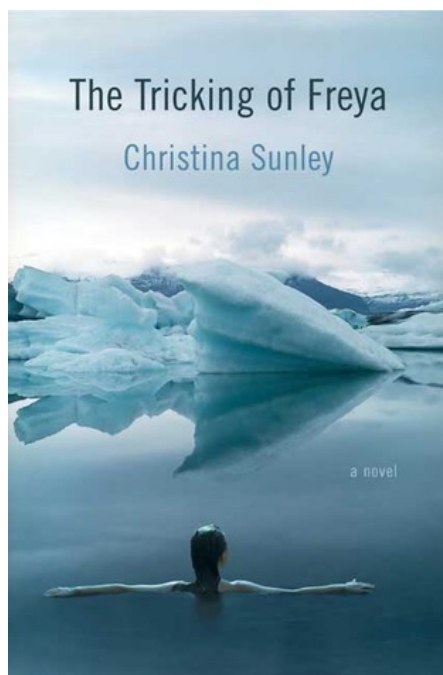




The Tricking of Freya

Christina Sunley

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A young woman obsessed with uncovering a family secret is drawn into the strange and magical history, language and landscape of Iceland.

Freya Morris grows up in a typical American suburb – but every summer, she enters another realm entirely when she visits her relatives in Gimli, a tiny village in Canada settled by Icelandic immigrants. Here she falls under the spell of her troubled but charming aunt Birdie, who thrills her with stories of exotic Norse goddesses, moody Viking bards, and the life of her late grandfather, the most famous poet of "New Iceland."

But when Birdie tricks Freya into a terrifying scandal, Freya turns her back on everything Icelandic and anything that reminds her of the past. She is living an anonymous, bleak existence in Manhattan when she finally returns to Gimli for the first time in two decades – and stumbles upon a long concealed family secret.

As Freya becomes increasingly obsessed with unraveling her family's tangled story, she finds herself delving into the very memories she has worked so hard to forget. When the clues dry up in Gimli, Freya journeys to Iceland itself. On this rugged island of vast lava fields and immense glaciers, Freya's quest comes to its unsettling conclusion.

A beautifully-written debut novel that deftly weaves together Iceland's distinctive history, ancient mythology, reverence for language, and passion for genealogy, *The Tricking of Freya* is a powerful exploration of kinship, loss and redemption.

The Tricking of Freya Details

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From Reader Review The Tricking of Freya for online ebook

Kristianne says

There is a story in the Icelandic poetic cannon about the tricking of Gylfi. Gylfi, the king, goes to challenge the Aesir (the clan of the gods) and discover the source of their power. He approaches Odin, who appears as a trinity on three thrones, and challenges him with a feat of wits wherein he peppers the tri-god with questions about the beginning and the end of the world. Odin, of course, easily answers all the inquiries and Gylfi fears for his life. Finally, he manages to stump Odin. Immediately, the grand palace and the thrones and the Odin trinity disappear, leaving Gylfi alone on the open hillside. The privilege of winning the challenge is tricked from him and he is forced to trudge home alone without glory.

Christina Sunley's Freya is likewise tricked but the cosmogony she is deciphering is her own. The portentous secrets her family have maintained send her on a mad pilgrimage through her ancestral Icelandic home. Sunley creates an epic of her own by weaving the mystery of family myth with a rousing travelogue.

Kiri says

Wow. This book made me want to sign up for a writing class or go back in time and go to a college with a great writing program... Although it is a first novel by the author she is clearly a superb writer (and in fact teaches writing in San Francisco(?)). Brilliant. The flow of the words, the character of the Icelandic culture that permeates and breathes through this novel, the portrayal of bipolar disorder that shows but does not tell us what's going on, the plotting and the unfolding and the very realness of the difficult relationships between generations... All these things are done so very well.

Dee says

Not as tightly woven as most mysteries, but then probably not meant to be a mystery. I had figured out the main plot "mystery" by a third of the way through. And the heroine really plays the shame-filled orphan card way too much. The description of Birdie, Freya's mother, and her descent into psychotic bipolar disorder appeared on target, and very hard to bear, as it was very painful. Told from the first-person memories of the young person forced to accompany her, made the account even more poignant.

A fun read, because of all the Icelandic history, language and poetry. The descriptions of Iceland make me want to go there immediately. Sounds magical! But probably a country for the young, as the weather sounds really intimidating.

Lisa Beaulieu says

The four stars are rounded up from a 3.6 or so. This book is full of fascinating descriptions of Iceland, its culture, history, and mythology. We even get a taste of the language itself! Being as I am obsessed with Iceland, it was a wonderful read for me. The writing is mostly strong and often poetic. However, there are some things that just got on my nerves.

One thing that bothered me ALOT was the author's description of sounds, given in italics. The first time it was clever, the second I said, mmm, the 20th I thought I would scream. I know that is minor, the thing is, this is so close to being an exceptional book, I held the writer to a higher standard I guess. The other thing that most bothered me was I never felt emotionally invested in anyone - not the narrator, and especially not Birdie. I think if I was supposed to believe this connection between them, there would have had to be more positive interaction between them - mostly Birdie was either a bitch, or depressed, around the child Freya. (A side note, would the family really have left a child with someone who had been in and out of mental institutions for all that time while Mary was in hospital? I think not.) After drawing out the "mystery" for so long (and I understand we are supposed to know well before Freya, but it did seem a little long...) the book wraps up a tad quickly too.

