash with pain, it flows over me, thick and sticky like treacle. Then, as it starts to slide away, I realise the noise is coming from me.*

*'With the next pain I want you to push. Are you listening? I need you to push with the next pain.'*

*I clench Michael's hand, digging my nails into his palm. I want her to shut up. I shake my head and clench my teeth as another pain builds. I can't push, I won't. Then I feel something pressing on the inside, the band of pain around my stomach is a vice and like a can of pop that's been shaken I feel I'm about to explode. I have to get this thing out, now, so I push.*

*'Fantastic, you're doing really well.'*

*I want to punch her face but my body does not belong to me, all I can*

*do is breathe and push, breathe and push. I feel a stinging and burning between my legs.*

*'That's it, the head's out. Just a few more pushes now and it will be over.'*

*This will never be over I want to tell her. Never. I push again and I feel the baby slide out of me.*

*The midwife cuts the cord quickly and efficiently, no smiles or celebration. She wraps a towel around the baby and hands it to me avoiding my eye. My baby is tinged blue. It is covered with blood and vernix but it doesn't move and although I knew, I didn't. I open the towel to see. 'A son.*

*We have a son.' The words choke me as I kiss his head breathing in the smell of him. He has dark hair, like Michael and thick dark lashes and I brush the tears away because I don't want them obscuring my vision; I want to drink him in. This image has to last me a lifetime, has to replace a lifetime of watching, I can't afford to miss a second. So I gulp them down, holding them in my throat. I feel Michael's arms around me, cradling me, cradling us and I feel his frame begin to shake with big, silent sobs. I lean into him, stroking his face with my free hand. I realise that the midwife is speaking to me but it's like I'm underwater and the*

*sounds are muted and distorted. I look at her to see her mouth moving as she waves a needle at me and although I'm terrified of needles I just nod and it hardly registers when it pierces my thigh. Suddenly I remember. 'A photo; I want a photo. Will you take a photo of us?' She asks me if I want to get cleaned up first but I'm adamant so she takes one and says we can have another later as well.*

Standing at the door of the plane, with the instructor behind me and the wind whipping my face, I realise that this is the first time for a whole year I have felt anything but grief. So I jump.



## Tara

‘Young man! Young man!’ Tara squinted through her glasses at the handsome twenty-something man who was texting as he walked. Louder; ‘young man!’ She had his attention. ‘Young man, would you be so kind as to assist me down these steps?’ He hesitated, glancing down at the phone still held in the palm of his hand. ‘I seem to have misplaced my walking stick and I really do need to get down these steps.’

He half-smiled as he slipped his phone into his pocket, stretching his

arm out towards her.

Tara's face broke into a smile. 'What a kind young man you are.' She reached out, grasping the back of his hand with her own; she had a surprisingly strong grip for someone her age. 'Now then,' she shuffled slowly along beside him, shifting her weight from side to side, penguin like. Although she kept her eyes on her feet he could feel the weight of her consideration as she spoke to him. 'I suppose you were doing that texting thing?'

Justin frowned. 'Yeah, my mum.'

'Can't get the hang of it myself – it just takes so long. By the time I've

finished one I could have written a letter, walked to the post office, bought a stamp, posted it, come back home and had a cup of tea.'

Justin looked at her as she spoke to him. She was hobbit sized, slightly bent over. When she glanced up at him thick, bottle-bottom glasses enlarged her green eyes giving her a bug like appearance. Despite the scarf which was tied tightly on her head wild, curly wisps of lilac-grey hair escaped and danced around her face in the breeze. One hand clutched him tightly; in the other was a grubby shopping bag that swung as she moved.

‘My daughter gave it to me; likes to know that I can call her if I need to. I suppose it puts her mind at ease.’ She looked up at him.’ We all worry about those we love, don’t we?’

Justin’s eyes dropped alighting on the swinging bag. He nodded towards it. ‘Want me to carry that?’

‘What’s wrong?’

