



The Christmas Lights

Karen Swan

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Indulge in the perfect winter's day treat and escape to the snow-fringed fjords of Norway with *The Christmas Lights*, a delicious tale full of drama and mystery, heartache and hope by *Sunday Times* bestseller Karen Swan.

Bo lives a life most people can only dream of. She and her boyfriend Zac are paid to travel the globe, sharing their adventures with their online followers. And when Zac proposes, Bo's happiness is complete.

With Christmas coming up, Bo can't wait to head to the snow-fringed fjords of Norway. Arriving at the picturesque and remote hillside farmhouse that will be their home for the next few weeks, Bo's determined to enjoy a romantic Christmas under the Northern Lights. Everything should be perfect

But the mountains hold secrets from the past and as temperatures plunge and tensions rise, Bo must face up to the fact that a life which looks perfect to the outside world may not be the life she should be living...

What readers are saying:

'This is a **perfect winter's day read**, that will have you utterly absorbed...'

'Full of **intrigue, secrets, heartbreak, love**'

'If you're after a book with a **truly Christmas feel**, full of drama, mystery, heart and hope then *The Christmas Lights* is a book for you'

'Crammed with **love, heartbreak and powerful secrets** this Christmas story with substance is not to be missed!'

'*The Christmas Lights* is the **perfect Christmas read** . . . The festive season can now commence!'

The Christmas Lights Details

Date : Published November 1st 2018 by Pan

ISBN :

Author : Karen Swan

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Genre : Holiday, Christmas, Romance, Womens Fiction, Chick Lit, Fiction, Contemporary

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From Reader Review The Christmas Lights for online ebook

Karen Whittard says

Karen swan is another one of those authors that I simply have to read at Christmas. Because her books always bring the magic and sparkle of the Christmas count down even more magical. This book is set in Norway a place that I would love to go to. To go and see the magestic northern lights.

December 2018, and free-spirited influencers Bo Loxley and her partner Zac are living a life of wanderlust, travelling the globe and sharing their adventures with their millions of fans.

Booked to spend Christmas in the Norwegian fjords, they set up home in a remote farm owned by enigmatic mountain guide Anders and his fierce grandmother Signy. Surrounded by snowy peaks and frozen falls, everything should be perfect. But the camera can lie and with every new post, the 'perfect' life Zac and Bo are portraying is diverging from the truth.

Something Bo can't explain is wrong at the very heart of their lives and Anders is the only person who'll listen.

June 1936, and fourteen-year old Signy is sent with her sister and village friends to the summer pastures to work as milkmaids, protecting the herd that will sustain the farm through the long, winter months. But miles from home and away from the safety of their families, threat begins to lurk in friendly faces . . .

The mountains keep secrets - Signy knows this better than anyone - and as Bo's life begins to spiral she is forced, like the old woman before her, to question who is friend and who is foe.

Pauline says

The Christmas Lights by Karen Swan is the story of Bo and Zac who travel the world funded by advertisers for their Instagram blog.

They are pampered, spoilt and unlikeable. They are accompanied by their photographer wherever they go and he does not like them doing anything without him.

I was invited to read this book by the publishers but unfortunately I just couldn't get into the story. Thank you to NetGalley and Pan Macmillan for my e-copy in exchange for an honest review.

Aoife says

I received a free digital copy of this book from the publishers/author via NetGalley in exchange for an honest review.

Bo Huxley and her boyfriend Zac are living what many would deem the dream life - travelling the world whilst in love, and getting paid by big brands to do it due to their massive social media following. When the couple, and their photographer/manager Lenny decide to stay in a remote farm in Norway for Christmas, Bo suddenly begins to doubt the life she's leading, and the people and traumas she's been trying to leave behind. Suddenly the feeling of 'home' begins to mean brand new things to Bo.

This was a really interesting read, and I really enjoyed seeing how Karen Swan played around with the relatively new phenomenon of social media influencers on a massive scale. There's been many books in the past focusing on bloggers but I feel like the topic of influencers is still something that's only starting to creep into novels (another example would be Holly Bourne's *How Do You Like Me Now?*), and Karen Swan did it in a great way.

