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The Runaway (Valkyrie)



Synopsis

Freya searches for a missing Valkyrie in this second book of an exciting new series that School Library Journal described as perfect for “those looking for Rick Riordan read-alikes.” Valkyrie: Norse Goddess. Reaper of Souls. Defender of the Weak. But could she also start a war? In the world of Asgard, living among Odin, Thor, and Loki are the Valkyries of legend. Norse goddesses, reapers of souls from human battlefields – they have the power to cause death with just one touch. Freya is a Valkyrie – but she has not followed in the footsteps of the legends before her. She has been to the World of Man to befriend humans – and not to reap their souls. Now she must return to the human realm on a new quest to track down the runaway Valkyrie of legend. There she will discover a dark secret that leads her to the Land of the Frost Giants where she must take on new enemies. But this time she has friends to rely on, and lots more to gain.

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Customer Reviews

Kate O'Hearn was born in Canada, raised in New York City, and has traveled all over the United States. She currently resides in England. Kate is the author of the Pegasus series, the

Shadow Dragon series, and the Valkyrie series. Visit her at KateOHearn.com.

The Runaway 2> AS DAWN ROSE PINK IN the sky, the heavy footfalls of visitors arriving in Asgard shook the ground. High up on a hill, far from Bifröst, the Rainbow Bridge and entrance to Asgard, stood the home of Eir, the head Valkyrie, and her daughters. Servants of Odin, and also known as his Battle-Maidens, the Valkyries work hard to bring the most valiant of the dying soldiers from the human world to Asgard. But for one Valkyrie there is no reaping of soldiers. Still on probation for leaving the realm without permission, Freya is forced to work twice as hard as the others as punishment—spending her mornings working in the stables of the Reaping Mares, cleaning and caring for the winged horses, and afternoons in full battle training with the other Valkyries. At the end of each day Freya returns to her bed exhausted and craving much-needed rest. But today she was awakened extra early by loud pounding on her bedroom door. “Gee, get up!” Archie called, using his pet name for Freya. Archie was her best friend and companion, and seemed to always have limitless energy, while Freya was perpetually exhausted. She moaned sleepily and started to doze off again. “Come on, Gee and Maya,” Archie called through the door. “You’re missing it!” Freya sat up, remembering what day it was. From outside the window came the sound of rumbling thunder as the ground beneath their home started to quake. She looked over at her sister’s bed. Maya was lying on her side and facing away from her, sleeping soundly. “Maya, wake up,” Freya tossed a pillow at her sister. “The giants are here!” Maya mumbled softly and rolled onto her stomach. She yawned, stretched, and extended her white wings up into the air. Folding them neatly on her back again, she mumbled a few more incoherent words and drifted back to sleep. “Gee.” Archie repeated. “Are you up?” “She is,” Orus cawed loudly. Freya’s raven companion sat on a perch at the base of her bed and kept watch while she slept. Maya’s own raven, Grul, had his head tucked under his wing and was sleeping as soundly as Maya. Freya took one final look at Maya and sighed. “I’m coming,” she called as she climbed from her bed and started to get dressed. Moments later they stood on an open balcony high above the streets of Asgard. “Cool!” Archie pointed to a long line of impossibly tall giants stomping through the narrow streets of the city. Each step caused the ground to rumble and buildings to shake. In the distance they heard the sound of breaking glass as windows shattered from the giants’ heavy footfalls. “I never thought they’d be so big. Are they the frost or fire giants?” “They’re frost giants,” Freya

explained. “You can tell by the color of their skin. Frost giants are silvery gray like ice, and their eyes are almost white to reflect the glare of snow from their realm. They have long, streaky black-and-white hair. Fire giants have bright-red skin, blazing-yellow eyes, and flaming-red hair. They followed the long line of frost giants lumbering toward Valhalla, Odin’s Great Heavenly Hall, where the opening ceremonies to the Nine Realms Challenge were to be held. The giants’ shoulders and heads rose high above the roofs of the buildings in Asgard. Their expressions were at best unfriendly, with some looking hostile and even threatening.