Justin looked at her. He shook his head. ‘She’s in trouble. She’s got debts, big debts. It’s not her fault mind. My dad, well, he was a bit of a shit and now he’s really gone and fucked us.’ He stopped talking and looked at her as his face flushed red. ‘Sorry, sorry about that. But he’s been

a right, well, you know. It was him, that ran up the debt but, well, he got it in both their names and now he's gone and we're in the...' He looked at her.

'The shit. You're in the shit by the sounds of it.'

Justin laughed in spite of himself, the words sounded incongruous coming out of her mouth. 'Yeh,' he nodded, 'we're in the shit. Deep in the shit. If we don't come up with the money we're out the house the week after next.' They paused, looking at each other as they reached the bottom of the steps.

'Where will you go?'

He shrugged. 'It's not like we can go anywhere. A new place would cost money and well...' He seemed to wilt slightly.

Still holding onto his hand Tara shuffled towards a bench where she sat down and started to root in her bag. 'My daughter works for a housing charity – I'll give you her number at work. She'll be able to give you some information.' She nodded, her head bobbing up and down as she spoke. 'She's very good, my Julie.' Eventually she withdrew a small card and a biro, muttering to herself as she laboriously wrote a number on the back of it. Holding the card away from her she

checked the number. Satisfied, she stood up and put the pen back into her voluminous, slightly grubby bag. 'There you are.' She pressed the piece of card into his hand. She tilted her head bird like and smiled. 'All will be well, young man, all will be well.' Turning on her heel she walked off along the street with surprising speed.

Justin shook his head, he doubted the charity would be able to do much; people like him and his mum just weren't a priority at times like this. He looked down at the thin piece of card in his hand; there was nothing on it except small print. He looked more closely, nothing. He

turned it over in his hand; it was a lottery scratch card. He looked up, but the old woman was nowhere to be seen. He opened his mouth to call out then realised he didn't even know her name. Using his thumb nail he scratched the icons off the card. The first two matched and his heart started pumping. Calm down, it'll be nothing, he remonstrated with himself. As he started to scratch the third icon, he could see the shape. It was the same. Bloody hell, it was the same. But no, the old lady, she might need this – it was hers really. Running to the corner he scanned up and down each street. Nothing. He turned

the ticket back over in his hand examining the back of it closely for the number he was sure he'd seen her write but there was nothing. He ran his thumb over it; not even the impression that a biro would have made if it hadn't been working.

Fishing his phone out of his pocket he called his mum.

## Mr Philips

Last night I dreamt of Mr Philips. I was sat on the cold plastic chair in the maths classroom and he was leaning over my shoulder explaining how to work out the angles of an isosceles triangle; his cheek close to mine, radiating heat, his coffee-breath in my face. I love the smell of his coffee-breath. All the other kids hate it. They laugh about his coffee-breath and the dandruff on his shoulder. When I live with Mr Philips I will buy him Vosene and extra fresh minty mouth spray and then no one would laugh at him.

Sometimes I pretend to laugh too so no one will know. It is important that no one knows. Having a crush on coffee-breath Philips would be social suicide. I would never live it down. Last week Richard Noble broke the land speed record. He travelled 634mph. That's nothing compared to how fast the news would travel round school if anyone found out about my crush on Mr Philips. It's not like having a crush on Mr Devine. Mr Devine's the RE teacher but he's not like our other RE teacher Miss Finnegan. She's about fifty and has hairs growing out of her chin and she dresses like a nun. Everyone says she

used to be a nun. One Tuesday John Fisher fingered Elaine Redmond at the back of class while Miss Finnegan talked about transubstantiation. John whispered to anyone that would listen that he was going to transubstantiate Elaine behind the bike shed after school. He didn't wash his hands for the rest of the day and kept shoving his fingers under the other lad's noses. Everyone in my class loves RE when we have Mr Devine but not me; give me maths every day. I do my homework for every subject except maths because not doing maths homework means an automatic after school detention on a

Tuesday with Mr Philips. That's a full extra hour every week that I get to sit in the same classroom as him. On Tuesday after detention, when everyone else had gone out, Mr Philips called me to the front of class. 'Clare, I don't understand why, when you work so hard and are so good in class, you don't do your homework. Is there something wrong? Don't you like maths?' I hate to disappoint him, the reproach in his eyes felt like a knife in my gut. I stammered that I did and I was sorry and I was just about to tell him that it was so I could stay in the room with him when he said: 'You could do ever so well in your 'O'

levels if you try. Think about it' and I just said 'Yes Sir.' That night I did my homework but then I tore it up. I think he knows. Obviously he can't say anything, even to me but he knows. I leave school in one year seven months and two days. We can wait that long.