Still, this is worth a read, it is enjoyable on a number of levels, and the author is one to watch (this is a first novel.)

Ariadne says

If my reading tastes were just a bit different this would be a 5 star read, so don't let my 3 star rating dissuade you. I picked up this book for the sole reason that I was going on a trip to Iceland, and I wanted to immerse myself in the place a little before going. In this the book was partially successful - the parts about Iceland really captured the place. But this book is less about Iceland than it is about relationships, people, and what makes them tick. That's not a bad thing at all, in fact it's the mark of an excellent book, but it wasn't precisely what I was in the mood for.

Sunley's writing is absolutely gorgeous. Her prose is top notch, and I'm surprised she hasn't gotten more attention. Her way with words, and ability to really create these places and people was excellent. The characters she crafted, particularly Freya and Birdie, came to life in such a way they felt real. A large part of this book, for me, centered around mental illness, and the subject was handled deftly - I kept thinking of a member of my own family as I read, because Sunley captured that particular illness so accurately. In fact, that might have been simultaneous what kept me reading, as well as what made me weary as I read. These broken people were so familiar to me that I couldn't help care what happened to them, but also be somewhat tired as they spun out of control, just as I am when my loved ones do so.

After I finished this book I flew to Iceland and found myself driving around the island. As I did so I saw many of the places Sunley wrote about, and it made them feel even more special. It gave me an anchor point for my travels. I'm glad I read this book, even though I was hoping for more mythology and less family drama. If you want to read an exceptionally well written story about broken people trying to discover the truth of themselves you won't go wrong here.

Candace says

After a spate of middling reads, I am delighted with the start of this novel. Christina Sunley's astute observance of children reminds me of Anne-Marie MacDonald. Good writing, interesting setting (an Icelandic settlement in Canada) . . . sigh, I'm happy.

Now that I have finished "The Tricking of Freya," I highly recommend it. The promising opening played out into an involving read that kept me up late and made me want this novel to be a hit so that Sunley will write more. The publisher has an ambitious marketing plan in place, and this is definitely the sort of book that

booksellers will love to hand sell.

I've been thinking about this book all day.

Diana says

Great novel. Challenging at times, I had to reread a few parts. I figured out the ending way before we were told which took away a little bit. Topic of mental illness is important. It's very atmospheric. Iceland and the people who live there seem wonderful and this book just added to my desire to go there :)

Eric says

Freya Morris discovers a bare hint of a family secret, a secret she sets out to unravel. On the way, we meet her family of Icelandic expatriates living in Gimli, Manitoba (the Canadian New Iceland), her manic depressive aunt, her long-suffering mother and grandmother, and several loyal family friends. Mix this surface story with reflections on language, goddesses, episodes from the famous Icelandic sagas (best represented by the poet-warrior Egil Skallagrimson), and above all the landscapes of Gimli and Iceland, and you have an exciting, hard-to-put-down first novel.

This is a book about many things; but fundamentally it is about the landscapes and places we inhabit - whether within or outside of ourselves - and how we view and perceive them. We may think we see what is right in front of us - how can we not know our own lives and families? - but we always view these landscapes through a thick fog. The fog may be a literal one created by volcanic ash or by an impending snowstorm; but most often we find ourselves struggling with our perceptions, with the volcanos and storms in our selves. Such complex shifts between our perceptions, the snow, darkness, and light of the places where we live, and the mediating filters of such landscapes as our bodies, our illnesses, and our languages, ultimately form our identities, our family histories, and our communities. In short, our shared sagas. But how much of the structure is real and how much is a deception or a trick? This is the question we face on any journey through a secret.

The landscape of this book can be viewed in several ways: an engaging family saga, a brilliant portrait of mental illness, or a long-hidden mystery to be solved. Any way you choose to take it, Christina Sunley has written a stunning, well researched, and especially well-written exploration of our minds, our families, and our stories.

Fiona says

Fantastic! I just love this book. I read it before, during and after a trip to Iceland and it was the best background reading I could have chosen. Maybe more a companion reader. I learned so much about Iceland, its people, language and culture, all of which gave me a context for my visit to this fascinating country. The descriptions of the landscape are written in beautiful prose and completely capture the extra ordinariness of the island. It's also a book about manic depression / bipolar disorder, its effects on the people who have it and on their family and friends. As readers, we know how Freya has been tricked from very early on and it's sometimes frustrating waiting for her to catch on but that's the whole point and it enthralled me through to the end. This will always now be one of my favourite books ever and I'm so grateful to the author for writing it. If I'm lucky enough to go back to Iceland, I'll be taking it with me.

