



TO THE WORLD, THEY WERE A SCANDAL.
TO EACH OTHER, AN OBSESSION.

THE FAVORITES

LAYNE FARGO

a novel

BY LAYNE FARGO

They Never Learn

Temper

THE
Favorites

A NOVEL

Layne Fargo



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The Favorites is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents are the products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events, locales, or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

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*For Katarina, Tonya, Surya,
and all the other badass women who've shown me what it
means to win on your own terms.*

Today is the tenth anniversary of the worst day of my life.

As if I could forget, when millions of strangers have been so eager to remind me. I'm sure you've seen the news stories, the magazine covers, the social media posts. Maybe you're planning to snuggle up on your sofa tonight with a bowl of popcorn and binge the documentary series released to commemorate the occasion. Schadenfreude and chill.

Go right ahead. Enjoy the show. But don't fool yourself into thinking you know me. By now, I've heard it all: Katarina Shaw is a bitch, a diva, a sore loser, a manipulative liar. Cold-blooded, a cheater, a criminal. An attention whore, an actual whore. Even a murderess.

Call me what you want. I don't give a damn anymore. My story is mine, and I'll tell it the same way I skated: in my own way, on my own terms.

We'll see who wins in the end.

NARRATOR: They were an obsession.

American ice dancers Katarina Shaw and Heath Rocha smile and take their bows in front of a crowd of screaming fans at the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi, Russia.

NARRATOR: Then a scandal.

Shaw and Rocha, surrounded by a crowd again—only this time, it's paparazzi shouting their names, a flurry of shutters and flashbulbs as they leave their Sochi hotel. The couple pushes through the throng with grim expressions, Heath's arm around Katarina's shoulders.

NARRATOR: And ultimately...a tragedy.

NBC Sports commentator Kirk Lockwood reports live from the Sochi Olympics. "In all my years covering skating," he says, shaking his head solemnly, "I've never seen anything like this."

NARRATOR: Now, for the first time, those closest to Katarina Shaw and Heath Rocha will share their stories, shedding new light on what led to the unprecedented events of that fateful Olympic final.

Former Olympic ice dancer Ellis Dean speaks to an interviewer in a West Hollywood bar.

ELLIS DEAN: We used to joke they were going to die in each other's arms or kill each other with their bare hands. Nothing in between.

Figure skating coach Nicole Bradford is interviewed in her suburban Illinois kitchen.

NICOLE BRADFORD: They were the most talented skaters I've ever worked with, no question.
But looking back...yes, I could see the signs of trouble to come.

U.S. Figure Skating judge Jane Currer addresses the camera from an ice rink in Colorado.

JANE CURRER: How could we have known? How could anyone have known?

In quick flashes, a series of images: Katarina and Heath skating together as children. Then older, standing on top of a podium, smiling, gold medals around their necks. Finally, shouting at each other, Katarina's makeup ruined, her hand pulled back to strike.

ELLIS DEAN: I know one thing for sure. There'll never be another team like Kat and Heath.

Slow dissolve to a photo of the ice rink in Sochi. Bright red spatters stain the Olympic rings.

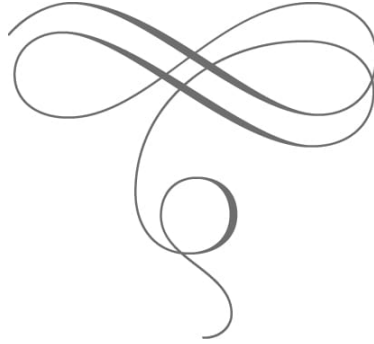
ELLIS DEAN: And you know what? Maybe that's a good thing.

NARRATOR: This is...

THE FAVORITES: *The Shaw & Rocha Story*

PART I

The Hopefuls



CHAPTER 1



Once I was satisfied, I handed him the knife.

Heath stood up on his knees, and I stretched out in the warm spot he'd left on the bed, watching him: the way his black hair shone in the moonlight, the press of his teeth on his lower lip as he concentrated, making his first mark with the tip of the blade. He was more precise than I had been, drawing curved, graceful lines underneath my savage slashes.

