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Three beautiful French sisters entrust an American hiker with the mission of rescuing their mother high in the Alps.

But what if she doesn't want to be found?

Recently fired from his high-power finance job and dumped by his fiancée, Jim Olsen has come to the Swiss Alps to clear his head. At the charming Cabane des Audannes, he meets Clio, Thalia and Helene Castellane, who are on a quest of their own: their mother, Calliope, has fled to these mountains to escape her philandering politician husband's most recent scandal. As snow threatens to descend upon the Alps, the women have come to bring their mother home.

But the sisters are at the point of surrender; it is time for them to return to Paris. Buoyed by wine and inspired by their beauty, Jim impetuously volunteers to assume their search, but soon realizes that he is in over his head. The Alps are filled with beauty and danger, not the least of which is Calliope's desire to stay hidden. And all the while Jim finds himself haunted by the memory of her daughters and conflicted in his desire for them.

The Runaway Wife is a story of adventure, survival, and romance—and of a man's discovery of a world outside his conventional life and a new vision of himself within it.

The Runaway Wife Details

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From Reader Review The Runaway Wife for online ebook

Rachel says

Just as pretentious as it is poetic. Exactly the kind of book i wanted to be able to whip through on my short vacation this week- 3 days of pocketed reading, and i enjoyed the scenic Swiss vistas and muse-inspired female characters. As a fluent French speaker and degree holder in French language, culture, and history, i was less than impressed with some of the translations, but i did only have an ARC- the proper edition might be better. compelling, fast, romantic, and kind of a throwaway. But happy i read it!

Rebecca says

This single story line book filled with references (many inaccurate) was dancing on the edge of a romance novel, but there was no sex. Here are my biggest points of contention:

I realize the author was shooting for using names of the muses. Commit or go home. I respect why she didn't want to use Erato, being the origin of and sounding so similar to erotic, but when that didn't seem appropriate, there were 5 other muses (excluding the 3 already used) to chose from. She didn't need to make up a muse based on the legend of Helen of Troy with exotic French accents to make it sound... more Greek? Not sure.

Jim Olsen... photographer? Puny man who needs saving? That's all that came to mind for me, because I actually read and watch some Superman, which is super saturated in our society. I imagine the author has somehow not, since she chose that name for what was supposed to be a strong character.

Freyja was the Norse goddess of love and known for her promiscuity... maybe she loved Odin. Maybe there are stories of it, but you're digging into obscure sources to find them. She is NOT heavily associated with war. I don't even understand the significance of her inclusion other than to say that Jim was reconnecting with his Norse roots.

Which is my next point, lots of references, but not all bound together to a cohesive theme. Just a messy hodge-podge. "Hey, Greek!", "Hey, Norse!", "OMG! Owls!", "Also Shakespeare names with no significance.", "Next, let's bring up Dante's Inferno and do NOTHING with it." I could go on, but I made my point.

Now on to plot problems! I'm not filtering spoilers, so in the event my review leaves you wanting to read the book, just stop here.

We're too busy and just pretty girls who can't find our mom at her yearly hideout, you look strong and handsome, we're putting all our hopes for her survival on you, a man who sees us through our "curvaceous" [insert body parts here], who give a cursory promise to see if he runs into while he's hiking. Seems legit.

Next, his "experienced" mountain hiking friend, leaves him (not so far fetched, he insisted) but without super important supplies, like a map (because when the trail is marked you can't get a map?!), an ice pick, a compass, hand warmers, adequate food, more than the one in use band-aid etc. I didn't keep a list. This is off the top of my head. It just went on.

But then he randomly stumbled on the right guy to take him to her. He meets her where they fall down an oddly platonic relationship mixed with hyper sexual innuendo, including competing with a teenage goat herder and being slathered in honey. But it's fine because she looks like she's in her 20s and not on the brink of 50. Want to embrace a relationship with a huge age gap while you fantasize about her daughters? Do it. Want to embrace them as platonic friends discovering each other? Do it. But don't do this weird hybrid that failed for both. It was lame.

Helicopter rescue team? Easy to ditch. Just go somewhere that smells bad, they can't handle that. It's not like they ever deal with anything gross on rescue missions. They'll just fly home and come back tomorrow.

How cold is it on this mountain? She has a fever for 2 days with pneumonia she caught from... the cold? And how is she alive and keeping bees (that struggle in temperatures below 55) and growing eggplants (which require some sort of warmth). One minute they're freezing and there's perpetual snow and ice, the next they're bathing in "cold" mountain lakes that would probably trigger hypothermia given the first statement. But then they flee and are near death in less than a day, and considering eating the owl they're so hungry. But the goat herder is living close with his family all year just fine. Was this a dangerously cold region, or not. It was not clear.

