



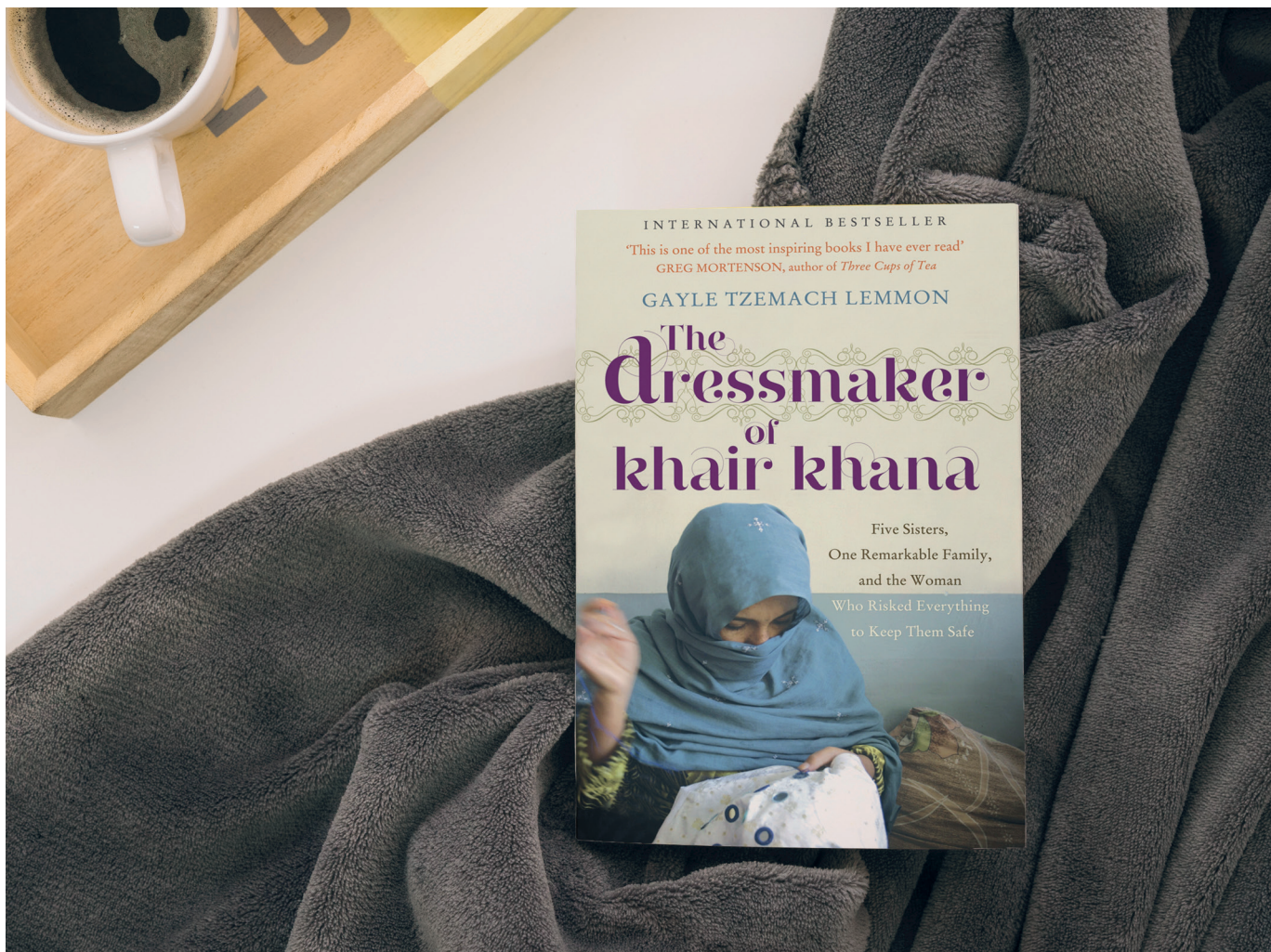
ABOUT  
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*True tales of the*  
**POWER OF  
SEWING**

*Discover the true-life stories that show us  
how sewing became a source of expression*





**W**e all know the many benefits that learning to sew has brought to our lives. For most of us, it's a hobby that enables us to express our creativity by creating beautiful individual garments for ourselves and our loved ones. Sewing increases our confidence through wearing clothes created to fit our individual bodies and personal style and tastes. For many of us, it's also an important hobby for our mental health and for establishing and maintaining friendships with like-minded individuals with whom we can share our sewing joys and sometimes fails!

