

*A happy and prosperous
New Year to you all!*



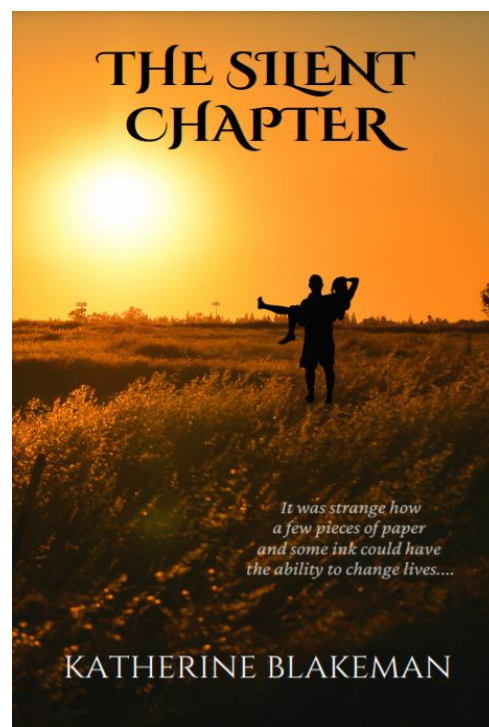
Katherine Blakeman
January 2022

Since, by now, you've probably forgotten that you ever signed up to my newsletter and you're wondering *who the hell is Katherine Blakeman?*... I'd best introduce myself.

My name is Kathy (obviously) and I'm a writer, blogger, baker, cat staff member and retail worker from South East England. Mostly the first and last of these things, however, due to time constraints. I've been writing ever since I can remember – yes, I know that is a commonly used cliché, but in my case it's true. I can't remember a time in which I *didn't* love reading and writing. One of my first masterpieces (I use this term loosely) was a story about sea creatures that I wrote aged seven and my friend at the time illustrated – I only remember it was about sea creatures due to the huge orange starfish she drew on the front! As time went on, I attempted poetry, which didn't go very well, I have to admit, and finished my first novel aged nine. Some of my teachers read it, and they were very encouraging; I credit some of them with the continuation of my love of reading.

When I changed schools aged ten, it's safe to say that it was a bumpy time. I went from being very popular to very *unpopular*, due to my 'posh' accent (I still don't think it's posh), my glasses and the fact that I was a bookworm. Books continued to be my escape and I made some good friends in the school library in break times and lunchtimes, all of us bonding over our love of reading (and our avoidance of going outside into the cold). I continued writing there, short stories in my notebook, and when I went home at night I begged my dad to relinquish his laptop so I could spend many an hour writing my next stories. I can still access some of them, and they make me cringe with how god-awful they are, but they kept me happy at least.

Skip on a bit, and I started writing something different. Before, ever the keen equestrienne, my stories centered around horses, horses and more horses. But in 2017 I



started something entirely new. The Silent Chapter – or 'evacuee story', as the first document of it was called on my computer – started off life as a short story, which became Chapter Eight of the final manuscript. I then wrote in everything leading up to it, edited it several hundred times, and four years later ended up with what is now a sweeping twentieth-century historical romance infused with deeper meaning. The Prologue was one of the last bits I wrote – after the Epilogue, in fact! – but it's the first bit anyone will see, and I have decided to share it with you lovely readers. This is a sneak peek of the rest of the book, which is out worldwide as an ebook and a paperback on Monday 7th February 2022. Read on to find my prologue, amongst other little pieces of me.

Love, Kathy ☺

But before we get to that...

Recipe of the Month: Sticky Toffee Pudding

And the promised CAT PICTURES!

I ran a Twitter poll earlier this week asking my followers to vote between gingerbread and sticky toffee pudding for this month's recipe. Sticky toffee pudding was a clear winner – sorry, gingerbread lovers. But if it's any consolation, the toffee sauce in this recipe goes brilliantly with gingerbread, with ice cream, *in* ice cream, or eaten on its own with a spoon (it goes gorgeously gooey in the fridge). So without any further ado, I give you... Mary Berry's Sticky Toffee Pudding! (Not sponsored.)