And then "rescue" and Jim's return to civilization. Desperate and fighting for his life to a good night's rest and a hearty breakfast and he's on his way. No recovery necessary. Meanwhile, medicine healed Calliope and although Jim thought she might need rest, she's up healthy and entertaining with a slight cough the following week.

Also, it'll all be okay. Her husband will save their country from socialism and she will sacrifice her self so at least one of her daughters will learn not to be like her and run away with Jim. No one dies, love (that guy you met once before you committed to wait forever for him) wins, and corporate America loses while simultaneously French socialism is crushed by a narcissistic dictator. Nice and neat!

Nancy says

If you're interested in hiking and the Alps read this. If not, don't bother.

Paulita Kincer says

The Runaway Wife by Elizabeth Birkelund transported me to a world I've never visited, to an oasis high in the Swiss Alps where a woman can be her true self, unworried about what others think.

The book begins with Jim, an overworked financial investor who hasn't had a vacation in 8 years taking a vacation with a friend. They hike in the Swiss Alps and at a remote hut, they meet three sisters who entice them to search for the women's lost mother. The mother was raised in the Alps, but she has never stayed gone so long. They fear for her safety with snow coming. She also happens to be the wife of a man running for the presidency in France. The press recently revealed that man had a mistress and a baby, so the wife disappeared. Every day, the man sent a helicopter into the Alps searching for his wife so he could bring her home.

Jim decides to take up the challenge, and what he finds changes his life and his dreams.

Here's an excerpt:

"The melodic singing drew closer but was interrupted by a long, drawn-out cough. Jim had not noticed her coughing yesterday. He looked out the window. She was hanging laundry -- sheets, lingerie, a long white nightgown -- on a clothesline. Her slim body weaved in and out of the laundry so that he could never see more than a part of her at any time.

...

He could not resist returning to the window for one more glimpse of Calliope's dance among the billowing sheets and clothing. She looked like a woman at sea amid the sails of a ship."

And later, the beauty of the Alps is reiterated.

"He'd heard the term Alpenglow, but this was the first time he'd witnessed it. The enormous bowl of the sky was lit from below by the amber light of the setting sun. The few snowfields nestled inside crevices in distant peaks glowed a deep mauve."

Doesn't that make you want to see it yourself? It does for me.

The entire time that the characters were hiding in the Alps, I wanted to be there to experience it myself. Very beautifully written.

As an author myself, I've been warned about the squishy middle of a book, the part that makes reader drop a novel and not pick it up again, but Birkelund does not have that problem. The middle of her book is enthralling.

The beginning of the book could have been stronger to lure readers into that middle, but I promise that if you stick with it a few chapters, you'll be rewarded.

AK Mama Reads says

With an evocative voice and imagery sure to help you cool down during this heat wave, Birkelund's second novel, *The Runaway Wife*, is more than a story of a man finding someone who wants to stay out of the spotlight. It's a story of a man finding out what desire truly means, and thus what he genuinely desires. This book flew by due to its fairly small page count. I could have read another 10 volumes, it was such a pleasant experience if I'd had the time I would have re-read the book immediately upon finishing. I think billing this as chick lit seems to throw people for a loop, as the genre is too often seen as one to dismiss. Whereas, books such as *The Runaway Wife* are some of the most enjoyable and some of my most recommended when asked by other what they should read when they are in a slump. Maybe we should just go ahead and call this literary fiction so that others might understand how beautifully written and how compelling it could be. Birkelund has created in me a deep desire to see what she's seen and go where she's been, so I'm off to figure out how to go on my own adventure. Not just a great summer read, but a great read period!

Lydia says

Such a good, cute read!

Melanie says

A fast read. It was an interesting premise for a story but only an "ok" read.

Deb (Readerbuzz) Nance says

No, the setting isn't France, but it's so close that you can see France just over the border. To add to the book's France factor, most of the characters are French right down to their occasional poutinesses and their love for art and beauty and minor surreptitious affairs. Giving the book a quite high Frenchiness overall.

SPOILER ALERT

The story is a bit of a stretch, but then again don't be looking for realistic fiction, folks. Three sisters, all of whom have lovely mythological names, (do you see where this little story is going?) meet up with a naive American, Jim, who spontaneously agrees to head off up the Alps in search of their missing mother, Calliope. Am I telling too much if I share that he finds her and she's French with a capital F, and just being around this amazingly alive woman revitalizes Jim and changes his life. Rescuing Calliope, who doesn't want to be rescued, from the Alps in a snowstorm is a wonderfully fun adventure.

Kathi says

I was recommended this book because I loved "Where'd you go Bernadette," please be advised "The Runaway Wife" is not at all like comparable.

DJ Sakata says

Favorite Quotes:

Whose breathing did he hear... How amazing it was to be privy to a stranger's sleep, something that belonged solely to that person.

