

My Favorite

Sarah Jollien-Fardel

Holly James, Translator

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Abused in her childhood and taught to believe that she doesn't deserve love, a woman seeks independence in Sarah Jollien-Fardel's heartbreaking novel *My Favorite*.

After a village doctor ignored the truth about her injuries, Jeanne grew up afraid that she would take after her alcoholic father. Indeed, she sometimes mirrored her father's temperament by lashing out, and she was resentful about the secrets her neighbors kept. Later, she studied to become a teacher. But even after leaving home, she had trouble relating to other adults. Nor could she extinguish her memories or the fear that abused people might be prone to becoming abusive too—indeed, that some troubles are inevitable.

The narrative is propulsive, moving at a rate that reflects Jeanne's urgency and intelligence. Jeanne's weariness and emotional distance also overtake its progression at times, so that time folds in on itself, recollections of abuse intruding on its progress. Then someone Jeanne loves commits suicide and further bleakness sets in.

The novel's darkness is offset by factors including the beautiful recurring image of Jeanne swimming in Lake Geneva for reprieve and an illicit romance. Jeanne exhibits care for her mother despite suspecting her of weakness; she defends her town, even as she tries to erase her ties to it. And when Jeanne recognizes a certain meagerness of spirit in herself upon discovering her mother's secrets, it startles her, leading her to believe that she, too, may have contributed to her family's dysfunction. The result is an emotive, complex novel that asks biting moral questions.

In the ruminative novel *My Favorite*, a woman wrestles with her inherited traumas, culminating in an irrevocable choice.

KAREN RIGBY (March / April 2025)

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