If I close my eyes I can feel him breathing on my cheek and smell his coffee-breath. I sometimes touch myself to the thought of him leaning over my shoulder explaining compound fractions. I imagine his hands on me, moving to the rhythm of his speech, his breath softly tickling my ear and waves of pleasure break

over my body. Yesterday at assembly we were told that Mr Philips and Miss Smith have got engaged. Everyone clapped. I nearly cried. I could feel a lump in my throat and tears stinging my eyes and I had to recite pi in my head. Reciting pi always calms me down. I didn't hear anything for the rest of assembly. I didn't even realise it was time to leave till Julie Jones poked me in the ribs with her pointy fingers. I can't believe it. I can't believe that he could possibly like her. She's not good enough for him. It would be horrible him getting engaged to anyone, but at least if it was someone nice I could understand.

Miss Smith teaches history. She has bad teeth and wears her hair in a ponytail that is so tight she always looks surprised. She's a bully and she shouts all the time. I bet she shouts at him too. Maybe he went out with her out of pity but now she's got her claws in him. She doesn't even dress well. My Gran dresses better than she does. Maybe that's why I dreamt about him last night. She can't stop that. I've started drinking coffee. Mum and Steve don't like coffee so I had to buy some with my pocket money. She can be really mean sometimes. She never gives me extra things like she does Jamie. She calls Jamie 'her

little ray of sunshine' and it's true, he's always laughing and he laughs so hard that his whole body shakes and his cheeks wobble and when he does that it's hard not to start laughing too; even if mum is mean and I'm pining for Mr Philips. But it's easy for him to laugh, he's two and everyone loves him and no one has left him. No one loves someone else more than they love him. Now I won't be able to buy 'Karma Chameleon' from Woolworths after school on Friday. I had to have the coffee though.

On Sunday night when me and Amy were taping the top twenty at her house, 'Freedom' by Wham came

on and Amy got all moony over George Michael saying that he's her ideal man, but he's nothing compared to Mr Phillips. She went on and on about how much she loves him but how can she love someone she's never met? That's not real, what me and Mr Phillip's have is real. When we live together we won't live in a stupid terrace like I do now with mum and Steve and Jamie, we'll have a semi-detached house on the Elm's estate and every Sunday that it's warm enough, we'll have breakfast on the patio and Mr Phillips will read The Times and I will read the fashion supplement. He'll grow roses in the

garden and when we have dinner parties we'll eat canapés and drink Blue Nun. Anyway, Amy doesn't know anything about love; she's never even kissed a boy. I have. I kissed Darren Wild at the Drum and Monkey disco last term. We used tongues and everything. He gave me a love-bite which felt really nice but looked horrible and I had to wear a scarf all week so Mum and Steve wouldn't see it, even though it wasn't that cold. Steve would have hit the roof if he'd found out; I'd be grounded forever. Mum's still on at me to call Steve 'dad' but I don't want to, even if he is miles nicer than my dad; it still

doesn't change anything. She says it'll confuse Jamie if I call him Steve but I'm not going to play happy families just because she's got everything she wants now. Still, I was sort of proud of my love bite, even though I was embarrassed too. Having a love bite marks you out as having a certain level of experience. A certain level. That's important; you can't have too much experience or you're a slag like Elaine Redmond. Everyone says that she uses Tampax and she's on the pill. Darren was just practice though. I have to know what I'm doing if I'm going to be with someone like Mr Philips.