“Frost giants hate us,” Freya said matter-of-factly. “Fire giants aren’t much better.” “Why?” She shrugged. “I’m not sure. It goes way back to when there used to be a lot of wars—they nearly destroyed the realms.” She paused and then pointed. “Look down there. The trolls are here too!” Squat, round creatures were strolling along the street. They were dressed in rough-hewn clothes, so it was difficult to tell the women from the men. Occasionally they would throw a stone or spit at the people of Asgard. “That’s gross,” Archie said. “Do they always spit?” “They’re trolls—what do you expect?” Archie spotted more new arrivals. “Whoa, what are they?” Freya looked down at the lovely line of creatures streaming through the streets. They were of slight build and seemed to float more than walk. They had pale complexions that looked like moonlight, and their soft, spider-like weblike clothes billowed in the gentle breeze. “They’re the Light Elves.” “They’re so beautiful.” “They are,” Freya agreed, “but, Archie, you have to be careful around them. They can be very dangerous, especially to humans. They love to keep them as pets. If one approaches you, do anything you can to get away as quickly as possible. Don’t talk to them, or they may try to enchant you and take you away to Alfheim.” “Alfheim?” Archie repeated. Freya nodded. “That’s their realm. It’s higher than Midgard but lower than Asgard.” “Does it matter where they are?” “To them it does,” Freya said. “That’s why there have been so many wars. The lower realms claimed the upper realms had the most beautiful and fruitful lands. So they attacked us and tried to drive us out to take it for themselves.” “But you always won?” Freya nodded. “There are more of us in Asgard than in the other realms. The last war was long before I was born.” They stood on the balcony watching more competitors arrive. Archie was completely mesmerized by the dragons, demons, Dark Elves, Light Elves, and dwarfs heading toward the battlefields at Valhalla. “There’s a lot more to come,” Freya

said. "They'll be competing here for twelve days. I wish we could go see them." She sighed. "I was just a child the last time the Nine Realms Challenge was held—back then it was in Utgard. This would have been the first time I could actually compete." Freya's older sister Skaga had appeared on the balcony. She was taller than Freya, with blazing-white wings and pale-gray eyes. Her expression was disapproving. "You would've been allowed to compete this time if you hadn't run away and caused all that trouble in Midgard. You're both lucky Odin didn't do more to you. I can think of worse fates than cleaning out the stables." "I know," Freya said. "But I only went to Earth to help. How could I know that Odin would send the Dark Searchers after us?" "You broke the rules, Freya. What did you expect?" Skaga said. "Now you and your dead human are paying for it."

"Archie," Archie glared at her. "What?" "My name is Archie," he said. "Use it! Don't call me a dead human."

Freya's family still hadn't accepted Archie's presence in the house. But since Freya had reaped him and given him her real name, they didn't have any choice. Whether they liked it or not, Freya and Archie were bound together. Skaga inhaled, about to retort, but Freya interrupted. "Look at everyone down there! I really hate to miss it." She turned to Archie. "Maybe we can sneak away from the stables to watch some of the opening ceremonies. If we're careful, Odin will never know." "Oh, no you don't!" Orus cawed from her shoulder. "Freya, don't even think about it. That's the sort of thing the Dark Searchers will be looking for. We're banned from the games and they know it!" "Listen to Orus, Freya," Skaga warned. "If the Dark Searchers catch you, they'll hand you over to Odin. I'm sure he'll cut off your wings this time. Just do your work at the stables. There will always be more Challenges." Archie nodded. "If I never see another Dark Searcher again, I'll be happy. Come on, let's get to work and let everyone else get on with the Challenge." Freya's eyes lingered on the Light Elves as they drifted through the streets. She wanted so much to see the Challenge. Sighing, she finally let Archie draw her away from the balcony. Walking through the streets of Asgard was almost as exciting as watching from the balcony. Streams of visitors clogged their way. They had to stand far back on the pavement while a tall line of fire giants strode past. "I smell smoke," Archie commented, looking around. "It's them," Freya explained, pointing at the giants. "Can you see their clothes smoldering? In their own realm, their clothes burn. When

