

PRETTY NOSTALGIC BOOK Club



WORDS: SARAH BAKER
ILLUSTRATIONS: ROSIE MOORMAN



Pretty Nostalgic is launching a book club this issue and, as I'm sure you can imagine, it's going to be pretty unique.

The Pretty Nostalgic Book Club is all about community building and sharing. It's about championing local independent bookshops and libraries and establishing a network of society members who want to share their love of the classics, rekindle a passion for literature, rediscover the joy of browsing second hand bookshops and recommend well-

loved titles to each other.

Perhaps school put you off some of the traditional classics; maybe you had a bad experience with a difficult book you just couldn't get into. If so, The Pretty Nostalgic Book Club is here to help.

There's so much to learn from the untapped resource of second hand books hiding amidst the shelves of your local library or bookshop. These books are not simply part of social history, but full of possibility and, if you give them a try, who knows what

other treasures they'll lead you to.

I've chosen a few of my favourite wintery reads to get you started, and hopefully, inspired. Perhaps you'll discover something new, or see a classic that you might want to give a second chance. There are books to share with your kids and books you might want to pass onto friends. All can be found at your local library or independent bookshop. In fact they're sitting on the shelf, right now, calling out, just asking to be read... so what are you waiting for?

Christmas Pudding by Nancy Mitford

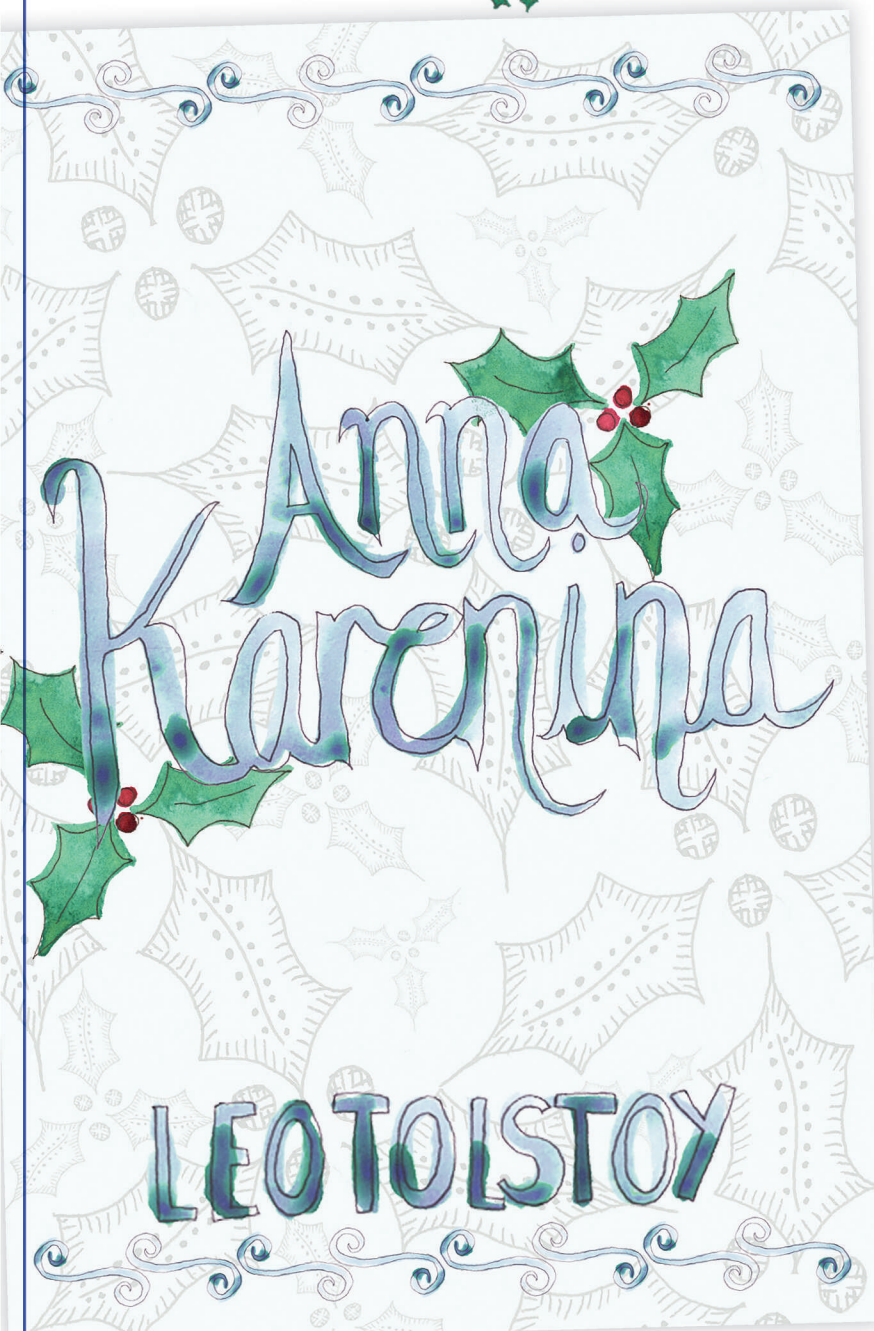
"The mere fact of being in love with somebody is a very good reason for not marrying them, in my opinion. It brings much more unhappiness than anything else."