Bo is a rather complex character - she seems to have her head screwed on straight, and isn't conceited or self-important in any way despite clearly being slightly famous, and extremely good-looking. She's actually on the shy side, and it's this that makes her more relatable to the reading my opinion. She knows how to pose for the camera but that doesn't mean she's happy posing for a million selfies when cornered at a Christmas market.

The Christmas Lights threw up some interesting questions around social media - the intensity and addiction of it, as well as the safety issues becoming famous on it can bring up. I think it serves some lessons in terms of geolocation and tagging oneself in places easily found, though I'm not sure if the readership of this book might learn some lessons from it, the way younger readers, who often need the stark reality of social media dangers displayed to them, would.

I will say that I guessed a lot of what was going to happen in this book, and I did feel like it was a bit long for a contemporary novel. The flashbacks to 1936 with Signe were interesting for a background to the Norwegian farm area Bo was staying in, and Signe's older character though I'm not sure how much it brought to the story, as sometimes switching timelines like that jarred me out of the tale.

This was mostly a fun, entertaining read though and I do enjoy Karen Swan's writing and characters.

Suzanne Waters says

What is there to say, but this book was a festive treat. Karen Swan really knows how to write about Christmas. I liked this book so much I bought the paperback.

Zoe says

Alluring, mysterious, and delightfully festive!

The Christmas Lights is an atmospheric, compelling tale set in Norway during 1936, as well as the present day, and is told from two different perspectives. Bo, a young reality star unnerved by an obsessed, online stalker and struggling to enjoy a life that lacks privacy, and Signy a sweet, country girl who learns at a young age the dangers that hide on the hills she loves and amongst the animals that grace them.

The writing is smooth, crisp, and vivid. The characters are a mix of kind, endearing, self-indulgent, and exasperating. And the plot is an entertaining mix of heart, hope, angst, mystery, and drama.

The Christmas Lights is, ultimately, a story about relationships, adventure, heartbreak, secrets, expectations, love, obsession, and discovering one's true self that highlights just how susceptible and vulnerable social media can make us. It's a beautiful, picture postcard of the frozen terrain, rugged mountains, and breathtaking Northern Lights of the fjords of Norway, and is a charming holiday read complete with a sliver of mystique.

Thank you to Publishers Group Canada for providing me with a copy in exchange for an honest review.

Paromjit says

This is the 1st book I have read by Karen Swan, and this is a rather dark festive read set in the beautiful wintry location of Norway, with its stunning icy fjords, frozen waterfalls and brooding dangerous mountains. It is an ideal, remote and off the beaten track place for social media stars, beautiful Amy 'Bo' Loxley and Kiwi Zac Austen with their 9+ million followers. They are the Wanderlusts, who make a profitable living by updating their blog and Instagram accounts on a daily basis, with photographs of themselves constantly throughout the day, of their personal lives and adventures in exotic locations. They rely on sponsorship to live the dream life, they are ostensibly the perfect couple, a threesome with Lenny, their organiser, planner and photographer. After a trip to Samoa in the South Pacific, they have chosen to spend Christmas on a remote shelf farm with breathtaking views that stun people into silence.

Bo is having niggles about her and Zac's lifestyle, specifically about the lack of privacy in their personal lives, but she is struggling to be heard by Zac and Lenny who are looking to increase their following. Bo finds herself getting closer to 96 year old Signy, the owner of the shelf farm, a mischievous woman who was part of a group of women and girls working away from their families as milkmaids in the summer pastures in 1936, looking after the herds so that their farms will survive the winter months. With a narrative that goes back and forth in time, there are frighteningly common threads of threat and danger in the past and the present. As Bo's life begin to spiral out of control, she is left to confide in Anders, Signy's taciturn grandson. Not knowing who she can trust, Bo is beginning to think the unthinkable, is it possible the life she has been living is no longer a perfect fit for her?

Karen Swan writes a festive read of intrigue, personal relationships, in a modern contemporary setting of the problems of living through social media and the issues that this raises. The characters of Bo and Zac come across as shallow and unlikeable, driven by the number of followers and likes they get and the agenda of their corporate sponsors. That this is no way to live an authentic life slowly dawns on Bo, and she begins to acquire the depths in character that make her a more interesting person. Swan does an excellent job in capturing the lives and thinking behind the phenomenon of reality stars and the inherent threats of social media, a world that is not as benign as it might appear. If you are looking for more demanding festive reading fare, then this might just be for you. Many thanks to Pan Macmillan for an ARC.