they come to Asgard, they have to wear special garments that don't set fire to everything. If we're lucky, a fire giant will get angry then you can watch their clothes burst into flame! Freya, Orus warned. "Must you always look for trouble?" "I'm not looking for trouble," Freya said innocently. "I'm just explaining to Archie, that's all." But there was a twinkle in her eye that let them know she'd have been quite happy to watch the fire giants start to burn. Behind the fire giants was a gathering of creatures wearing dark-green cloaks. Their faces were obscured by black masks and they were silent as they drifted past. "Those are Dark Elves," Freya whispered. "Outside of their realm, they keep their faces hidden. I've heard they're hideous. But I don't know for certain." "Dark Elves are even uglier than trolls," Orus commented. The nearest Dark Elf heard the comment and stepped closer. It pointed a gloved finger at the raven, hissing. The elf remained still, as though waiting for a challenge. When Orus said nothing, the creature hissed once more before walking away. "Watch out for them as well," Orus warned Archie. "Light Elves keep humans as pets. Dark Elves eat them with berry jam." "I'm not sure I want to meet any of them," Archie said. "They're really interesting to look at, but I think I'll stick with you two." "Coward," Freya teased, punching him in the arm. "I'm not a coward. I'm just not crazy. Let's see if I got this right." He started to count on his fingers. "The giants will either step on me or set me on fire if I'm not careful. Light Elves want to abduct me, Dark Elves want to eat me, and trolls just want to spit at me and hit me with rocks. This world takes a bit of getting used to." "Don't forget the faeries," Orus added. "Faeries? In Asgard?" Archie asked. "Light Faeries, just like Light Elves, also come from Alfheim. They'll steal anything shiny that you're wearing, so be extra careful around them. Look over there." The road had cleared and they were finally able to cross. Up ahead, they spied a swarm of glowing Light Faeries using their little daggers to pry several jewels out of a sign over a jeweler's shop. "See what I mean?" Orus cawed. "They'll keep at it until they get all the jewels." Archie stood very still, enchanted by the tiny figures doing all they could to free rubies from the sign. "They almost look like dragonflies, only more beautiful. Look at their tiny hands!" "They're thieves, that's what they are," Freya ran over to where the faeries were swarming on the sign. Her wings flashed open, and she launched into the air.