INGREDIENTS:

For the cake:

100g softened butter	1tsp baking powder
175g soft light brown sugar	1tsp bicarbonate of soda
2 large eggs	3tbsp black treacle
225g self-raising flour	275ml milk

For the sauce:

100g butter	1tbsp black treacle
100g soft light brown sugar	300ml double cream
1tsp toffee vodka/brandy (OPTIONAL)	

METHOD:

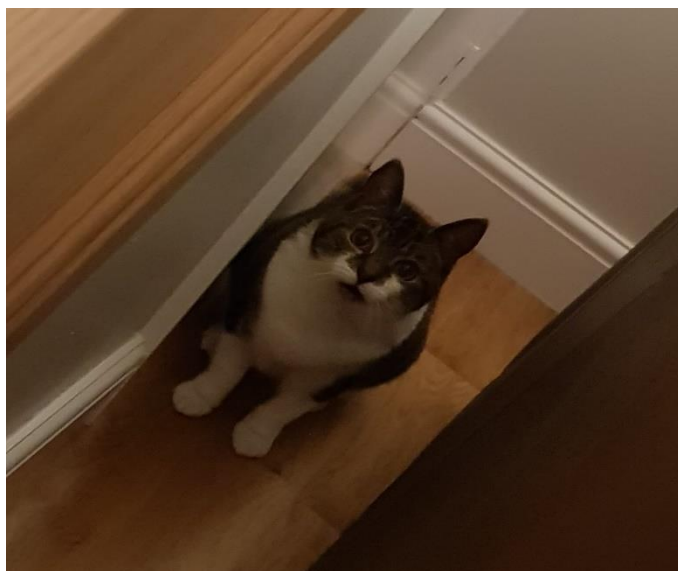
Put all of the cake ingredients EXCEPT THE MILK (so the butter, sugar, eggs, flour, baking powder, bicarbonate of soda and treacle) into a bowl and beat together until combined.

Gradually add the milk, whisking continuously until smooth. The batter may look a little separated by this point, but I've found this doesn't affect the final product. Pour into a greased and lined shallow ovenproof dish, the sort in which you'd bake a lasagne. Bake it in an oven set to 180C/350F/Gas Mark 4 for 35-40 minutes, or until a skewer inserted into the middle comes out clean and dry. If it takes longer, put a piece of foil over the top to ensure it doesn't burn.

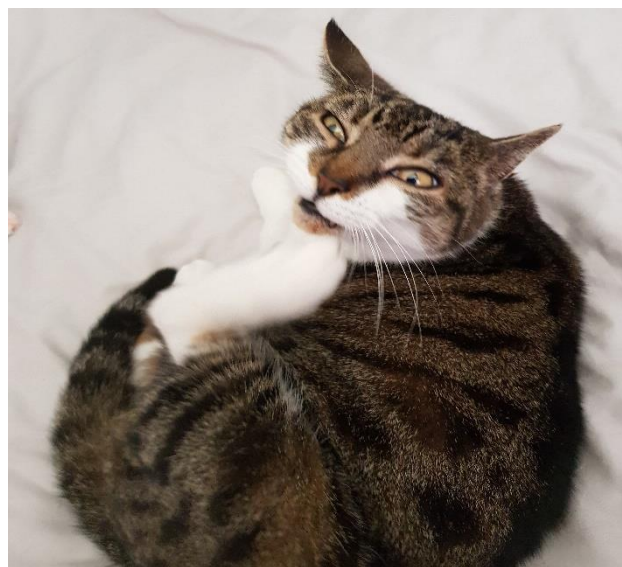
For the sauce, place the butter, sugar, treacle and optional alcohol into a saucepan and heat gently, stirring continuously, until it just about comes to a boil. Then add the cream, continuing to whisk until combined.

Pour half of the sauce over the cake and let it soak in for a minute, then serve. Pour the remaining sauce over each individual portion. Easily reheated in the microwave.

I did promise you cat pictures, did I not? Introducing Poppy. She's a middle-aged rescue moggy who won't be told that she's middle-aged – as evidenced by the playful (read: evil) eyes in this picture...



...the feline yoga demonstration she gives us in this picture...



...and the love affair she seems to be having with her toy mouse in this one (he's too young for you, Pops).



Tune in next month to see what else she gets up to!

JOKES OF THE MONTH

Easy:

What is the capital of Spain?

S.

Medium:

I went into a pet shop and bought a fish. The guy working there said "Do you want an aquarium?"

I replied, "I don't care what star sign it is!"

Hard:

A man from Ancient Greece walks into a tailor with a pair of trousers for him to repair. The tailor sizes them up and says, "Euripedes?" The man replied, "Yes, Eumenides?"

Let me know if you need any of these explaining to you! And do you have a joke for me? I love learning new jokes, so please feel free to DM me on my Twitter page, @kblakemanwriter, or my Instagram, @katherineblakemanwriter.

What I've Been Up To This Month...

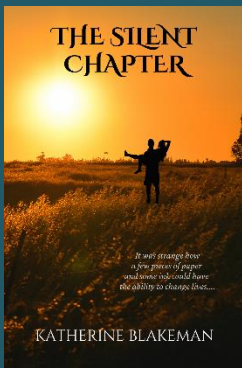
It didn't feel like it while I was at it, but I actually got a lot done in December!