Susan says

Karen Swan is one of my auto-buy authors. If her name is on, it I'll read it. This has never steered me wrong, except with her last book which just wasn't for me. Thankfully, The Christmas Lights is the Karen Swan I know and love! The Norwegian setting was a huge draw for me, especially as that is where the historical portions of the story are set. I am fascinated by the history of the region and what it was like for my ancestors. My great-grandfather was Norwegian and I kind of feel a connection to the lifestyle and the landscape. I live in the Canadian Rockies so it's not too far off! I had a good feeling that I was really going to enjoy this book and it ended up being my favourite of her books yet!

At the risk of sounding like a miserable Grinch, I don't love Christmas, I don't love romance and at first glance those two things seem to be the core of this book. I find there's a lot more depth than just these superficial elements. This story, like all her other books, is actually is more about a woman finding her strength and learning to follow the path that leads to the life she wants, even if she doesn't know it at first.

Strong female characters are stock in trade for Swan's books and while Bo starts out not entirely likable and a bit silly and weak-willed, she finds her voice and comes out the other side. Of course this is a romance so she doesn't come out alone! I won't give away any spoilers but I feel like she chose the right man and the right lifestyle.

Signy is the other main character and she features in both the historical sections and the present. She seems to be a totally different type of person from Bo but as the story progresses they find a lot in common. The historical storyline was absolutely beautiful and horrifically brutal at the same time. Seeing Signy as a young girl and the trials she faced fleshed out her character and helped me understand her as an old woman. If possible I loved her even more after learning her story! Weaving in the story of her grandson and his rocky journey towards happiness was very touching and eventually fulfilling. Overall, the ending is a real tear-jerker but a triumphant one. Just like a good romance should be, it's ultimately a happy ending. Dang, does this mean I like romance now? My cold, dead heart must have grown two sizes today. Thank Karen Swan for taking the humbug and the grouchiness out of this Grinch. If she can warm my heart she can charm anyone!

Thank you to Pan Macmillan for providing an Electronic Advance Reader Copy via NetGalley for review.

Louise Wilson says

Set in the scenic Fjords of Norway. It's December 2018 and Bo Loxley and her partner Zac are living the life of the wanderlust, traveling the globe and sharing their adventures with their millions of fans. They are a travel Instagram brand who have over 9 million followers. They travel with their cameraman and they are known as the wanderlusts. They spend Christmas in a remote farm owned by an enigmatic mountain guide Anders, and his grandmother Signy. We are also told off Signy when she was 14 and was sent with her sister and their village friends to work the summer as milkmaids.

I did not like the characters Bo and Zac. You do get a real feel for the location with some of their customs in the run up to Christmas. Signy has secrets that go back 80 years. The story takes us back to the 1930's and the present day. Will Bo and Zac's relationship survive? As Bo's life begins to spiral, she is forced to question who is her friend and who is her foe.

I would like to thank NetGalley, Pan MacMillan and the author Karen Swan for my ARC in exchange for an honest review.

Agi says

"The Christmas Lights", set in the beautiful and raw Norway, introduces us to a bunch of different characters. Bo and Zac are living the dream life, being the Wanderlusts who share their adventures on Instagram with their 9 + million followers. There is also Lenny, their photographer and manager who organizes all the trips and schedules. After their recent trip to Samoa they are travelling to the remote shelf farm in Norway to spend Christmas there. The owner of the farm is Signy - an older woman who's going to change the lives of the threesome.

As usual, this book also starts with a chapter set in the past that ends with a cliffhanger and the story slowly unfolds, brilliantly and cleverly intertwined with this of Bo and Zac's. This was the story of Signy, Anders's

grandmother, the owner of the shelf farm where our trio is staying. Back in 1936, Signy has experienced unforgettable summer when she worked with other girls as milkmaids, away from their families, there where the pastures were the greenest. I loved how the author put us up to different kinds of danger with those two subplots, and I must say that both of them had me on my tenterhooks.