“Get away from there!” The Light Faeries cried out with voices that sounded like tiny bells as they scattered. But the moment Freya landed on the ground, they went right back to work on the sign. She jumped at them again, and once more they scattered only to return when she was back on the ground. Their soft laughter rang out, and the tiny faeries stuck out their tongues and blew raspberries at her. Freya shook her head and walked away, calling to Archie to follow her. Farther down the street, they slipped between two grand buildings to take a shortcut to the Reaping Mares’ stables. From behind them came the sounds of cheering as the crowds swelled to greet the new arrivals to Asgard. “We should be there,” Freya complained, kicking a pebble away. “Not shoveling out dirty stalls.” “At least we don’t have to train during the Challenge,” Archie said. “I might actually go a day without a fresh bruise or cut.” “I thought you liked battle training?” Freya asked. “I do. But the warriors at Valhalla have more experience than I do. Crixus tries to make it easy for me, but he used to be a gladiator.” “Crixus is your instructor?” Freya asked, awestruck. “He’s the best warrior at Valhalla! How did you get him?” Archie shrugged. “He saw me training and then offered to teach me. He believes in learning through pain and defeat.” He paused. “But I rock at sword fighting. Soon I might even beat you!” Freya smiled. When she first met Archie, he was being bullied and beaten at school by a vicious gang. Now every afternoon he was being taught by the very best of humanity’s warriors, reaped from Earth’s battlefields. He was learning hand-to-hand combat and fighting with many sorts of weapons. He had been accepted by the warriors of Valhalla. “You think you can beat me?” Freya teased, shoving him. “Ha! I dare you to try!” They reached the stable, and as soon as they opened the doors, the mares nickered to greet them. Freya went straight to her own mare. “Good morning, Sylt.” Freya stroked the horse’s smooth muzzle. Archie pulled an apple from his pocket. “Did you miss us?” While Sylt munched the apple, Archie looked at the stalls. “Maybe if we finish quickly, we can watch from the balcony as the other competitors arrive. We can’t get in trouble if we’re watching from home.” “Great idea,” Freya agreed as she reached for a pitchfork and they began to clean the stalls. It wasn’t long before Archie paused shoveling soiled straw out of a Reaping Mare’s stall and leaned heavily on the shovel handle. His brows were knitted together in a frown. “Gee, I still don’t get how this works. Are you sure I’m dead? I mean, Skaga always calls me a dead human, but I just don’t feel dead.” Freya forked fresh straw into a cleaned stall and looked over at her best friend,

puzzled by the randomness of his question. "I'm sure." His frown deepened. "But if I'm a ghost, why can I lift up this shovel? Or carry a sword and train with the warriors at Valhalla? And eat? I've never been so hungry. All I do is eat! You say the Light Elves would keep me for a pet if they caught me. But would they keep a dead person? And how could the Dark Elves eat me if I'm already dead?" Freya stopped working to carefully consider her answer. It was obvious he had been thinking about this for some time.

"Here in Asgard, things work differently from the human world. You're dead, but also alive. You have an Asgard body that people can see and touch, and it can be hurt. It's just like the dead warriors at Valhalla—they were killed in Midgard battlefields and brought here. In the human world they would have no substance, but here, you've seen how they spend their days fighting and their nights drinking and singing in Valhalla. If you returned to the human world it would be different."

"So I'd be a ghost there?"

"Yes." Orus flew off a stall door and landed on Archie's shoulder.

"And there, I couldn't do this to you." He nipped Archie's ear and cawed in laughter. "Hey! That hurt." "See?" Freya said. "On Earth you wouldn't have felt that." Archie rubbed his earlobe and grimaced at the raven. "You didn't have to bite me to prove it. You could have just told me."

"Where's the fun in that! Besides, now that you're dead, you can understand me, and that alone was worth dying for!" Archie chuckled for a moment, but then became pensive. "But I don't remember." Freya wondered about the sudden change in her friend. He'd been so happy watching the competitors arriving and had laughed at her for trying to shoo away the faeries. But now something was troubling him. "Archie, what's wrong? What don't you remember?"

"Dying," he answered. "I can't remember how it happened."

"What can you remember?" Freya asked. Archie frowned. "Not a lot. You and Maya were wounded and in danger, and I needed to get back to you. But that's it."

"You really don't remember?" Orus cawed. "You don't remember taking Freya's sword to fight off the Dark Searcher?"

"I did what?" Archie cried. Freya nodded and stepped closer to him. "You fought the Dark Searcher for me. You nearly cut off his hand when he held me by my broken wing. I was so grateful to you." Archie's frown deepened. "How did I die?"

