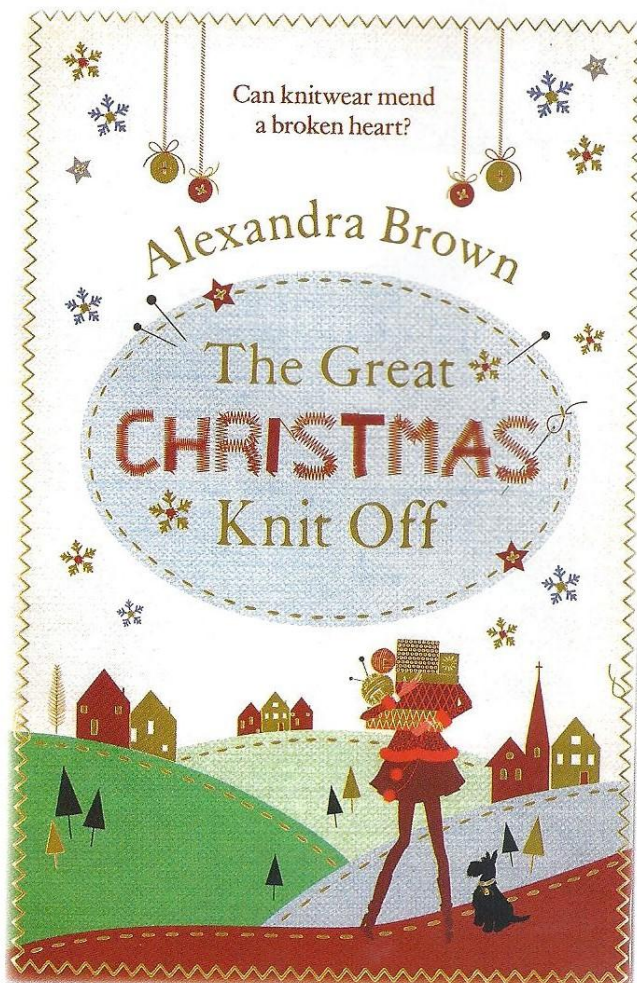


# The Great Christmas Knit Off

## by Alexandra Brown

Can knitwear mend a broken heart? Sybil intends to find out. Left heartbroken after a failed relationship and a run of bad luck, she decides to make some changes, with a few surprising results.

By Hayley Penrose



When it rains it pours, and Sybil is getting drenched from the clouds hanging over her life – it all started when her relationship fell apart and then proceeded to get worse. To escape her troubles Sybs, as she likes to be called, takes some time out and heads to the small country town of Tindledale with her Scotty dog, Basil. A far cry from London, Tindledale is the kind of place where everyone knows everyone and everything there is to know about them.

Intending to meet up with her best friend, Cher, who has just taken over the pub in town, Sybs is devastated when she learns Cher is out of town for the weekend. At a loss, she takes refuge at the local bed and breakfast and immerses herself in knitting. An innocent trip to the local haberdashery shop for supplies sets wheels in motion that changes the town of Tindledale, just in time for a Christmas miracle.

*The Great Christmas Knit Off* is a fun, uplifting story that will bring a smile to your face as you cringe and laugh alongside Sybs and her loveable friends. A true city girl, Sybs' first encounter with someone from the village is exceptionally awkward and highlights her London upbringing.

'... Are you a shepherd?' I say, and then instantly wish I could push the words back into my mouth. I sound ridiculous – from what I've already seen of Tindledale, it's obviously a bit behind the times but hardly biblical.'

Endearingly embarrassing, Sybs' trip to Tindledale begins a journey of self-discovery where she learns a lot about who she is and what she wants out of life. Guided by Cher and the loveable, quirky characters of Tindledale,



## LITERARY THREADS

Sybs begins to understand that you can't please everyone. The theatrical Lawrence, a tall 50-something, debonair man with a shaved head takes Sybs under his wing with the assistance of Ruby, owner of the vintage clothes store, and together they push Sybs to try new things and guide her out of her rut. When she meets Hettie, an older lady from the village who is facing some hard times, Sybs comes up with a plan to help her and in the process helps herself.

*The Great Christmas Knit Off* is the first book in a new series by author Alexandra Brown. Her first series, set in the fictitious Carrington's Department Store, was loved by readers around the world and this new series set in Tindledale is no different with the first instalment making the UK paperback bestseller list. The second book in the series follows a different group of Tindledale residents and is called *The Great Village Show*.

Alexandra began her writing career when she won a competition to be the City Girl columnist for *The London Paper*. It was supposed to be an anonymous, non-fiction expose of working in life in London, there was just one problem – Alexandra didn't actually work in the city! Her column became a satirical dairy account on her fictitious life as a banker. After two years in the role, Alexandra decided to leave and focus on her novel writing and here we are, although it wasn't a straightforward move into the writing world. Like Sybs in the book, Alexandra took an interesting path to get where she wanted to be. At 16 years old she ran away to London with dreams of being a writer until reality set in and she



Image: Andrew Roland

Red phone box and cottages in snow, Cotswolds, England.

realised she needed a 'proper job' and so she found herself working in an office for 15 years before leaving and starting to write the City Girl column.

Alexandra's witty column writing has carried over into her novels, making them hilariously entertaining while also capturing the emotion behind each character's actions. The characters are by no means two-dimensional, with each having their own back stories that impact the way they behave within the narrative. Hettie has a long and complicated history, while Doctor Darcy has had a more straightforward life (so far), but all of them have something to offer and help Sybs get to the point where she realises she has to take a stand and do what's right for her.

'I remember Nana telling me once that if you don't plan your own life then

someone else will plan it for you, and that's what I've allowed to happen, in a way, by not taking control, by shying away and letting things happen instead of facing them head on.'

And that's what she does. Sybs takes on all the issues that have been plaguing her for months, all the while knitting her heart out.

In acknowledgements Alexandra says she has wanted to write a book about knitting for 'a very long time, since childhood in fact.' As a child she would sit with her hands held up and her Nanny Edie would wind the wool around them. These are some of her fondest memories and her appreciation of the craft can be felt throughout her novel. That being said, it is not just a book for knitters. You do not have to know anything about the how-to; you don't even have to be a fan of the craft to appreciate the enthusiasm of the characters in *The Great Christmas Knit Off*.

Curl up in your favourite chair for the weekend to be transported to the snowy English countryside and enjoy the exploits of Sybs and the people of Tindledale.



Image: Gorbash Vanvara

Merry Christmas Scandinavian style seamless knitted pattern with deers.



Image: Mamont

Set of snowflakes for Christmas design.

*The Great Christmas Knit Off* is published by Harper Collins. Look for it at your local book retailer or online.