Praise for
THE GLOVEMAKER'S WAR

"As you read The Glovemaker's War, you will feel what these three women have felt. You will travel the French roads down which Eve pedaled her bicycle, and feel the compassion and love grow between grandmother and granddaughter. This book is a true blessing to the strength and courage of women, especially those who fought for freedom during World War II. I highly recommend The Glovemaker's War and look forward to reading more from this author."

Theresa Syms, Readers Favorite

"The Glovemaker's War is a riveting novel of love and war. Katherine Williams seamlessly weaves the stories of three generations of women into one, which will put a lump in your throat and love in your heart."

Madeline Barbush for Independent Book Review

"A sweet tale of love in wartime."

Kirkus Reviews

"Katherine Williams is adept at bringing the milieu of the war and the efforts of young women to life."

D. Donovan, Senior Reviewer, Midwest Book Review

The Glovemaker's War" by Katherine Williams receives four stars from The Historical Fiction Company

LOST FAMILY

KATHERINE WILLIAMS

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In memory of Winnie,
who sat by my side while I was writing this book.

For Nick and Johnny.
And for my parents, whom I wish I'd known for longer.

"Families are like branches on a tree. We grow in different directions, yet our roots remain as one."

Unknown

CHAPTER 1

Chester, England, 2020

BEN

Ben Griffiths shook off his jacket, slung it on the stool behind him, and folded his lanky body over the shiny steel bar, deliberately turning his back on the people behind him. The young bartender was busy mixing cocktails, but he managed to get her attention and ordered half a pint of bitter. He pulled a face at the man seated to his right who was watching football on the TV.

"Sorry, mate," the man said. "Your team losing, is it?"

"No, I'm glad United's winning. It's time City got a thrashing." He shrugged. "I'm not bothered about either of them; I support Liverpool."

"Why the glum face then?"

"You see those two women behind us?" Ben jerked his chin over his shoulder. "They keep looking at me. I'm worried I've offended them."

"How did you do that?" The man glanced at the two heads that kept twisting in their direction. "I see what you mean; they do look very interested in you."

"I fell asleep during a presentation they were giving earlier. I've never done anything like that before. I'm so embarrassed."

His neighbor chuckled and knocked back the dregs of his beer. "Rather you than me, mate. I wouldn't want to be on the wrong side of those two!"

"What are you drinking?" Ben asked, hoping that the man would stay to keep him company. He wanted another beer.

"Sorry. I wish I could stay, but the wife will kill me if I'm late for dinner. Good luck!"

"Thanks, I'll need it." Ben's shoulders sank as he watched his potential protector leave. He glanced at the reflection of the two businesswomen in the large mirror at the rear of the bar to see if they were still shooting curious vibes his way. They weren't. Now they had their heads together in deep conversation.

Their presentation was about Facebook and its importance in marketing. He'd never liked the platform much and hardly ever used it. He'd found it mortifying when his mum posted baby pictures of him, and he hadn't been happy when Kirsty, his ex, had shared their pictures either. She'd only posted photos of them together when they'd gone out somewhere special, making people think that all they ever did was dine out for fancy meals. It all seemed so fake.

He was positive that the women were discussing how rude he'd been to fall asleep at the meeting. He'd only been listening to the presentation for a couple of minutes when his eyelids started to feel heavy, and he hadn't stirred until his mate Mark nudged him in the ribs twenty minutes later.

Now, not only was he ashamed, but he fretted that they were looking right through him and could see everything that was wrong with his job and his life.

Since his breakup with Kirsty, he'd realized that he was stuck; he needed a challenge, a new beginning, but he had absolutely no idea what that could be. He knew he was good at his job in distribution; transport was his thing. His logistical

skills regarding schedules and timetables were much respected within the company, and under his expert supervision, lorries came and went with precision timing.

Now, though, after several years in the same position, he felt weighed down by the monotony of it all. Rather like the laden trucks that labored up the winding hill from the depot with tedious regularity, he was stuck in second gear, and the dull daily routine was sucking his motivation dry. These days, the only thing that energized him was being outdoors. Every hour at work was like a countdown until he could escape from the confines of his cubicle.

The weeks dragged on, and today had been another dreadful day, with another two to go until the weekend.

Leaning against the bar, he swirled the beer in his glass and knocked back the last mouthful. The half-pint was finally doing its trick, and he felt his body relax. The women seemed to have lost interest in him, so he ordered another drink. The bartender's white teeth sparkled as she acknowledged his order with a flirtatious smile.

