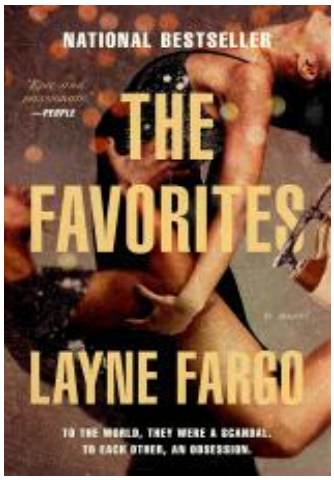
The Favorites

by Layne Fargo



About the Book

To the world, they were a scandal. To each other, an obsession.

An epic love story set in the sparkling, savage sphere of elite figure skating starring a woman determined to carve her own path on and off the ice.

She might not have a famous name, funding or her family?s support, but Katarina Shaw has always known that she was destined to become an Olympic skater. When she meets Heath Rocha, a lonely kid stuck in the foster care system, their instant connection makes them a formidable duo on the ice. Clinging to skating --- and each other --- to escape their turbulent lives, Kat and Heath go from childhood sweethearts to champion ice dancers, captivating the world with their scorching chemistry, rebellious style and roller-coaster relationship.

Until a shocking incident at the Olympic Games brings their partnership to a sudden end.

As the 10-year anniversary of their final skate approaches, an unauthorized documentary reignites the public obsession with Shaw and Rocha, claiming to uncover the ?real story? through interviews with their closest friends and fiercest rivals. Kat wants nothing to do with the documentary, but she can?t stand the thought of someone else defining her legacy. So, after a decade of silence, she?s telling her story: from the childhood tragedies that created her all-consuming bond with Heath to the clash of desires that tore them apart. Sensational rumors have haunted their every step for years, but the truth may be even more shocking than the headlines.

Discussion Guide

1. What threads does THE FAVORITES share with its literary inspiration, WUTHERING HEIGHTS? Where do the stories differ?

2. How does Kat Shaw?s self-description in the beginning (?a bitch, a diva, a sore loser...?) shape your initial perception of her? How does this perception evolve throughout the book?

3. Kat?s ambition often conflicts with her relationships. How does her drive to be the best impact her connections with Heath, Garrett and Bella?

4. Heath Rocha?s background is touched upon briefly. How do his racial and cultural identity play into his experiences and relationships within the story?

5. Kat loves Heath --- but she loves skating even more. What was it like for you to read a love story where one of the leads prioritizes something else over her love interest?

6. Sheila Lin is a significant mentor figure in the book. How does her influence shape the paths of the younger skaters, and what does her character reveal about the pressures of competitive sports?

7. What makes Bella and Garrett Lin such perfect competition for Kat and Heath? How do the relationships --- and everyone?s skating --- change when the foursome switches partners?

8. What roles do race and class play in the novel? How do these themes affect the characters and their trajectories?

9. The book includes multiple perspectives and flashbacks, as well as interview transcripts. How does this narrative structure affect your understanding of the characters and their motivations? How does author Layne Fargo use these devices to add tension and foreshadowing?

10. How do Kat and Heath?s reputations --- on the ice-dancing circuit and then in the blogs and tabloids --- affect their senses of self? Conversely, how do they change as people when they?re out of the spotlight?

11. The theme of betrayal runs deep in the novel. Discuss specific instances of betrayal and how they affect the characters? dynamics and development.

12. ?When I was strong and self-assured, people recoiled from me,? Kat says. ?They told me I was too competitive, too ambitious, too much. But when I was brought low, bruised and bleeding, a princess in need of rescue instead of a conquering queen, they loved me.? Discuss the parts of herself that Kat feels compelled to hide.

13. How does Heath change after Russia? What did it teach him? What did the experience teach Kat?

14. Discuss Kat and Bella?s friendship. Did you think it was authentic --- or would you call them frenemies?

15. Kat?s outburst during the interview about being asked when she will start a family highlights gender expectations. How does the book address the pressures faced by women in sports --- and society at large?

16. What does the book suggest about the cost of ambition? Are the characters? sacrifices justified by their

achievements?

17. What did you think of the ending of the book?

Author Bio

Layne Fargo has a background in theater, women?s studies and library science, so it?s only fitting that she now writes deliciously dramatic, unapologetically feminist stories for a living. She?s the author of THE FAVORITES, THEY NEVER LEARN and TEMPER, as well as co-author of the bestselling *Young Rich Widows* series, and her work has been translated into over a dozen languages. Layne lives in Chicago with her partner, their pets, and an ever-expanding collection of books she?s definitely going to read before she dies.

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