

BOOK CLUB KIT

LETTER FROM THE AUTHOR

Dear reader,

Thank you so much for picking up *Always, in December*. Having a debut novel out in the world is so special, and I'm beyond thrilled that it's found its way into your hands.

Writing *Always, in December* was a bit of an emotional rollercoaster for me. I'm a terribly emotional person—I cry at adverts, at things I see on the news, at the thought of something that may or may not happen . . . I also laugh easily (I'm often told how inappropriately loud my laugh is) and am a comedian's best friend because I find so many things genuinely funny. For this book, I had to tap into it all—the sad parts of life, the bits that make you laugh, as well as that romantic, sweeping feeling of falling in love.

Always, in December came out of a very early conversation, in a café in London, about grief. I'd lost a close friend of mine about a year before. She was twenty-eight, and she passed away unexpectedly. She was one of the best people I've ever met—warm, funny, so beautifully kind. It was something that took—and still takes—a lot of processing, and it got me thinking about all the different types of grief, and how we manage them. How we have to learn to live with grief, as well as trying to find a way to celebrate the person we lost. In part, that formed the idea behind *Always, in December*, as Josie and Max are two very different people dealing with two very different kinds of grief when they first meet—and that's something they'll have to process over the course of the novel.

The story begins and ends at Christmas, though its events span the whole year. I love so much about Christmas—I love (love!) the food. I love mulled wine. I love the excuse to get together and see the people who mean the most to you. But I'm also aware that Christmas can be such a difficult time for some people—it is not a happy time for everyone and having the expectation that you *should* be happy makes things all the harder. In *Always, in December*, Josie is still struggling after losing her parents as a child, and that affects that way she thinks about Christmas. I lost my mum when I was seven—not at Christmas, and not in the way that Josie lost her parents, but I think it affected my feelings about Christmas, birthdays, and special occasions when I was growing up: all those occasions where you end up taking stock of your life, or where the absence of lost loved ones is particularly felt. This is something which affects Josie, particularly at the beginning of the novel, and I hope I've captured it in a way that is representative but not overpowering.

That all potentially sounds very grim and I don't mean it to! Whilst the sparking-off point might have been a conversation about grief, this novel is very much about love. It is the story of two people who meet, maybe at the wrong time, but who can't help being drawn to one another despite that. It's a story of that once-in-a-lifetime connection, which can make you giddy but is never without its share of heartbreak.

I really hope you enjoy the book. I hope it allows you to escape into Josie and Max's world, both at Christmas and beyond, and feel the joy of new love with them. I hope it makes you smile, and I'm sorry if it makes you cry—though I hope that, ultimately, it is still uplifting.

I loved writing it, so if you do enjoy all, or just a part of it, then I'd love to hear from you—hearing from real-life people who are actually reading the book makes it so worth the ups and downs along the way.

Thank you, dear reader, and over to you.
Emily X

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why do you think Josie writes a letter to her parents every year?
2. Max and Josie literally crash into each other at their first meeting. Do you think it was fate?
3. Describe Josie's relationship with Bia. How does it differ from her relationship with her grandparents? What do you think she gets from each support system?
4. What do Max and Josie each get out of their relationship? Does this change throughout the novel?
5. How did you feel about Josie's decision to move to NYC with Oliver? What would you have done in her shoes?
6. Describe Josie's relationship with Erin. Do you think they ultimately see themselves as friends?
7. Why do you think Max is able to tell Erin the things he can't seem to bring himself to say to Josie?
8. Despite his reasons for staying away, what ultimately persuades Max to return to Josie?
9. Why is Josie able to follow through on her heart's desire to go Botswana only *after* learning the truth about Max and not before?
10. Do you agree with Max's decision not to tell Josie the whole truth? How might you have handled the situation if you were Max? If you were Josie?
11. *Always, In December* is filled with multiple themes—grief and loss, love and attraction, secrecy and connection. Is there a theme that resonates most with you? Explain.
12. What do you think of the ending? Did it surprise you? Why or why not?
13. What motivates Josie to write the letter to Max?
14. Where do you think life will take Josie? What kind of future do you imagine for her in five years?
15. If *Always, in December* was made into a television series or movie, who would you cast to play Josie and Max?