We are reading Cider With Rosie in English. I love it, it's my favourite book. In one chapter Laurie Lee talks about all the girls he kissed when he was a boy, ending with the story of him kissing Rosie Burdock one evening under an old wooden cart. He describes how that kiss changed him, through it he knew about all the possibilities of love. That's how it will be with Mr Philips. Kissing Mr Philips will make me a woman, I know it will.

It's the school disco tonight. I'm getting ready at Amy's. Emma and Julie are getting ready there too. Emma's wearing new jeans and a red jacket just like the one Alex wore in

Flashdance, which we all went to see for Julie's birthday in May. Emma's dad has his own business and they have loads of money so Emma gets everything she wants. Mum made me a rah rah skirt for the disco; she used to make wedding dresses before she married dad and they moved up here so she's really good at making clothes; sometimes I get things before you can get them in a shop, like my rah rah skirt. Emma has brought all her make-up and a copy of Jackie that shows you how to do a sophisticated modern look. That's what we're going for tonight.

Well it's all over now and nothing will

ever be the same. I knew that Mr Philip's had noticed me as soon as we walked in. As he took our tickets he said: 'You're looking very nice this evening, ladies.' But he was looking at me as he said it. He called us ladies and he smiled at me and our fingers touched as I handed him our tickets. It was like when you get an unexpected electric shock from a metal doorknob. It took my breath away and I knew that despite everything, it is me he loves. I knew where he was the whole evening, even while I was talking or dancing with Amy and Emma and Julie. I could feel his eyes on me. Then Martin Ingle asked me to dance and I

got all confused because I didn't want to hurt his feelings by saying no. Martin was my best friend when we were in the infants; we used to spend all our time together and although we don't hang around much now we do still talk sometimes and I know how the boys take the piss if one of them asks someone to dance and they are rejected, so I just said, 'I can't right now, I need the ladies.' I left the hall to go to the toilets but on the way there I saw Mr Phillips and Miss Jones conoodling in an annex in the corridor. He was stroking her face and looking into her eyes and she was smiling at him and then he kissed her.

I felt dizzy and sick at the same time and suddenly I really did need to get to the toilets. I don't know how long I was in there trying not to cry, I didn't think I would ever be able to leave when I heard banging on the door and Martin shouted: 'Clare, are you in there?' I said I couldn't come out, so he said he would come in, so I came out. When he saw me he asked what was wrong and then I couldn't stop myself, I started crying and Martin took me by my hand and led me into a classroom off the corridor. He held my hands like he used to when we were little and just waited and when I started talking it wasn't about Mr

Philips and how he's broken my heart  
it was about dad and how crap he is,  
how he forgets my birthday and never  
turns up when he says he will and  
when he does he'll go to the pub to  
watch the football and leave me in  
the car with a bag of crisps and a coke  
and how now mum's got Steve and  
Jamie I'm not her favourite anymore  
and I don't fit properly in that family.  
Then Martin pulled me to him and  
put his arms round me, I rested my  
head on his shoulder; he felt so solid  
and I could feel the weight of his arms  
around me. I felt safe and stopped  
crying but I didn't want to move. His  
hands were stroking my back and I

could smell his skin and his just washed hair, I could feel my heart beating so hard that I thought he must be able to feel it too and I wasn't sure what to do when Martin leaned back slightly and kissed me on the lips, a gentle, tentative kiss, then drew back and looked at me. His brown eyes looked so warm and inviting that I leant in to kiss him again, my breath was coming faster and I pressed my body into his when the door opened and we jumped apart.

Mr Phillips. Mr bloody Philips. He told Martin that he would speak to him on Monday but he wanted to

Speak to me now. I told Martin it was okay and I would meet him outside. My Philips stood there looking at me then he said 'Clare, I'm disappointed in you. What were you thinking?'

Well, I told him exactly what I was thinking, I looked right into his eyes and said; 'you are a two faced, two timing hypocrite and if you think you can string me along you're mistaken. You've made your choice and it's not my fault if you regret it, you should have thought it all through a bit better.' You should have seen his face. When I get home I'm going to throw the coffee away. I never liked it anyway.