November ended for me with a webinar run by the wonderful Sam Missingham and Katie Sadler of The Empowered Author. They gave some valuable tips and tricks on marketing a book, and the existence of this newsletter itself is down to them! Sam and Katie, I owe you!

December saw me throw myself into making my website functional, first and foremost, before I focused on my book itself. I uploaded it to KDP's formatting tool, checked it a few hundred times, and uploaded the manuscript to KDP. All good. Next came the cover, on which I'd been working for some weeks, from Canva. Then I ran into an issue. The entire cover, according to KDP, consisted of the bottom half of the front cover. I asked my family for help – they were fairly clueless – and appealed to the KDP Self-Publishing Titans Facebook group, who steered me back in the right direction. Then for the rest of December it was a matter of ordering proofs (several proofs, because the cover needed a little tinkering) and turning to my next venture, which was this newsletter! Oh, and setting up The Silent Chapter as an ebook, which you can now pre-order for £3.49 in the UK, and \$4.63 in the US. Just sayin'.

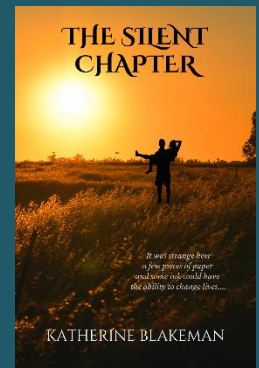
I also told my wider family about my book, over Christmas. They were impressed, but they insist on reading it when it's out. I mean, yay sales, but also is there anything more nerve-racking than having those close to you read your work...?

I'm looking forward to seeing what January brings! Lots of pre-orders, hopefully...



And now what we've all been waiting for...

The Prologue of The Silent Chapter



They were both as different as different could be, Patrick mused. He'd never really thought about how their lives had come together in the first place. Of course, it was all down to the war, but really, what were the chances of him turning up in her town, a mental and physical mess, a product of his past?

After all, their upbringings were so different. Hers was one of love, a warm little terraced house in Manchester, with a mother who worked in a fishmonger's and a father who flitted from job to job when his unfortunate criminal past caught up with him. It had been a financially unstable childhood, and having to leave school at ten for being too daring hadn't helped. She'd spent all day at home, with the same furniture and the same wallpaper and the same little dog, and yet she'd loved it regardless, and carried this attitude forward. Accepting her lot, with a smile on her face and an undying love for whoever was kind to her. She'd had to do that all her life, and maybe that was why she'd always been loved in return.

His upbringing was less rosy. Surrounded by silver, maybe, but it hadn't all been as bright. His mother had tried, bless her soul, but she'd been filtered, censored, beaten down by his father. Patrick shuddered at the thought, especially now he knew the whole story. He'd been barely allowed to leave the house as a child, and despite having a kindly nanny and a top-level tutor, he'd been bored. Maybe that was why that first war had appealed to him – some excitement at last! Sometimes he wished he'd never gone, for it had dictated his entire life – although ultimately for the better, he reminded himself.

They'd been pushed together by nothing but a taxi, really. The driver had simply deposited him in Monthill, Manchester and driven off. Somehow, he'd made his way to the nearest building – a posh restaurant – and the manager there had sorted him with accommodation and a job. That was where he had met her, although what had really secured a connection was her kind heart.

Whether he'd have gone ahead with it, he wasn't sure. But she'd rescued him, dragged him away, and from there they'd just carried on bonding. Twenty-seven years later, here they were. Older, wiser, far more so than they'd ever expected. They'd never really had any plans beyond marriage, let alone being such a major part of other people's lives (and not just those of their children).

But it hadn't been all plain sailing. Their story wasn't like the ones he had read so often in books, which generally spanned a few days, weeks or months and had a clear beginning, middle and end. Real life wasn't like that. If it was, surely he'd be on the easy stretch by now?

They'd had their ups and downs, but things would be different now. He'd said that before, he was painfully aware of that, but tonight was a night to lay the ghosts to rest. It was VE Day, a turning point for all those affected by the war, and he especially wanted it to be one for himself and his wife, who was currently resting her head on his shoulder. He'd done all he could – for that moment, they were just enjoying being together. Once her eyes were dry, they'd go back into the party, apologise for their brief absence, join in with the dancing again.

But for now, it was just them. Just Patrick and Dorothy. The way it would always be. He exhaled slowly, a breath he'd been holding lest it disturb her, and opened his eyes.

Ahead of them, in the neatly mowed grass at the bottom of the steps, he was aware of a growing light. Ah, there they were. He'd always known that they'd be back.