Freya knew she had to approach this carefully. "I was badly hurt, but the Dark Searcher wouldn't stop. You tried to get me to run with you, but I couldn't because my leg

was cut. Then you took my sword and attacked him.” “It was really dumb but very brave,” Orus cut in. “He was bigger and much stronger than you. A sudden memory seemed to flash across Archie’s face. “Wait! I remember something.” He looked down and rubbed his stomach where the Searcher’s sword had cut into him. “He stabbed me here.” “That’s right. What else do you remember?” Archie looked up at her in wonder. “I don’t remember the pain, but I remember you. He was going to kill you, so I had to stop him. But then he stabbed me.” Archie’s eyes grew wide. “Wait, now I remember. Gee, you were crying.” “No, I wasn’t,” Freya huffed. “I just had something in my eyes.” “Liar!” Orus teased. “You’re not such a tough Valkyrie after all, are you? You knew Archie was going to die, and you didn’t want to lose him. Then the floods arrived.” “I didn’t want to leave you either,” Archie continued. “But then you gave me your name and your mark.” He held up his right hand, indicating the symbol that had appeared on the back of his hand the moment she’d told him her true name and reaped him. “You saved me, and I’m so glad you did.” Freya looked at the ornate gold and black symbol blazoned on the back of Archie’s hand like a strange tattoo. Every Valkyrie had a unique pattern, which appeared on the hands of those they gave their true name to. In Asgard it was a great honor to be marked by a Valkyrie, and these chosen ones were the envy of those who didn’t bear such a mark. With it, Archie was safe from anyone who might trouble him, because he had a Valkyrie’s protection. “Most of the warriors I train with are jealous that I’ve got your mark. Crixus says I’m really lucky. But I just think it’s cool!” “You do?” Freya asked. “It doesn’t bother you that it means you belong to me?” Archie shrugged. “Nope. I’d be with you anyway, with or without the mark. Besides, it means that you belong to me too. So we’re even.” “Yes, we are,” Freya agreed softly. The turn in the conversation was making her uncomfortable, and she fumbled to change the subject. “We’d better get these stalls finished if we want to see anyone else arriving.” Freya lifted a forkful of clean straw and heard Archie chuckle. Before she could question why, she was struck in the back with a shovelful of smelly, soiled straw. Spinning round, Freya saw Archie laughing as he bent down and picked up handfuls of straw and threw them at her. “Straw fight!” Orus cawed as he swooped off his perch, caught straw in his claws, soared higher, and dropped it on Freya’s head. “Hey!

You're going to pay for that!" Freya threw down her fork and hurled handfuls of straw at Archie. The barn erupted into a full-on war as neatly stacked bales of straw were torn open and used as ammunition. Archie ran across the barn and tried to avoid Freya's projectiles while gathering up more to throw at her. Freya opened her black wings and launched into the air. She reached Archie in two wing beats and knocked him into a large pile of clean straw.

"Using wings is cheating!" Archie laughed as he rubbed handfuls of straw into Freya's dyed-red hair and into the feathers of her wings. Lost in fits of hysterics, they were soon covered in dry, golden shafts of straw. Freya pinned Archie down and hovered above him.

"Do you surrender?"

"Never!" Freya pulled a large stack of straw down onto him and shoved it into his face.

"Now do you surrender?"

"No!" Archie cried, spitting out straw.

"It's you who's going to surrender." With a quick wrestling maneuver, Archie spun Freya around and was soon pinning her down in the straw.

"Do you give up?" Freya cried.

"Who taught you that?"

"Crixus," Archie answered.

"He said if I'm going to stay with you, I'd better learn how to fight properly so I can protect you."

"Crixus said that?" Freya asked.

"How does he even know me?"

Archie shrugged.

"Don't know. He just does. Now do you give up?"

"Archie, I'm lying on my wings," Freya protested.

"Then you'd better tell me quickly!"

"Let me up!"

"Not until you say 'Uncle' and give up!" Freya was laughing too hard to use her Valkyrie strength against him. Instead she lay in the straw, looking up into his beaming face, and saw that it was true. Archie had no regrets that she had reaped him and brought him into her life here in Asgard. A familiar voice rose from behind them.

"Is this what you two call cleaning the stables?"

"Azrael?" Freya rose and flew at the leader of the Angels of Death. Azrael received her in his open arms and wrapped his white wings around her tightly until she could no longer be seen in his angelic embrace.