I adore Nancy Mitford's books so it's no surprise that I'm including this sparkling, festive comedy in my list.

One of her two pre-war novels, first published in 1932, *Christmas Pudding* is a perfect seasonal treat. A comedy of errors set over the course of a few days in December, it includes a very colourful array of characters who converge on a country house in the shires for a Christmas house party.

It's a period piece, but it's also deliciously witty and takes a pop at Englishness, money, taste, class and relationships all at the same time. There's romance, there's intrigue and there are plenty of ridiculous characters with impossible names like Squibby, Biggy and Maydew. It's packed full of fun and whilst not an awful lot happens, it's a well-written jolly farce, a social comedy and an easy read. With lots of eccentric English Bright Young Things, think *Downton Abbey* with bite. Devour and enjoy.





Anna Karenina **by Leo Tolstoy**

“He stepped down, trying not to look long at her, as if she were the sun, yet he saw her, like the sun, even without looking.”

Now don't be put off by the 864 pages, nor be scared by the fact that this is a classic of Russian literature, or that it was declared the 'greatest novel ever written' by Time Magazine in 2007. Take a deep breath and relax because there are a whole host of reasons why you should give this book a go.

Primarily, it's a wonderful love story and yet marvellously tragic at the same time. Despite being published for the first time in 1877, the epic story explores love, divorce, infidelity, class, politics and society in a way that's still relevant today. It's a captivating book and your sympathy for certain characters changes as the story unfolds. A classic tale of human sensibilities; one that asks how far you'd go for love, it can be read over and over again, discovering new layers of meaning each time. It's also set amid the cold and snow-bound landscape of Russia, making it the perfect book to curl up with next to an open fire during the winter. Have a cup of hot chocolate to soothe and a box of tissues for all those tears at the ready.