For the sewists whose lives and sewing skills are explored in my following suggested reads, their sewing brings even more

to the (cutting) table. These are true life stories of needle and thread, which cover how sewing can be used as a means of resistance, a skill for survival and a form of freedom of expression, alongside providing hope, a voice or vital income.

### SEWING FOR SURVIVAL IN AFGHANISTAN

*The Dressmaker of Khair Khana*, Gayle Tzemach Lemmon, Harper Collins

With "Malika unfolded the fabric, which was really several panels of material that had been sewn together by hand", we are introduced to the first description of a hand-sewn garment in Gayle Tzemach Lemmon's *The Dressmaker of Khair Khana*. The description continues "The front section,

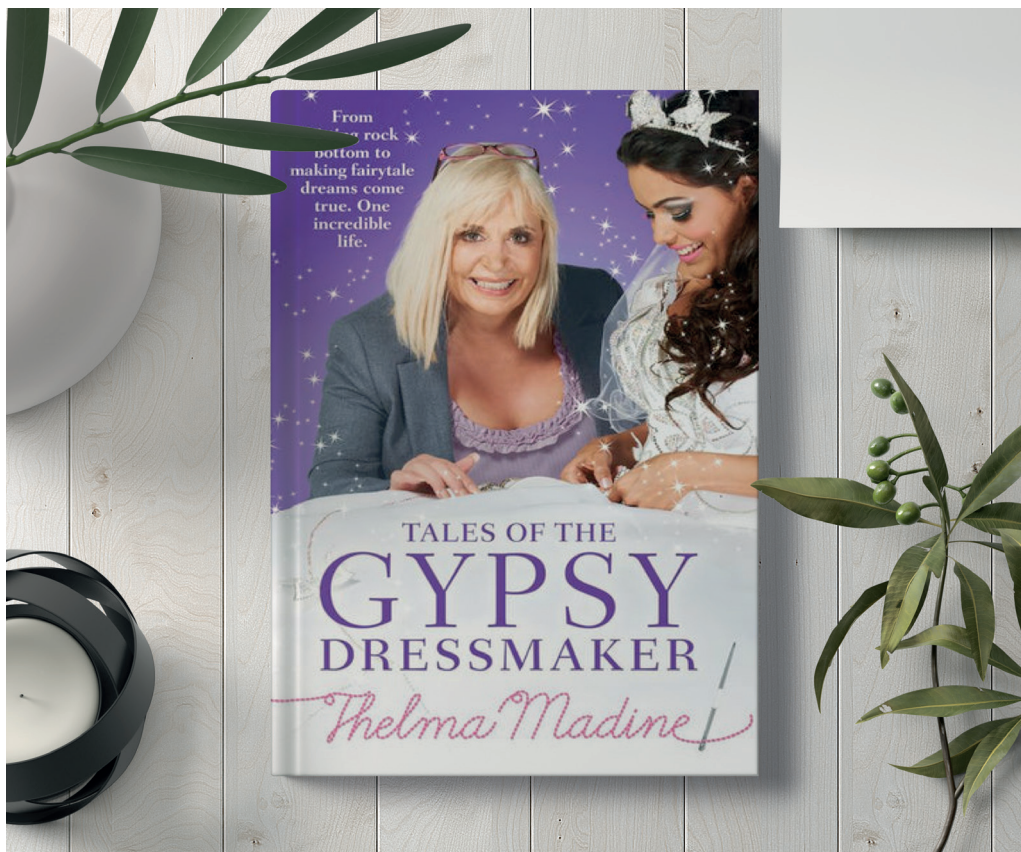
about a yard in length, was made of a light polyester with a finely embroidered border at the bottom and a cap at the top". Whilst descriptions of a finely embroidered border conjure up a vision of something of beauty, it is actually an Afghan woman revealing her first encounter with the chadri, the traditional full face and body covering Afghan women often wear, "which turned the world slightly blue".