"I'm glad to see that Odin's been keeping you busy." He released her and chuckled softly as he picked straw from her tousled hair. Archie walked forward and bowed his head.

"Hello, sir."

Azrael smiled.

"And how's my favorite human?"

"Not too bad, thanks."

"What are you doing in Asgard?" Freya asked.

"I'm here for the Challenge. I've been speaking with Odin, and we both feel it's time for my realm to join in the competition. We're the Tenth Realm."

"The Tenth Realm?" Freya asked. Azrael nodded.

"Heofon. My angels will be arriving

shortly. "I really wish we could watch," Freya explained sadly. "Odin has forbidden us from competing in any Challenge or visiting Valhalla during the events. We're even banned from watching." "Yes. About that," Azrael said. "I've been speaking with Odin and asked if your punishment might be suspended, just for the Challenge." "You did?" Archie asked. The tall Angel of Death nodded and plucked another piece of straw from Freya's hair. "I did. And Odin has agreed. So if you two would like to get cleaned up, we can head over to the opening ceremonies. You will be competing with your sisters and the other Valkyries. But you'd better hurry if you want to join them in the opening parade." * * * The parade wound its way through the crowded streets of Asgard. Freya was thrilled to be riding her Reaping Mare, Sylt, beside Maya. Seated tall and proud on her own Reaping Mare, Maya glowed with excitement at being part of the opening ceremonies. As the most beautiful of all the Valkyries, Maya held everyone's attention. But Freya wasn't jealous. She adored her older sister and was honored to ride beside her. They were following their mother, Eir, who was leading the Valkyries upon her tall Reaping Mare and waving the Valkyrie banner proudly up ahead. But the noise, colors, and crowds ebbed away as Freya felt a sudden chill running down her spine that caused her to look back. More participants had joined the parade directly behind the Valkyries. Dark Searchers. As Freya's eyes passed over the dark-cloaked, armored creatures, her blood ran cold when she noticed one Dark Searcher in particular staring directly at her. Knowing he now had her attention, the Dark Searcher opened his black wings and raised his right arm. He made a cutting gesture across his wrist with his left hand. Then he pointed at her and shook his head slowly. The message was crystal clear. This was the Dark Searcher that Odin had sent to find her in Chicago. The same one Archie had cut with her sword. He had not forgotten nor forgiven what they had done to him.

"Maya, look," Freya said tightly to her sister. "Dark Searchers." Maya refused to turn back. She shivered. "Mother warned me they were coming. They're the Enforcers of Justice. It's their job to keep everyone from fighting and to deal with any troublemakers. She warned us not to antagonize them." "Us, antagonize them?" Freya cried. "The one that killed Archie just threatened me. He's going to try something. I just know it." "He's definitely going to do something," Orus cawed. "He can't. Odin has declared an armistice, which includes the Dark Searchers. Just ignore him. I'm sure we won't see them again after today," Maya said. "Ignore him? Are you kidding?" Orus

complained. “Have you forgotten Chicago so soon?” Freya asked. “No, I haven’t. But it’s over now. They are here to watch over the games and keep the peace. Not cause trouble for us. That Searcher can’t do anything to you.”

“Did you tell him that?” Orus finished. “Don’t be such a scaredy-bird,” Grul, Maya’s raven, cawed. “Maya and I aren’t frightened of a few Dark Searchers.”

“You’re not smart enough to be scared,” Orus insulted. “Orus, that’s enough.” Freya stroked her raven and stole a glance back to the Searcher. The tilt of his visored head suggested he was still staring directly at her. Freya shuddered and turned to face the front, determined not to look at him again. When the parade ended, the competitors moved into their training areas. Archie joined Freya as the Valkyries gathered in a large, brightly colored tent that flew their flag.

“Now, remember. Her mother addressed all of them, but her pale, disapproving eyes landed on Freya. “Each and every one of you represents the honor of the Valkyries. We must not bring any more shame down upon us.”

