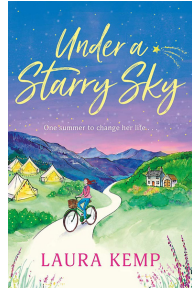


MEET THE AUTHOR

Romantic comedy writer **Laura Kemp** on reading and writing books and what inspires her



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If there was one book you would recommend to a friend what would it be and why? First question and I'm cheating already! I can't recommend one book - it's too difficult but can I suggest a genre? For me it has to be romantic comedy, which is hilarious, feel good and uplifting - pretty much perfect for when you're feeling flat or need a top up. I love this type of book because it's escapism, still realistic with every day problems, but you're guaranteed a happy ending. I'd suggest anything by Milly Johnson, Mhairi McFarlane, Lucy Diamond and Marian Keyes.

What was the last book that made you laugh? It's Mhairi McFarlane's new one called Last Night which is out in April. It's about a woman whose life changes one night and she sets about working out who she is. It's a love letter to friendship, a romance that will keep you guessing, completely hilarious - her word play is so entertaining - but with real life thrown in. Full of belly laughs!

What book are you reading now? The Glittering Hour by Iona Grey, which is a superb historical novel about lost love set in between the First and Second World Wars when a society girl meets a struggling artist. It's so compelling, switching between the two lead roles, and her young daughter, and so evocative of a time when class ruled.

Whose biography would you like to write? I'm obsessed with Modern Family, the super smart American sitcom about an extended family which is both laugh out loud funny and poignant, and I'd have to choose either the star characters of Gloria, to tell her Colombia to America story, or Cameron, who broke the mould of his upbringing on a Missouri farm. Actually, maybe I could do the both of them in one book!

Which book have you read that surprised you and why? It has to be Why I'm No Longer Talking to White People About Race by Reni Eddo-Lodge because it's more than an education, it's mind-changing. The book packs a huge punch in its deconstruction of institutionalised racism, explaining how on the surface prejudice that we're familiar with goes much much deeper. I already saw institutionalised sexism in this way but to have it set out so explicitly in terms of race made me realise how much further back the starting line is for non-white people.

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Which was your favourite book as a child? The Owl Who Was Afraid of the Dark by Jill Tomlinson. It's a lovely atmospheric story about an owl called Plop who goes against his instinct and is frightened of the dark. He learns to love it through meeting people and dares to be brave. I still love it for its message - some fears are a result of not understanding some things and with a bit of courage and learning, you can conquer your demons.

What inspired you to want to write? I started off as a journalist after university because I loved finding out about things, hearing people's stories and writing about them in a way that raised awareness or changed things. Being an author is a fabulous relation, combining nosiness, curiosity, imagination and the urge to put pen to paper.

What are your top tips for people wanting to write a book? To do it! It can only begin when you start to write. Planning is very helpful, research is essential but to write 100,000 words requires the physical act of sitting down to do it. It's an overwhelming thought but like lots of things, if you break it down then it becomes manageable and achievable and then very fulfilling. Let yourself go, give yourself permission to put whatever comes from inside down and you can worry about the rewrite afterwards!

Do you have a message for our NHS front line staff? A huge thank you to our NHS frontline staff who sacrifice themselves every minute of every day - your bravery and grit makes you the very best of us. I hope you are given time and support in the future to recover and process what must be a draining and traumatic time.

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