LETTER PROMPT

Write a letter to someone. Someone who means something to you. Maybe someone who is no longer here—or someone who used to be a part of your life. What would you say to them? What would you share about your life now? How would you reflect on your time together?



PLAYLIST

[CLICK HERE TO LISTEN TO THE PLAYLIST ON SPOTIFY](#)

“All I Want for Christmas is You” by Mariah Carey

“Last Christmas” by Wham!

“Santa Tell Me” by Ariana Grande

“I’ll Be Home for Christmas” by Bing Crosby

“Underneath the Tree” by Kelly Clarkson

“It’s Beginning to Look a Lot Like Christmas” by Michael Bublé

“What Christmas Means To Me” by Stevie Wonder

“Bring Me Love” by John Legend

“Christmas (Baby Please Come Home)” by Mariah Carey

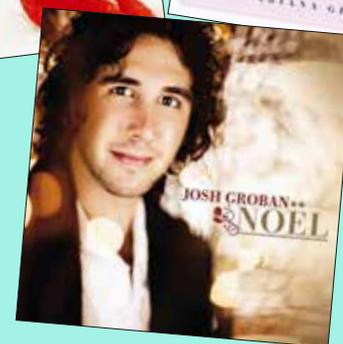
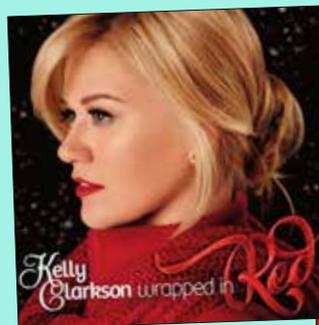
“Christmas Song” by Josh Groban

“River” by Joni Mitchell

“The Winter Song” by Leslie Odom Jr.

“Let It Snow! Let It Snow! Let It Snow!” by Frank Sinatra

“Grown-Up Christmas List” by Amy Grant



COCKTAILS



Mulled Wine

Enjoy a cup of mulled wine and imagine taking a stroll with Josie and Max through a London Christmas Market

INGREDIENTS

- 1 (750 ml.) bottle red wine
- 1 orange, sliced into rounds, plus more for garnish
- 6 whole cloves
- 3 cinnamon sticks, plus more for garnish
- 3 star anise
- ¼ cup honey
- ½ cup brandy

DIRECTIONS

In a medium saucepan over medium heat, combine all ingredients. Bring to a simmer not a boil, then reduce heat to medium-low. Simmer gently over low heat for 10 minutes. Serve warm and garnish with more citrus slices and cinnamon sticks.

Recipe credit: delish.com/cooking/recipe-ideas/a23364385/mulled-wine-recipe

COCKTAILS



Mulled Gin

Josie and Max just had to try it. Now you can too!

INGREDIENTS

100 ml gin
400 ml apple juice
½ lemon, sliced
1 bay leaf
4 cloves
2 cardamom pods, lightly crushed
1 small cinnamon stick
3 juniper berries, lightly crushed
½ tsp. coriander seeds
1 tsp. runny honey
For the garnish
4 bay leaves
2 lemon slices, halved
Cherries

DIRECTIONS

Divide the gin between four small heatproof glasses or teacups.

Tip the apple juice into a saucepan with the rest of the ingredients. Heat gently until simmering, then strain into a jug. Pour the mulled apple juice into the glasses with the gin and stir gently to combine.

Garnish each glass with a bay leaf and half a lemon slice and serve warm. Add a garnish of cherries to be more like Josie and Max!

Recipe credit: bbcgoodfood.com/recipes/mulled-gin