The food menu caught his eye, and he picked it up. He was usually a *meat and two veg* kind of guy; his mum's no-nonsense style of cooking was what he liked most, and the gastropub's menu was a little too adventurous for his taste. But the heady aroma of something barbecuing on the wood-fired grill was making him hungry.

He pictured his fridge at home, with nothing in it except maybe some old bacon, and thought he'd splash out on something to eat from the open kitchen on the other side of the room.

"What's that I can smell?" he asked the girl.

The bartender leaned on the bar, settling in for a chat. "That'll be the steak tips. They're served with a chimichurri sauce. They're quite spicy. I love the crab dumplings, though—

by far the best thing on the menu. They have a bit of a kick too."

His stomach rumbled in anticipation, and he found himself agreeing to her recommendations.

"I'll have both of those," he said, thinking for a moment before adding a bowl of chips to his order. "Maybe soak up some of the heat from the chimichurri!" he said with a grin.

"My kind of guy; I eat chips with everything, too!" The bartender giggled.

He laughed to himself, grateful that Kirsty had at least given him a push to be more daring when it came to food.

The bartender ran her tongue over her glossy lips and flipped her hair off her shoulder before typing his order into the computer.

As he took off his glasses and rubbed his eyes, he noticed that she was staring at him.

"I've seen you here before. Are you a model?" she asked, her false eyelashes batting up and down as she boldly studied him. "You look a bit like the gorgeous guy on the cover of this book I'm reading, or are you on TikTok?"

Ben groaned inwardly, hoping that she was just making polite conversation and wasn't hitting on him; he wasn't sure if she was even old enough to be working behind a bar. He was thinking he should take his drink and move to a table so he wouldn't have to talk to her, when he felt a small hand touch his back. He turned his head and looked down into the blue eyes of the woman who had given the presentation.

"You were in our meeting earlier, weren't you?"

Ben's hair flopped into his warm, brown eyes, hiding the deep furrows that now appeared on his forehead. He felt his shoulders tense again, and his teeth started to bite down on the inside of his mouth. This was exactly what he'd been dreading, and he was annoyed he'd let his guard down.

"I, um ... I don't know what to say!" He ran his fingers through his hair. "This is so embarrassing! Yes, I'm the one

who had his eyes closed during your presentation," he said, feeling his face turn hot.

She tilted her head to one side as she looked up at him.

"Was I that uninspiring?" A cheeky grin lit up her face. "I wondered who was snoring!"

"Oh, God! I wasn't, was I?" He took a deep breath and composed himself. "Look, I'm sorry, it was very rude," he said. "I don't usually do that kind of thing."

She put her hand on his arm and tapped it reassuringly.

"Don't worry. I never noticed you sleeping or snoring. I saw you earlier, before I started the presentation," she said. "You're very tall; you're hard to miss." She giggled. "In case you fell asleep before I introduced myself to everyone, I'm Melanie Harris."

Listening to her playful words, he realized that she wasn't as old as he'd originally thought, and now, up close, her slick merino wool business suit didn't disguise that she was probably only in her early thirties. She put out a manicured hand. He shook it and smiled back, relieved that she didn't appear to think badly of him.

"I'm Ben Griffiths—Distribution and Logistics Manager, who wishes he wasn't so tall," he joked back.

"Nice to meet you," she replied.

"You've got the right idea about the cat food industry and social media. We've got a captive audience," he teased. "Old ladies are all over Facebook these days." He pulled his phone out of his pocket. "Can I get you a drink to make amends?"

"That'd be lovely. A glass of white wine, please." She giggled. "Old ladies and cats, why hadn't I hadn't thought of that one?" she said. "Why don't you like being tall? I thought most men did."

"I've always hated standing out in a crowd—being noticed. Hey, I can't even fall asleep in a meeting without being seen," he joked.

She chuckled again, her face sparkling with amusement,

and an electric current seemed to buzz between them. He couldn't stop staring at her as he ordered the wine. He dragged his eyes away to tap his mobile on the payment reader. When he looked up, he saw that she'd spotted a leather sofa in the far corner of the bar and was walking over to claim it. Crisscrossing through the tables, he made his way to join her.

Melanie glanced up at him as she sat down. "You look just like someone in an old black-and-white photo I've got on my wall at home," she said. "Not so much with your glasses on. When I saw you earlier, you weren't wearing any."

He put their drinks down on the table and took a seat opposite her. He wasn't expecting her to flirt with him, but this was much better than a tongue-lashing or discussing work, and he was enjoying joshing back and forth with her.

"Okay, so who's this guy I look like?" he asked, amused by her efforts to make conversation with him.