I've mentioned it thousand times already, and I'll repeat myself, that Karen Swan is my auto - buy author. What I absolutely adore in her books is the fact that her characters are so diverse, so different to each other, and their jobs are always unusual. This time Bo and Zac turned their lifestyles into job, they're already a brand with over 9 million followers on Instagram. They walk the earth together with their photographer and their lives look so colourful, inspirational and perfect on photos, as they visit places that you won't find on the tourist maps, spending at least a month or longer at their chosen place, to get the feeling of it, to turn into locals, as they don't want to be perceived as the usual tourists. No, they're Wanderlusters and they want to experience authenticity. But - are their lives really so perfect? Without cracks? The author has so gently hinted that Bo's life is getting out of her control, and yes, I immediately fell for Bo, I liked her and didn't want anything bad happen to her. The way she realises there is so much more to life than followers and sponsors makes her character so much more believable. And also, what made me like her even more is the fact that I have a feeling that at the end she's chosen the right things for her. It hurt to see that she can't trust anybody, how she tried to be heard by those closest to her and how she was left alone in all of this. That is, alone but for Anders, but it turns out that he also has a terrible secret - is there a single person that Bo can trust, who would understand her?

It was a read with a rather slow pace but there was not a single moment that it felt flat or uninteresting for me. On the other hand, I enjoyed the descriptions of the setting, the harsh nature of Norway, so raw and virginal and beautiful - yes, Karen Swan is the queen of choosing the most beautiful settings for her novels, and what I love is the fact that they're not fictional places. They're secluded, solitary but real and simply gorgeous. Another bonus is that she always adds truly interesting facts about those places and I couldn't help but googled shelf farms - they're brilliant. The setting is just fantastic and the author eloquently and vividly brings all the places she writes about to life. I've read some books set in Norway, and also some describing the Northern Lights but "The Christmas Lights" overdoes them all with its descriptions, the gorgeous, wild and austere nature of Norway.

I, however, immediately guess the "who". For me it was obvious and there was no other option, even if the author has tried a little to put wool over our eyes at the end, trying to complicate things a little, to point us in other directions, but this is the one thing that she didn't manage. Was it disappointment? To be honest, no. Not at all.

Of course we can't forget the big elephant in the room - Karen Swan writes about the problems and dangers of living through social media, and I liked the way she has tackled this issue. We have Zac and Lenny, who live only through the numbers of followers and nothing is impossible for them, no matter how dangerous it is. Then we have Bo, whose eyes start to open and she starts to notice the dangers and issues of being in the centre of attention. And we have Anders, whose idea of living is totally different. Yes, Zac and Lenny come across a little obsessed and shallow, at least for me, as I do realise that the grass is not always greener on the other side and there are limits for what you can do to increase the number of your followers and your sponsors.

"The Christmas Lights" was a story full of action, hiking, gorgeous settings and characters full of personality - characters that are annoying, that have their flaws and secrets which only makes them much more interesting and believable. The author has also brought closer the Norwegian history and its present, traditions, habits, the language, food and drink. There was intrigue, danger and it was festive enough to get in the spirit of Christmas, this all brought to life through Karen Swan's vivid, alluring and engaging writing style. A novel about relationships, loss, grief, love and adventures, living on the edge, full of heartbreak and hope. It's much more than about finding your own strength, it shows that everything is possible, and it had

me totally and completely hooked. Highly recommended!

Copy provided by the publisher in return for an honest review.

Booksandchinooks (Laurie) says

Karen Swan always writes such beautiful atmospheric books. Speaking of beautiful - you could buy this book just for the amazing cover alone. This story is set in Norway and all the dazzling scenery that encompasses. The book is set in two time periods, 1936 and present day. Bo and Zac are reality stars that document their life traveling the world. Upon their arrival in Norway we meet another central character in the book, Signy. Bo starts to analyze her life as events begin to make her question her choices and we follow along as she makes important decisions. Wonderfully written!! Another great book by this author.

Many thanks to PGC Books for my free copy for review.

Veronica ?? says

Great page turner about a couple who became Instagram influencers living their lives in front of 9 million followers.

Full review to follow.