“I think she means us,” Archie whispered to Freya. “I know she does,” Freya agreed.

“Shhhh,” Maya warned. “You don’t want Mother to get any angrier.”

“I hardly think that’s possible,” Orus added. “All the realms have drawn lots,” Eir continued. “The Valkyries are participating in a total of eleven Challenges. We will be in three races—two on the ground and one in the air. Plus four different battles, and a challenge of strength, swimming, tracking, and then hunting. Finally, we’ll all participate in the tug-of-war against the Angels of Death. I will assign each of you the Challenge you are to compete in. Come forward as I call your name.”

“I hope I get the Moat Race Challenge, I love that one,” Maya whispered to Freya as her mother began calling up the Valkyries one by one. “And I’m sure Mother will pick you for the races. You’ll definitely win—you’re the fastest out of all of us.”

“Especially flying,” Archie added. Freya blushed under the compliment. “I’m just happy to be here.”

They watched their mother call more and more Valkyries up to the front, but still none of their names were announced. “I thought Azrael said we were going to get to participate,” Freya whispered to Archie. “Not everyone’s been called yet. It will be your turn soon.”

They continued to wait and watched the last of the other Valkyries walk to the front. Soon everyone had been called, apart from Freya and Maya. But Eir turned to address them all as if she were finished. “Sisterhood of the Valkyries, this is our moment to shine. We are strong and we are powerful—let’s

show the other realms just what we can do! Will you give me your best?"

The Valkyries opened their wings and raised their hands to cheer. All except Freya and Maya. Both girls stood at the back, crushed, knowing they had been excluded from the games.

"It's all right," Archie said brightly. "I know how strong you both are. You don't need to prove it to anyone."

Freya was grateful to him for trying, but this cut deep. She had been desperate to participate in the Challenge.

"I don't care," Maya said lightly. But her eyes spoke differently. They were downcast and her lips held a pout. She couldn't hide that she was deeply hurt at being cut from the Challenge.

Eir climbed down from her dais. "Freya and Maya, because of your punishment you are forbidden from officially taking part in the Challenge. However, your punishment will be lifted for one event only. The tug-of-war against the Angels of Death. You are only allowed to participate because Azrael has lobbied for it. You are very lucky to have such an influential friend."

"What about Archie?" Freya asked.

"What about him?" her mother said sharply.

"If Archie wishes to compete, he may join the warriors at Valhalla, as they represent Midgard."

"He's been training with them; let him stand with them."

"Crixus won't let me compete," Archie said.

"He says I'm not ready yet."

"He's right," Eir agreed.

"You have only started to train. You need more time."

"But he's with me," Freya insisted.

"He should compete with us."

Her mother's eyes blazed.

"Your pet human is not a Valkyrie. He may not compete with us."

"Archie is not my pet!" Freya cried.

"He's my friend. If he can't compete, I won't."

"It's okay," Archie insisted.

"I don't want to compete anyway. Your mother is right. I've only just started to train. I'm not ready to go up against frost giants or dwarfs or anyone."

"But..."

"It's okay," Archie repeated.

"I've caused enough trouble for you already. I really would prefer to watch. Next time I'll be ready, but not now."

Eir's eyes bored into Archie.

"Tell me, child, how old are you?"

"I'm fifteen," Archie said.

"Fifteen," Freya's mother repeated.

"Before you died, did my daughter warn you that once she reaped you, you will forever remain that age? That even though she continues to age and grow, you will be stuck as you are? You will watch her mature and perhaps have children of her own, and still you will remain a child."

"Archie will always be my friend, no matter what!" Freya replied.

Archie faced Eir.

"Crixus and I

have already talked about that," he said respectfully. "And just like I told him, I am grateful to Gee for bringing me here. Whatever happens in the future will happen. But for now we are friends." Eir's back stiffened. "Why do you insist on calling my daughter Gee when you know full well her name is Freya?"

