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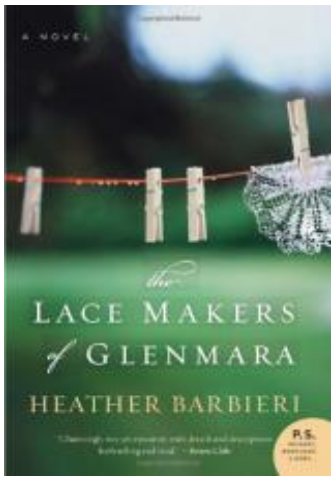
The Lace Makers of Glenmara

by Heather Barbieri



About the Book

"You can always start again," Kate Robinson's mother once told her, "all it takes is a new thread." Overwhelmed by heartbreak and loss, the struggling 26-year-old fashion designer follows her mother's advice and flees to her ancestral homeland of Ireland, hoping to break free of old patterns and reinvent herself.

She arrives on the west coast, in the seaside hamlet of Glenmara. In this charming, fading Gaelic village, Kate quickly develops a bond with members of the local lace-making society: Bernie, alone and yearning for a new purpose since the death of her beloved husband, John; Aileen, plagued by doubt, helplessly watching her teenage daughter grow distant; Moira, caught in a cycle of abuse and denial, stubbornly refusing help from those closest to her; Oona, in remission from breast cancer, secretly harboring misgivings about her marriage; Colleen, the leader of the group, worried about her fisherman husband, missing at sea. And outside this newfound circle is local artist Sullivan Deane, an enigmatic man trying to overcome a tragedy of his own.

Under Glenmara's spell, Kate finds the inspiration that has eluded her, and soon she and the lace makers are creating a line of exquisite lingerie. In their skilled hands, flowers, Celtic dragons, nymphs, fish, saints, kings, and queens come to life, rendered with painterly skill. The circle also offers them something more ---the strength to face their long-denied desires and fears. But not everyone welcomes Kate, and a series of unexpected events threatens to unravel everything the women have worked so hard for?

Discussion Guide

1. Women's friendships are central to The Lace Makers of Glenmara. Discuss the shifting alliances, confidences, and conflicts among Bernie, Kate, Aileen, Oona, Moira, and Colleen. Who is a good friend? Why?

2. Lace making has a major role in the novel. What role does the craft take in the women's lives? How does it shape

them? Change them?

3. Many small towns experience a tension between the modern world and tradition values. How does this dynamic affect Glenmara?

4. What are the characters' attitudes toward faith and religion? How is Catholicism treated in the novel?

5. To what extent is Father Byrne a villain? Is it possible to sympathize with the motivations and feelings behind his actions?

6. How does Kate's personal history affect her life and the choices she makes in Glenmara?

7. Sibling relationships can be difficult. Discuss what binds Aileen and Moira together, and what drives them apart. How does their relationship change over the course of the novel?

8. What is at the root of the conflicts between Aileen and her daughter, Rosheen? Do they see each other differently by the end of the book? Why?

9. The Lace Makers of Glenmara has a rich cast of minor characters. How do they contribute to the texture of the novel?

10. A spectrum of romantic relationships are portrayed in the book. What keeps Moira in her marriage? What strains and joys are present in the other women's relationships? Who has the best marriage?

11. Who is the happiest character in the novel? The most discontented? Why?

12. What do you imagine happens next between Kate and Sullivan?

Author Bio

The author of THE COTTAGE AT GLASS BEACH, THE LACEMAKERS OF GLENMARA and SNOW IN JULY, Heather Barbieri has won international prizes for her short fiction. She lives in Seattle with her husband and three children.

Critical Praise

"THE LACE MAKERS OF GLENMARA is a charming, moving story, written with a delicate touch."

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