Lemmon, an experienced reporter in Afghanistan, shares the true inspirational story of Kamila Sidiqi, a young Afghan woman she met in Kabul after the Taliban seized power in 1996. Kamila was left to fend for herself and five siblings whilst banned from school and confined to her home.

*The Dressmaker of Khair Khana* takes the reader to Afghanistan to travel on Kamila's journey. Her first step towards survival is to pick up a needle and thread and, as her journey continues, she establishes a clandestine sewing school to help save the lives of many others.

Risking her life every time she leaves home take and deliver orders, Kamila's story is one of bravery and resilience. It's incredible to read of the hours she and her students spent sewing in dark and cramped environments, whilst also caring for young children in dangerous conditions. Whilst the backdrop to their lives is one of horror, the empowering story of hope, faith and community is one of beauty.





memoir that followed.

Whilst the wedding dresses are undoubtedly an acquired taste, it's fascinating to read how Thelma transforms dreams into reality. The dream might be to walk down the aisle as "a swan pumpkin", and Thelma's sewing skills and feats of engineering make it happen. How do you support a 107-foot train on a 24" waist, sew a dress with 22 underskirts or create a dress weighing 25 stone? With every bride desiring a gown that's bigger and better than all previous gypsy wedding gowns, reading the demands and work involved is a dressmaker's dream.

The book also charts Thelma's own personal journey, including her financial difficulties, time spent in prison and relationship problems. It demonstrates how a strong work ethic and sewing skills turned her life around, making it an enthralling read for anyone who sews.

## TANTRUMS AND TIARAS

*Tales of the Gypsy Dressmaker*, Thelma Madine, Harper Collins

With more tulle, Duchess satin and diamantés than you can shake a sewing machine

at, Thelma Madine's *Tales of the Gypsy Dressmaker* is a fascinating insight into the work required behind the scenes to create eye-popping gypsy wedding gowns. Thelma's trials and

tribulations of turning near-impossible demands into bling-tastic unique gowns was documented on the hit TV show *Big Fat Gypsy Wedding* back in 2011 and *Tales of the Gypsy Dressmaker* is the