"Mother," Freya protested. "No, let him answer. He is in Asgard now. He should use your proper name."

"I am sorry if it upsets you," Archie said.

"But for so long, I only knew her as Gee. Yes, I know her real name is Freya, because she gave it to me. But everyone here calls her that. For me to call her Gee reminds us both of our special friendship and where we've come from."

"Your special friendship?"

"Yes, friendship," Freya agreed. "I like it that he calls me Gee."

"Mother," Maya put in. "It might be hard to understand, but Archie is my friend too. He will remain so for all time." Eir's eyes softened as she looked at them. "You all feel the same?"

"Yes," Freya agreed. Archie and Maya nodded.

"Time alone will tell," the tall, elegant Valkyrie said. "For now, Archie, if you will not compete with the Valhalla warriors, you may remain with Freya and help her prepare for her Challenge. Just as she was leaving, she paused and turned back.

"Also, I am sorry, but you are all restricted to watching only one event per day. So choose wisely."

"One?" Freya protested. "That's not fair!"

Her mother charged back and pointed a shaking finger in Freya's face. "Running away to Chicago without permission was wrong. You must be punished. This is the price you will pay! Be grateful I don't ban you from watching all Challenges!"

(Note: Another review by my daughter) This one is just as awesome as the first! I totally recommend this one too! You'll be knocked almost entirely off your feet! This met WAY more than my expectations. To say I was satisfied was an understatement! I was really happy! It's almost as good as the first one. It comes in by a very close second. How much better was the first than the second? I'll give you this: .0001 points better. They might as well be the same, as they are so epic the books are a hurricane of epic! This and it's prequel are totally in the top five in my favorites list. READ THE PREQUEL AND THEN THIS ONE I AM BEGGING YOU

At first my 10 year old daughter was slow to get into the first book Valkyrie, but as she got farther in, she got hooked and a little emotional during the ending. She quickly moved into this second book The Runaway and zipped right through it. She was very excited about it and is ready for the next

one. My daughter loved the Pegasus series by this author.

My 5th grader finished the series over a month ago & still talks about it. I'm always thrilled to find books that my child wants to read! According to her, this series has an interesting story line involving mythology "and there's a bunch of adventure stuff that happens and you get really attached to the characters in the books."

I was a little disappointed on Kate O'Hearn's last Pegasus book, so I wasn't very sure I'd like this one, but it turned out to be much better than I expected! I really hope the series doesn't get sloppier in the next books and I can't wait to know what happens, even more after the exciting sneak peak to the second book!! especially loved Archie as a character, although he is not the protagonist. Freya, the main character, was less relatable in her actions, but she was still quite good. I would really recommend you to read this if you like the whole mythical-fantasy topic as much as I do!

I really enjoyed this book. Despite some rather cliché plot points, it had a refreshingly novel flavor--love the Norse mythology!--and the characters were very sympathetic, especially Freya and Maya. Valkyries are pretty rare in fiction, and I enjoyed the idea of mythological beings interacting with the modern world. It raised some interesting questions about the changing nature of war, and Freya's struggles with her once-bloodthirsty culture were understandable and interesting. While certain themes (such as the "high school dance" subplot) are rather tiresome in any media, I actually thought O'Hearn handled them well here, and the characters were so loveable I really didn't mind. The darker elements like bullying were treated deftly, and I enjoyed watching Freya act out her role as a heroic defender. The ending was suspenseful and well-paced, and the whole book was a lot of fun to read. Overall, light and enjoyable with a deliciously unique flavor.

Kate is one of my favorite authors. This story has a lot of surprises and suspense and it was one of the best books I ever read. I couldn't put it down and I am so excited so that the end of this book said to be continued. Can't wait for the third one!

The story was the best and the cover was also amazing and the words really captured me and it was overall a very good book. -perspective from 9 year old reader.

My Daughter Loves it.

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