Shaw & Rocha, the carving read when he finished. It was the way our names would be written on the scoreboard at our first U.S. Figure Skating Championships in a few days' time. The way they'd be announced in medal ceremonies and reported in newspapers and entered in the record books. We'd cut the letters into the center of my antique rosewood headboard, deep enough that no amount of sanding could remove them.

We were sixteen, and so sure of everything.

Our bags were already packed for the National Championships, costumes and skates in a neat stack next to my bedroom door. As many years as we'd been waiting, working, preparing for this moment, those few final hours felt like torture. I wanted to leave right then.

I wished we never had to come back.

Heath left the knife on my bedside table and settled down beside me to admire our handiwork. "Are you nervous?" he whispered.

I looked past him, at the pictures collaged around the drafty leaded glass window—all images of my favorite figure skater, Sheila Lin. Two-time Olympic gold medalist in ice dance, living legend. Sheila never seemed nervous, no matter how much pressure she faced.

“No,” I told him.

Heath smiled and slid his hand up the back of the stretched-out Stars on Ice 1996 sweatshirt I always wore to bed. “Liar.”

Nosebleed seats to see that tour were the closest I’d ever come to Sheila Lin in real life. My father sprung for a signed commemorative photo of her too, which was tacked up on my wall with the rest of my shrine. She was the woman, and the athlete, I wanted to be—not when I grew up, but as soon as possible.

When Sheila and her partner, Kirk Lockwood, won their first U.S. title, she was still a teenager. Winning was a long shot for Heath and me, since we’d never been to Nationals before. We had qualified the previous season but didn’t have the means to travel to the competition venue in Salt Lake City. Luckily, the championships were in Cleveland this time, a comparably short and affordable Greyhound bus ride away. I was certain the competition would change everything for us.

I was right. Just not in the way I imagined.

Heath kissed my shoulder. “Well, *I’m* not nervous. I’m skating with Katarina Shaw.” He said my name slow, reverent, savoring the sound. “And there’s nothing she can’t do.”

We stared at each other in the shadows, so close we were sharing breath. Later, we’d become world famous for that: stretching out the moment before a kiss until it was almost unbearable, until every member of the audience felt the quickening of our pulses, the pure want reflected in our eyes.

But that was choreography. This was real.

Heath’s mouth finally met mine—soft, unhurried. We thought we had all night.

By the time we heard the footsteps, it was too late.

Nicole Bradford, a middle-aged blond woman wearing a sparkly cardigan and heavy makeup, sits at the center island in her white-on-white suburban dream kitchen.

NICOLE BRADFORD (Figure Skating Coach): There's always a surge after the Winter Olympics.

All these girls who think they're destined to become stars. Though they usually aren't *quite* as intense about it as Katarina Shaw.

Family photos show Katarina as a little girl in various skating costumes. In one, she's in front of a wall covered in pictures of Sheila Lin, imitating Sheila's pose in the central image.

NICOLE BRADFORD: At her first lesson, Katarina said she was going to be a famous ice dancer like Sheila Lin. The other girls hated her instantly.

Four-year-old Katarina skates alone with a serious expression, her hair in two messy pigtails.

NARRATOR: Though her name eventually became synonymous with ice dance, Katarina Shaw spent her early career as a singles skater, since no boys were available to partner with her.

Ellis Dean perches on a stool at a chic cocktail bar, holding a martini glass. He's in his early forties, with an impish smile and carefully coiffed hair.

ELLIS DEAN (Former Ice Dancer): There are *vanishingly* few guys who want to do ice dance. At least pairs has jumps, plus hurling pretty girls into the air and catching them by the crotch. If you like that sort of thing.

NARRATOR: Ice dance is perhaps the least understood figure skating discipline.

Archival footage of skaters competing in the ice dance event at the 1976 Winter Games in Innsbruck, Austria—the first year ice dance was contested as an Olympic sport.

NARRATOR: Drawn from ballroom dancing, ice dance focuses on intricate footwork and close partnering between skaters, rather than the acrobatic lifts and athletic jumps seen in other events.

ELLIS DEAN: A lot of female ice dancers start out skating with their brothers, cause those are the only dudes they can manage to guilt into it. That was not an option for Kat Shaw.