

'Modern, intelligently
observed and highly
original' *Daily Mail*

The background of the cover is a vibrant blue with a subtle, repeating pattern of wavy lines representing water. Four bright red inflatable rings are scattered across the scene, floating on the surface. Each ring is shown from a slightly elevated perspective, casting a soft shadow on the water below. The rings are the central visual element, contrasting sharply with the blue background.

Learning To Swim

Clare
Chambers

Author of *Small Pleasures*

Clare Chambers

LEARNING TO SWIM



arrow books

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About the Author

Clare Chambers' first job after reading English Literature at Hertford College, Oxford, was working with Diana Athill at André Deutsch. They published Clare's first novel *Uncertain Terms* in 1992.

Clare is also the author of *Back Trouble*, *Learning to Swim*, *A Dry Spell*, *In A Good Light*, *The Editor's Wife* and *Small Pleasures*.

Since 2020 Clare has been a Royal Literary Fund Fellow at the University of Kent. She lives with her husband in south-east London.

Praise for Clare Chambers:

‘Chambers’ eye for undemonstrative details achieves a Larkin-esque
lucidity’ *Guardian on Small Pleasures*

‘An irresistible novel, wry, perceptive and quietly devastating’ *Mail on
Sunday on Small Pleasures*

‘Gorgeous ... if you’re looking for something escapist and bittersweet, I
could not recommend more!’
Pandora Sykes on *Small Pleasures*

‘A dazzling, exquisitely written story’ *Red on Small Pleasures*

‘The writing is beautiful’ Jessie Burton on *Small Pleasures*

‘Smart, astute and very funny’ *Daily Express on Learning to Swim*

Also by Clare Chambers

UNCERTAIN TERMS

BACK TROUBLE

A DRY SPELL

IN A GOOD LIGHT

THE EDITOR'S WIFE

SMALL PLEASURES

*For
Christabel, Julian and Florence*

I

Loyalty never goes unpunished. My father said that once when he was passed over for promotion at work and I've never forgotten it. I went to visit my parents on the Saturday afternoon just before I was due to play in a big charity concert, having received a summons from my mother. She was having a clear-out ready for the decorators and could I come and pick up a box of my belongings or they'd end up in the church jumble sale? My mother likes to invent a practical purpose to my visits so she doesn't feel she is making frivolous, self-indulgent demands on my time.

She was in the process of sifting through a cardboard box of old, uncatalogued photographs when I arrived, and had clearly been at it for some time. All around her lay empty packets, slippery strips of negatives and neat piles of pictures sorted according to subject matter, date and quality.

'Blurred, blurred, duplicate, awful bags under my eyes, don't know who that is,' she intoned, tossing a series of rejects into the bin. I reached past her and picked up an old school photograph from the box. It was of the netball teams. There I was, standing on the end, second reserve for the B team. And there was Frances, captain of the A team, seated, holding the county trophy on her lap, that usual defiant expression on her face. I was assailed by a sudden, overwhelming sense of nostalgia – my memory has a trigger that's easily sprung – and I started leafing through the loose prints in search of other ghosts.

'Don't rummage,' mother said crossly. 'I've been at this all morning.'

'One thing I always hated,' I said, looking at my thirteen-year-old self, long hair scraped back off my face into a ponytail, my spindly legs ankle-width from plimsolls to knickers, 'was being the thinnest person in the class.'

'You weren't thin,' she said defensively. 'I would never have underfed you.' My mother can take the oddest things personally. She twitched the