Brenda says

From the sunshine of the South Pacific to the ice and snow of winter in Norway, Bo Loxley, her partner Zac and photographer Lenny kept the Instagram fans delighted. The hundreds of thousands of followers were growing daily – even hourly – and the companies with the brand names that Bo and Zac wore were even happier. Money was flowing; adrenalin was as well – but where was Bo and Zac’s privacy? For some reason, Bo was feeling a little disgruntled and overwhelmed. When their guide, Anders, took them to the cottage on the remote icy shelf owned by his ninety-six-year-old grandmother Signy, Bo realized the conditions they were going to live in were vastly different from their last accommodation. But the scenery was magnificent...

1936 and Signy was a fourteen-year-old girl who was having her first summer caring for the goats at the family’s summer farm. She was with her sister and other village girls – Signy was the youngest and filled with excitement and energy. The jobs they all had were important – what they achieved through the summer months would fortify the family through the dark and cold winter to come.

As Bo’s discontent grew, she found herself talking to Anders and Signy. And it seemed there was a parallel between Signy and Bo – but Bo was only aware of one thing; the danger felt close. Was she just being paranoid? Or was the uncertainty and fear she felt real?

The Christmas Lights is my first by author Karen Swan, and wow! I loved it! Set in December 2018 (so

pretty current!) where Instagram and social media is the norm; and in 1936 as we first meet Signy as a young teenager. The beauty of the snowy mountains, the frozen waterfalls – life in the wilderness of Norway – all sets a beautiful scene filled with danger, fear, secrets and love. The spectacular book cover adds to it. Highly recommended.

With thanks to Pan Macmillan AU for my ARC to read in exchange for an honest review.

Hannah says

Bo and Zac are famous on Instagram and travel around getting likes and comments for there many adventures, they are a marketing dream couple. I think I'd be like Bo when people are asking for selfie's like she's Taylor Swift. It's a topic that is very current with the use of social media wanting to share things over experiencing them, it's quite clever to pick on. They have a photographer called Lenny who really is the third person in the relationship.

At the start of the book Zac and Bo are very much in love with each other but as the story progresses it starts to become clear the relationship is becoming more for likes than the love between them. It's also thought Bo was on the run from something that happened to her and her brother. Bo I instantly like, i'm not so sure about Zac, he's not a horrible person but not really one I'd like to be around either and Lenny I didn't like but didn't guess to the full extent what he was capable of. I didn't like all the characters enough to give more than three stars, this is no reflection on Bo.

The back story is about Siggie who is now very old and the grandmother to Anders another main part. I didn't connect to the back story quite as much as in some other of Karen Swan's books. Siggie thinks her and Bo are alike but I'm sure more of a Bo fan, I find Siggie a little weird and don't really invest in the character much.

Anders is another character I didn't really trust and it is explained why he is acting a little odd. It involves a girl on a photograph and I guessed she's died but not how. However he becomes a very good friend (even more than friends) to Bo and she finds him very easy to talk to about the problems she's having with being famous. For all the positive comments, Bo will always remember the negative ones such as being called slut. (It's even more disgusting when you find out who's sending the messages and writing the comments)

Another character is Anna who becomes involved with the group in more than one way, she recognises Anders but can't quite picture were from. Anders past has been in the papers and it's one that could be taken from a view angles to what people think about him.

I feel Bo carried this storyline (I could have given up without her) and wasn't sure if she made the right decision in the end maybe she should have just gone to London and forgot the lot of them, I feel she was a little too good for the rest of them.

Rebecca Carter says

4.5*

The cover of this book was yelling out at me to read it next, it's just so gorgeous and Christmassy! Yet although it's set - as a whole - in Norway during winter, it's not really your normal Christmas book. Don't

start reading it expecting a light book that makes you feel all warm and cosy. Christmas isn't really mentioned until about 70% of the way in, and it's only an incidental part of the story.

It's a lot darker than I imagined and has quite a bit of tension with a menacing atmosphere at times; with the isolation, and not being too sure of people's intentions. Although i wouldn't class it as a thriller, it has a vein of suspense and mystery running through it, and I'm so glad it wasn't what I was expecting. It's really well written, and with no intended disrespect as I adore my fluffy books, far exceeded the writing I was expecting to find inside the pages. I loved soaking up the descriptions of the places and Norway has been added to my travel list. Although probably not staying at a shelf farm in the winter!