## STITCHED STORIES

*Threads of Life*, Clare Hunter, Sceptre

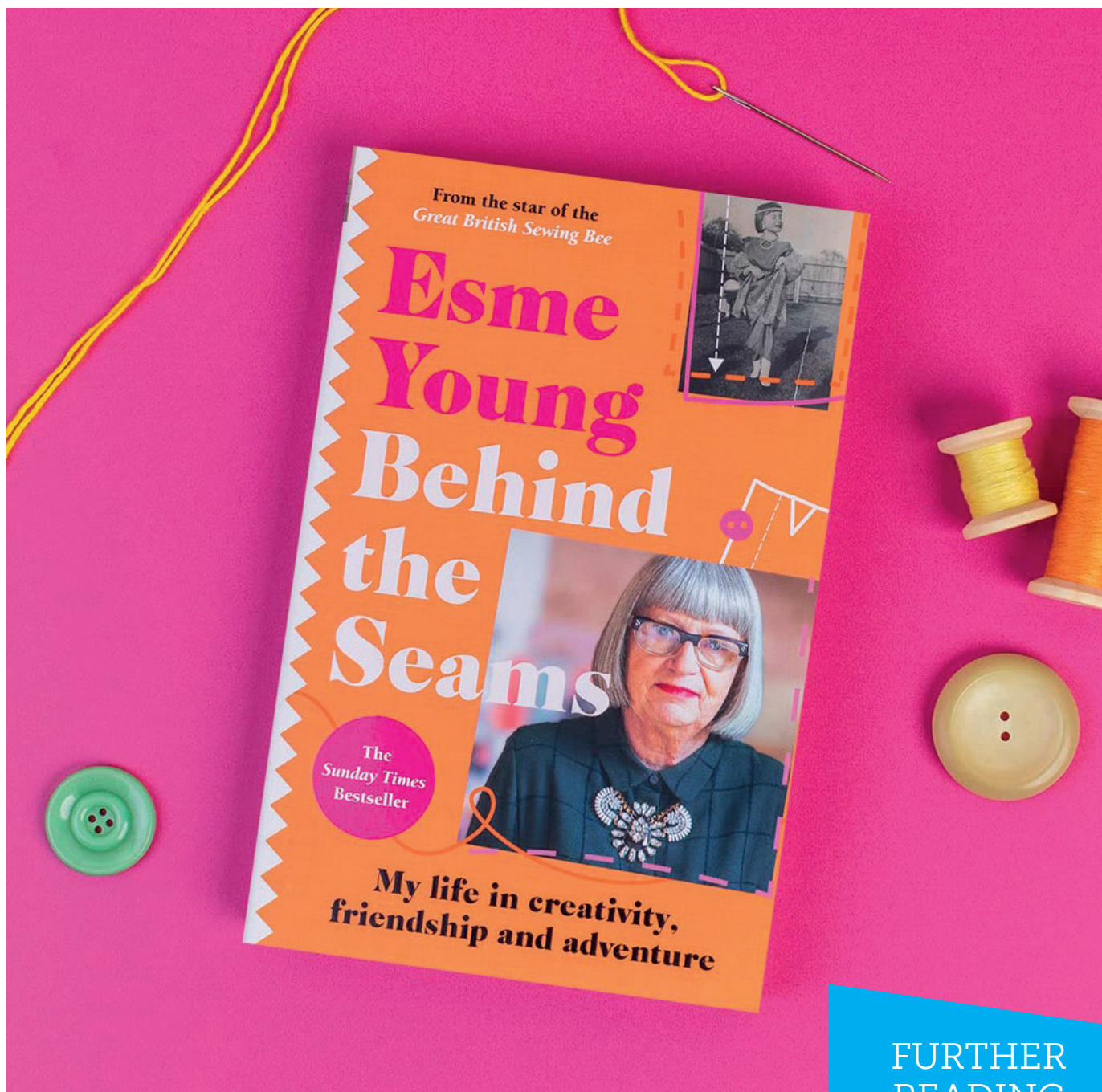
Telling "a history of the world through the eye of a needle", Clare Hunter's *Threads of Life* weaves her own story of a life sewing with the stories of others throughout history who have used sewing to tell their stories. This insightful, and often moving, book explores how sewing has been used to protest, connect and give voice and empowerment to so many people. As a banner maker, community textile artist and textile curator, Hunter has empowered many people to share their experiences through textiles and the book

includes their stories, as well as her own and those from the wider world.

Starting with the unknown women behind the political propaganda of the Bayeux Tapestry, Clare takes us on a journey through stitches and time. The journey includes tales of stitching from POW camps in Singapore, First World War soldiers with PTSD, Mary Queen of Scots, The Suffragettes, 1970s Argentina and modern-day Mexico and more. It's a beautiful homage to textiles, art and the power of sewing. It might move you to tears, and it will certainly confirm your love for sewing.







## THE DRESSMAKING JOURNEY OF A SEWING BEE JUDGE

***Behind the Seams*, Esme Young, Blink Publishing**

We all know Esme Young as a well-loved judge on *The Great British Sewing Bee*. Many of us know about her fashion design and teaching background, but how many know about her time as a squatter, boarding school student and young child affected by partial deafness? Esme Young shares her life

“in creativity, friendship and adventure” in her delightful memoir and it’s a must-read for all Sewing Bee fans.

With the sense of humour that we know and love, Esme shares the highs and lows of her life and career. It’s a delight to read of the clothing, creativity and energy behind her label Swanky Modes and her passion for teaching at St

Martins College, but it’s also the stories from her personal life that warm the heart. If tales of dressmaking, fashion and sewing success weren’t enough to keep a hobby sewist reader happy, there are also helpful sections on refashioning and pattern cutting. For those who didn’t get to read it on its first publication, its recent release in paperback is now your chance.

## FURTHER READING

Discover how Mary Queen of Scots used embroidery to give coded messages in *Embroidering Her Truth* by Clare Hunter. You can read more about this fascinating book in *Love Sewing* issue 107.

Lucy Adlington’s New York Times bestselling book *The Dressmakers of Auschwitz* uncovers the Upper Tailoring Studio in Auschwitz, where women used their sewing skills to survive the Holocaust. You can read more about this eye-opening book in *Love Sewing* issue 105.