Sleep was not a break from life's continual sweep. In it, you were still living life, seeing things you would never see come morning, and it could age you as quickly as daytime.

Even when she wasn't moving, she vibrated like a flame dancing in the wind.

One of her dull-gray eyes was open, the other shut. As you go to death, Jim thought, perhaps there is always one eye turning back toward life.

My Review:

Upon finishing *The Runaway Wife*, I was in a state of indecision on how I felt about the book. I had vacillated in my opinion of the story while reading, although overall I found it thoughtfully written,

insightful, and observant. I also found it somewhat exasperating, and then there is also this unsettling yet elusive quality for which I just couldn't settle on an apt descriptor without an in-depth internal analysis of my personal reading preferences. I was fascinated by the interesting and unpredictable nature of the characters, yet I was ultimately disappointed with them... but then, if I am being realistic, people disappoint each other all the time in the real world. The setting and premise were well out of my wheelhouse as the bulk of the adventure was a fool's errand taking place on the slopes of the Swiss Alps, (by a novice mountain climber) and also involved the power and facade of a philandering French politician/presidential candidate. Although, politics tend to be slimy and filled with philandering beasts in any culture... it certainly does in the current American political landscape.

After a glass, or two, of wine and considerable inner musing in a hot bubble bath with my favorite Mozart disc playing, I concluded that my main complaint would be the lack of closure to the tale, as the story ended with the characters still in flux after making major life changes. I didn't get my coveted HEA, or a sense of closure or completion.

Lesson learned - I should not be so rigidly focused on the expectation of having all the loose ends tied up for me, or in achieving a positive end result, or in having a neat and tidy sense of closure; as even with fictional characters, their life can still go on in an unclear direction - and so should mine.

Griselda Alvarez says

This story needed character development. The story although somewhat entertaining, I failed to understand why Jim would take on a search mission requested by three young women he had just met. The women wanted Jim to find their mother in the mountains and bring her home, when the mother had ran away to the mountains to get away from her cheating and controlling husband. I was disappointing to get to the end of this book and read that she decided to remain in the marriage and in the household even though she wasn't happy.

Meg - A Bookish Affair says

"The Runaway Wife" is the story of Jim, a man who is down on his luck. He travels to the Swiss Alps with his friend to simply relax and find some peace of mind. It's not to be when he gets roped in to finding the mother of three women that he meets. But maybe Calliope doesn't want to be found? This book is a good one for when you want to let go of reality for a little bit and get lost.

I don't need my fiction to be reality based but if you do, this book may not be for you. The premise is a little stretched but it works well for this one. The characters were so fascinating. I especially liked Calliope. Her life is relatively charmed in the manner in which she is able to live in but that is not enough when she feels so constrained by other parts of her life. The detail is often sparse in this book and I wish that I could have gotten to know a little bit more about what made the characters tick.

This book has a very light and airy feel, like the Swiss Alps that the book is set in. The setting was fantastic and my favorite part of the book. The author does a good job of moving her characters through this gorgeous setting while showing the readers around the place. There is also some nice bits of writing throughout the

book that I really liked! Overall, I would have loved more detail but enjoyed the premise of the book!

Juliana Knight says

I read this novel while walking on the treadmill, so it's perfect for a light read and can be finished fairly quickly. However, I didn't find the story terribly engaging and felt unsatisfied at the ending. There are beautiful passages of prose featuring descriptions of nature, but the characters themselves (and their conversations) leave a lot to be desired. I feel as though many of the issues are unresolved at the end.

Jennifer ~ TarHeelReader says

The premise of this was absolutely fascinating, but the execution fell just a little flat for me. More to come once I think about it more. Thanks to Caryn, The Book Whisperer, for the book. :)

Chana says

Hiking heals. Our main character is a 30-ish American man, recently dumped by both his fiancée and his job. Life hurts! He and a friend take a vacation hiking in the Alps, help our guy walk it off, leave the pain behind and get ready to begin the life struggle once again.

Maybe such a hike can never be a "normal" experience, it is too intense, but for our story we take a distinct step towards weird when three women approach our hikers and ask our guys to find their mother and bring her out of the mountains. Really? Our main character has never hiked the Alps before but, in American can-do spirit, he agrees. And down the rabbit hole we go.

We have entered the fairy tale; the Queen fleeing her ogre husband, living on a mountaintop aerie full of flowers, bee hives, owls and ancient Benedictine wine, thick and tasting of blood. The Queen is young, with a braid and a quiver of arrows on her back. She cooks fish stew and ratatouille and charms our American no end. She doesn't want to go back to the ogre, understandably, but she is sick (pneumonia, not mental). The ogre has a menacing helicopter out looking for her, and they run and skip and dodge that helicopter like mountain goats. Eventually the game is up, I won't tell you everything. But choices are made and the players resume their places on the board, for the most part, but maybe not all is lost.