The Night Before Christmas
by Clement C. Moore

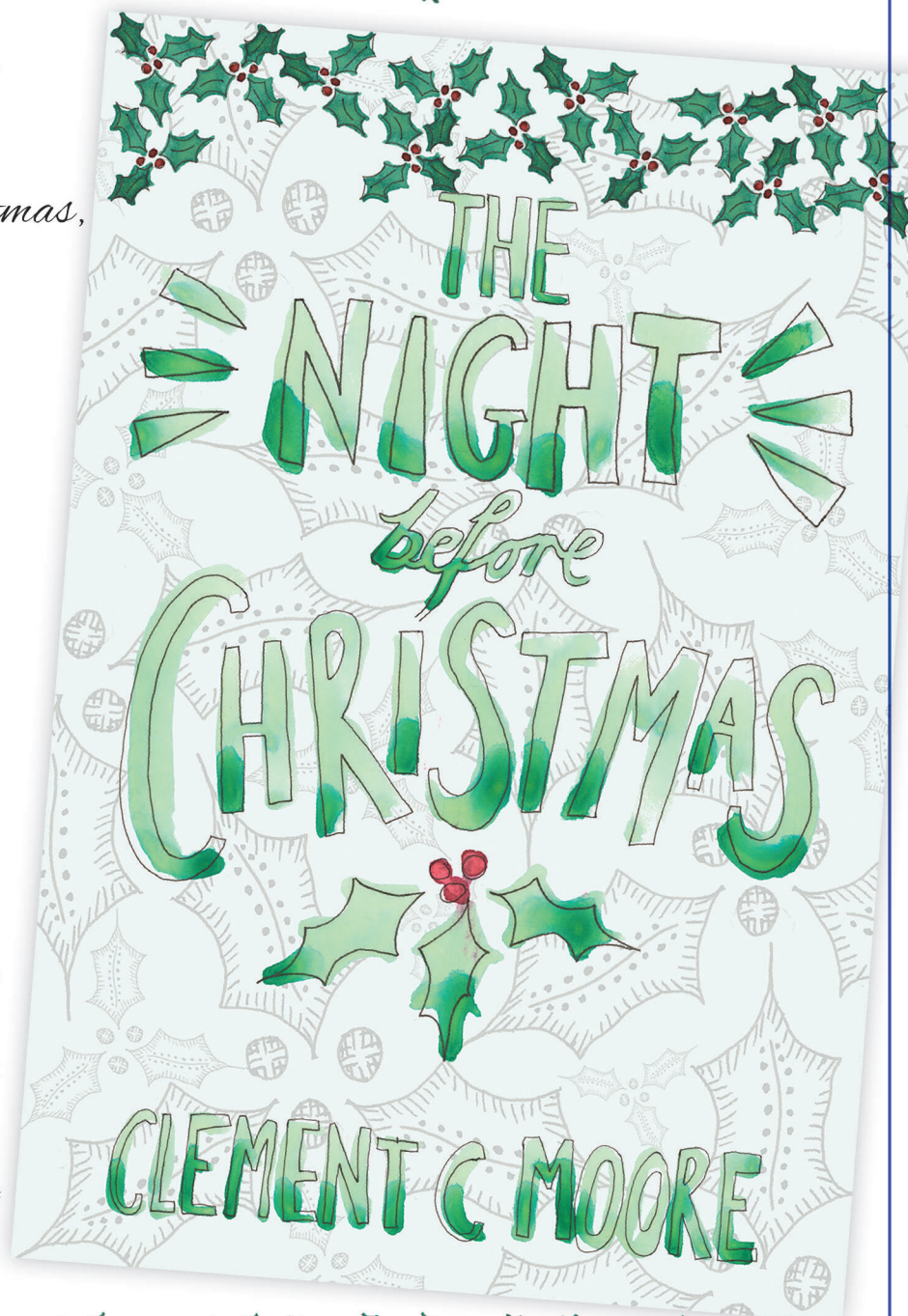
*‘Twas the night before Christmas,
when all through the house,
Not a creature was stirring,
not even a mouse.’*

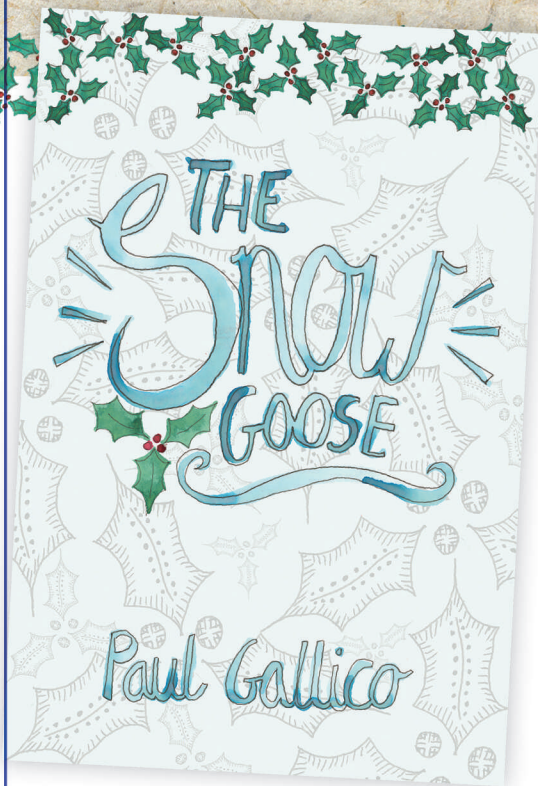
I know a lovely couple who have a great tradition; every Christmas Eve they take it in turns to read from this classic children’s book. The curtains are drawn, the dogs sit quietly at their feet and the book is lit only by the lights of the Christmas tree. Then they begin.

This is a magical book, perfect to read with or without kids, or dogs! Children enjoy the festive verse and will happily join in as it’s a great read-along with an easy rhythm. If they’re anything like me, aged six, they can act it out as a pre-Christmas play, complete with household accessories (tea towels, sheepskin rugs, and homemade cardboard angel wings – all optional.)

American author Clement Clarke Moore wrote the poem (also called ‘A Visit from St. Nicholas’) in 1822. First published anonymously on 23rd December 1823, it was an immediate success and is now a worldwide institution.

There are many versions of this classic, but all come with delightful illustrations that complement the story. My favourite has to be the one illustrated by Angela Barrett, as her snow covered world sparkles across the page creating a vivid atmosphere within the book. Why not let it become part of your Christmas Eve traditions?