He took a swig of beer, laughing playfully. But this time, she didn't laugh along with him. She'd wrapped her fingers around the stem of the glass and was gazing into the wine as if she were trying to conjure up something.

"It's a long story. Do you have time to listen?"

"I'm not in a hurry to get home." He leaned back on the sofa and stretched out his legs.

"Well, I was in France a few months ago visiting my grandparents; they live in a village outside Tours called Sablé-sur-Manse," Melanie explained.

"I've only been to Paris and the South of France. Where's Tours?"

"Tours is south of Paris if that's any help. The Loire Valley—you know, white wine and châteaux," she said.

Ben shrugged his shoulders. "I'm more of a beer man. I don't know much about wine."

"I was shopping for antiques. I'm into vintage stuff and

was looking for bits and pieces to decorate my house. Anyway, long story short, I found an old album of black-and-white photos from the 1940s. I've framed some of the pictures to cover a wall in the downstairs loo."

He leaned forward in his seat, reached for his drink, and took a swig. "You've framed pictures of people you don't even know and put them in your house? That's weird." He swallowed another gulp of beer, then slid his glass back down on the table, thinking this was the oddest pickup line he'd ever heard.

"Not really. They complement the 'vintage look' I'm going for. When I saw you leaning with your back against the bar, you looked so like the man leaning against a fence in the picture. He's tall and handsome like you, with the same black hair."

"So you think I'm handsome?" Ben's mouth twitched mischievously.

"No, that didn't come out right!" she replied. "What I meant was that the guy in the photo is handsome."

"Oh, so I'm not handsome then!" He chuckled.

"Stop messing with me!" She gave an exasperated sigh. "Look, I'm trying to tell you something ... listen! Now I can see you up close, there's no doubt in my mind. I wish I had the photo with me to show you."

"Wow! I really do look like some old bloke. If it's a black-and-white photo, of course his hair's black," he kept on joking.

But as she carried on talking, there was something about the passionate way she told her story and how her eyes shone earnestly that started to convince him she wasn't flirting at all. His eyes strayed to her bare ring finger.

"Do you live around here?"

"I'm from Leeds," Melanie replied.

She took a band off her wrist, using it to twist her blonde hair into a high ponytail. He glanced at her while she loosened the buttons of her suit jacket and saw someone young and

happy-go-lucky instead of the serious businesswoman who'd given the talk earlier. Even if she wasn't coming on to him, he was enjoying himself more than he had in a long time. He still missed Kirsty, but this was far better than spending the evening in front of the TV.

"So, what's your connection to France? Harris doesn't sound like a French name."

"It's my married name. My maiden name is Piccard. I'm divorced. My dad is French. He met Maman when she was studying at the University of Tours one summer."

"I thought I noticed a bit of an accent that wasn't all from Yorkshire. The way you pronounce your name—*Mehlanee*. It sounds French. When are you headed back to Leeds?"

"I'm going home tomorrow." She swirled the remains of her wine around in the glass before knocking it back in one go.

A waiter arrived with Ben's meal. He looked at the plates and the napkin-wrapped cutlery in the man's outstretched hands then glanced at her. "Would you like to share some of my dinner? I've ordered too much, as usual."

"I'm sorry, I'd love to, but I said I'd eat with my colleague." She looked at her watch. "I've a busy day tomorrow, and I could do with an early night. I'm not really a nut job." She put her hand in her handbag and pulled out a business card. "I don't know when I'll be down here again. I could text you the photo if you're interested—I'm sorry if I've bothered you."

"No, I've had fun. Shame you've got to go." He touched her arm. "Do you mind me asking why you're divorced? You don't look old enough to have been married."

"Was that supposed to be a compliment?" she asked sharply. A look of pain flashed in her eyes. "My friend is waiting." She stood up and buttoned her jacket, reverting to her serious business persona, instantly snuffing out the spark that had flashed between them.

I can't believe I just said that! he thought, furious with himself for thinking he knew her well enough to be so familiar. But

she had a way about her that had made him feel at ease. He put his hand on her arm to stop her from leaving. Just as he was about to apologize, he felt his phone buzz in his pocket. He took it out and saw a text message, his father's shouty letters jumping off the screen:

"CALL ME. NANA IS SLIPPING AWAY. NOT LONG LEFT."

"I'm sorry, family stuff. Look, I'm sorry if I offended you. Your divorce is none of my business. Can I call you sometime? I'd really like to find out more about that photo," he prattled on nervously, still looking at his phone.

But she wasn't listening; she'd already gone.