The author cleverly uses a dual time line that flips between Bo (the main protagonist) in the present, and Signy back in 1936. Initially I wasn't entirely sure why there was a dual time, or really what the point of it was aside from giving background and a sense of place of the evocative Norwegian scenery, until much further into the book. Then it made sense. Usually with dual time lines I prefer one over the other, not with this book, both were as equally enticing.

What made the book feel darker and more eerie at a certain point, was exacerbated with its (very) slight parallels with a tv series I'm currently watching. Anyone whose seen the new season of Luther with the creepy stalker man in the mask, and in particular the night bus scene, will know what I mean by tension!! I was towards the end of the book, which is definitely a lot darker with its unraveling twists, and reading my kindle in bed. After watching the first episode of Luther before bed, which had me hiding behind the largest cushion in the house, I had to stop reading this book in the dark! I doubt it would have been so creepy, apart from certain similarities with Luther...which are extremely slim similarities!!!

The premise is about a pair of bloggers/instagrammers (Bo and Zac) and their photographer Lenny - the wanderlusts - who travel the world for a living/lifestyle and post every snippet of their adventures for their millions of followers to see. After a few weeks in tropical Upolu (an Island in Samoa), they head off to the winter fjordwonderland of Norway to live on a shelf farm for a month owned by an old lady called Signy and her serious Grandson Anders. They hope to see the Northern Lights as well as lots of climbing, skiing, kayaking, hikes and off the beaten adventures their followers expect. They are insta-famous and appear to lead an inspirational and perfect life to the outside world who follow their every move, yet behind the camera and once in Norway, it's clear it's not as perfect or as fairytale like as their followers are lead to believe.

This book got my reading in 2019 off to a cracking start, it's an amazing read. It isn't just a Christmas book and is full of intrigue, suspense, enchanting scenery, secrets, insights into Norwegian customs, love and heartbreak complete with a nice little twist at the end.

Many thanks to NetGalley and Pan Macmillan for the opportunity to read this ARC in return for an honest and unbiased review.

Rachel Gilbey says

What can you say about such a marvellous book, written by one of my favourite authors that hasn't already been said.

Am I allowed to just say Wow! ... and leave it like that - as I think wow is the best was to describe the setting of this book, the stories contained within the pages, and just my overall feeling towards it all.

I've read a couple of other Christmas books this year that have had a reference to the The Northern Lights in

the title, and set somewhere in Scandinavia, so i was curious to see what Karen Swans' take on the setting would be.

And if you are in the same position as me with Christmas reads then don't worry this was completely different, had a very different feel to it, and that is all due to the main characters and the setting.

For Bo and Zac are a travel Instagram brand, and have over 9 million followers, they travel with their cameraman and are what appear to be a close threesome. To the outside world they appear to have a perfect life and they are inspirational.

They are known as The Wanderlusts and they go to places off the beaten track and try to spend at least a month if not longer in their new destination, living like a local, not in hotels, and trying to experience authentic activities.

For this trip to Norway they have decided to spend Christmas in a shelf farm, in the Norwegian Fjords, an area that is incredibly hard to navigate to and around, even in the summer when its the season, and close to impossible in winter.

They are renting their accommodation from Signy, and interspersed with the 2018 chapters, we have those set in 1936, in Signy's childhood, highlighting key events from one summer when she was fourteen. At times I did wonder other then background colour what the point of the chapters were, but as the book progresses, well there are some similar themes being explored.

As someone who is keen to do a more mainstream Norwegian Fjord cruise at some point in the future, I was very curious as to the setting of this book, and I am now completely convinced the best way for me in real life to view the fjords is by boat. All this hiking and action man stuff isn't for me but its riveting to read about in this book.

There is plenty of action scenes, and you really get a great feeling for the location, a spattering of the language and food, and various customs in Norway in the run up to Christmas.

And that is before you take into account what appear to be cracks in the real version of Bo and Zac - and their stay in Norway is eye opening in so many ways that I will leave you to ponder and find out for yourself.

This is a perfect winter's day read, that will have you utterly absorbed and not really caring how cold it is outside. It is an enthralling story that had me completely hooked. Easily one of Karen Swans best books to date, if you are even halfway tempted, go and read this, you won't regret it!

Thank you to Netgalley and Pan for this copy which I have reviewed honestly and voluntarily.