The Snow Goose by Paul Gallico

*“This is her home now--
of her own free will.”*

One for children and adults alike, this is a heartbreakingly sad and sweet tale. I first came across it when it was recommended to me by my local bookshop and I've been giving out copies to friends ever since.

It's a story of love, loss and courage and, at only 55 pages, it's a very quick read if you're worried about tackling something too big. Set as the world hurtles towards World War II, it's a story

of an ugly yet kind man who falls in love with a pretty young girl who brings him an injured snow goose. I won't tell you what happens, but I sobbed at the ending, so that might give you a clue about the effect the book might have on you!

Although it is a children's book, adults will really appreciate the poignancy and depth of the story. It's romantic, beautiful, moving and is an absolute wartime classic.

The Box of Delights by John Masefield

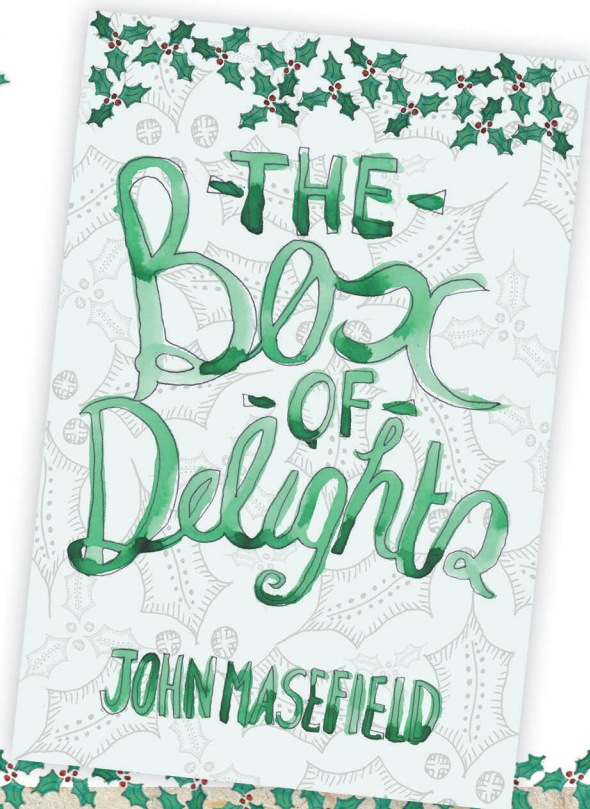
*“And now, Master Harker, now that the wolves are running,
perhaps you could do something to stop their Bite?”*

I have to admit that this is my all-time favourite children's book – ever. In fact I knew my other half was 'the one' when he presented me with a first edition for my birthday during our first year together.

You might have come across it before (it was first published in 1935), it might be an old childhood favourite or you might have seen the kooky BBC dramatized version first shown in the 1980s (which I also love). Either way, I recommend it most highly for a deliciously dark,

Christmassy, winter read.

It charts the adventures of Kay Harker, a boy entrusted with the Box of Delights by a magical old man. But Kay is in danger from the dastardly Abner Brown who will stop at nothing to possess the box. Add cars that turn into aeroplanes, snowy landscapes, well stocked larders, wolves and pirate rats, top with a folklorish and mythological flavour, and you have a classic good versus evil story that's magical, fantastical and an absolute must read.





The Greatest Gift
by Philip Van Doren Stern

“I want to live again. I want to live again. I want to live again. Please God, let me live again.”

You'll know this book already even if you haven't read it, because it's the original short story that inspired the famous 1946 film, 'It's a Wonderful Life'. This tale is a great read, and a worthy book-end to my list.

As the story goes, George Pratt, depressed and contemplating suicide, is shown how his community would have turned out if he'd never been born. Although short, at 30 pages and therefore a swift read, it's perfect for the season, especially for those folks who've forgotten their seasonal joy. A tale for all time, it's one that reminds us our lives touch many people, often unknowingly, and we should never consider ourselves useless. If you're lucky enough to find an original illustrated version then you have an absolutely beautiful classic on your hands. Read it and weep – then hug your family.

So what do you think? Do you agree with my suggestions? Have you read any of the above already, or have I inspired you to get rummaging in your nearest library or bookshop for the ultimate wintery read? Get in touch and let us know.

Whether you're a second hand bookshop, a library, or an individual, and you'd like to join the Pretty Nostalgic Book Club, look out for more information in the newsletter on how you can get involved. We'll be telling you how to sign up, how to set up a local group of your own and how to join the exclusive Facebook group, where you can talk to other likeminded society members about your favourite vintage classics.