Elizabeth says

A master-tale of search for identity and roots (set mostly in Manitoba & Iceland). Sunley is a clever, poetic and insightful wordsmith, as well as an astute observer of human nature at it's best and worst. I love a novel that has a good balance of good plot and great language - this has both. If you like stories about misfits discovering themselves and ones with complex characters, you'll love this journey of one woman through her family's history and secrets.

I am an old friend of the author's from our NYU Film School days. she will have a reading for this novel at Elliott Bay Books in Seattle on March 12th - hope to see some of you there!

Chrissie says

What do I think the book is about? A multigenerational saga filled with Icelandic myths, legends, culture and landscapes. Good writing. Exploration of family secret.

My guess was correct! And the book was very good, in fact worth four stars. I loved learning about Iceland and the Icelandic immigrants that settled in Manitoba, Canada.

The above is still correct. I have read 43% .

In addition to that above the story is a coming of age novel. It is light reading, but at its core there is a sad note. There is humor. I know some sentences could be criticized as being unrealistic, but I do not care because I simply find them humorous. There is a wealthy guy that works for Shell.... and Freya thinks that perhaps the trade of rare shells could make one wealthy in Iceland. Rather stupid, but still funny.

The physical description of Iceland has me so curious that I find myself looking on the web to see the places spoken of. There are glaciers and lava caves and volcanoes and waterfalls. So you learn about Iceland, not only the significance of her poets, but also the physical terrain and history. All of this is tied up in the story of one large family. And then there is this crazy aunt, whom I find not that crazy but just a bit strong minded. Determined. Set on doing things her way.

So what am I getting? History and culture, some crazy characters and a fun, light story.

Will the above be correct? I have read 20%, into the sixth chapter. None of the above as yet been proven

false. I am learning about Manitoba and Iceland . I enjoy the Norse myths and discussion of kennings. But most of all I think the author has a knack for drawing people. I do not see the child as naughty; I see Freya as a 7 year old with lot of curiosity, imagination and energy. I enjoy viewing the world through her eyes. I find myself smiling. I see sisters who both hate and love each other. I see a real family. So one sister is a crazy aunt, but I empathize with her too. I feel for all of them in this messy family. Aren't most families rather messy,

I am enjoying my time spent with this book. What a difference from the last book, where I kept waiting and waiting for something to move me. When I am really quiet reading a book, it usually means I am fighting to find something enjoyable. When I like the book, I want to share my enjoyment immediately. That is why I am sharing this with you now. I hope the book remains good!

Kristen says

This book made me want to be Icelandic, or at least have a really good friend that lives there and lets me stay the summers.

The writing, the voice, the pauses, the rhythm, I am not sure what the proper term is, but whatever it is, it is different in this book. Good different, interesting different. It took me a chapter or two to find my bearings in reading the story, but I am so glad I continued. Sorry if this sounds silly, but sometimes I felt like I was reading English for the first time. How cool, after reading thousands of books, a writer can make my own language seem new to me. I only give it four out of five stars, because the ending didn't quite live up to its beginnings.

Read this book, don't give up in the beginning. I will wait impatiently for more from this author.

Laura says

Although I was annoyed by the first chapter, the overly self-conscious posture of it, I read on and am glad I did. I love Sunley's characterizations, both of "her people" and of place. Sunley takes a risk of losing her reader (spoiler alert) when her most interesting character, Birdie, dies midway through the book and the action slows. Again, I am glad I kept reading. The Tricking of Freya is filled (sometimes to overflowing) with Icelandic language and lore. The mystery behind The Tricking of Freya is rendered as intricate double-speak, emulating the Icelandic language itself. Not a book to be read in a distracted state, it requires the reader's full attention.

Shomeret says

As a poet who writes about runes, I adore kennings. So finding out that there is an emphasis on kennings in this novel attracted me to it. Sure enough there was a paragraph in The Tricking of Freya that inspired me to start the process on a new rune poem. Needless to say, I enjoyed the mythology element and the Icelandic history element.

Although I saw the plot resolution coming a while before the big reveal, I did think the characterization was quite good.

Cheryl says

Every once in awhile a book comes along that just takes my breath away. I can't explain why and the ones on my short list (like *Sunlight in a Beautiful Garden*, *Moby Dick* or *The Time Traveler's Wife*) don't appear to have any similarities to each other at all, except perhaps that in all cases, the authors' command of the written word shows what a truly beautiful language English can be in the right hands.

From the the first paragraph until I closed the cover last night I was swept away by this lyrical, emotional, and poetic tale. The characters seemed like family and the descriptions of place, photographic. The writing is beautiful and eloquent with a fluidity to it that makes the story move from beginning to end with an effortlessness that belies how truly difficult it is to write well.

Freya, conflicted by her past and the often misinterpreted memories of childhood, is stuck in her future and struggles to understand and come to terms with herself, her family with all of their dysfunction, peculiarities and history, as well as their love for each other. It is also a tale of how much history and place both influence and shape our lives and character. It is never a case of nature OR nurture - it is always a case of nature AND nurture.

If I had to find fault it would be that, in some ways, the ending seemed a bit rushed. But, most likely, that was not really the case - it was just me, sad that this wonderful story was over.
