



## The Favourite

**S. V. Berlin**

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In *The Favourite*, S. V. Berlin's quietly compelling debut novel, estranged siblings reunite following the death of their mother, troubled by old resentments and misunderstandings at a time of both raw and numbing grief.

Edward and Isobel are now fortyish and living in separate countries. Edward remained near their childhood home in Sussex, England, while Isobel boldly moved to New York twenty years ago, hoping for a career in the movie industry. When their mother Mary is suddenly taken ill, Isobel returns to Sussex; following Mary's death, she stays to help Edward plan the funeral.

*The Favourite* includes three perspectives, alternating between Isobel, Edward, and Edward's seemingly meek girlfriend, Julie. The narrative shifts with an engrossing rhythm. Even the newly departed Mary is evocative in her absence, as Isobel and Edward uncertainly sort through her wardrobe and eclectic possessions. The novel balances keen observations with welcome moments of humor; there are also subtly eloquent undertones about matters of loss, life, and death.

Beyond Isobel's outwardly vivacious confidence is an increasing uncertainty, particularly about her life in New York. Her captivation with Manhattan began with Woody Allen-esque cinematic yearnings—"a city in 'black and white', mythic and romantic"—but now she feels displaced and isolated, and contemplates moving back to England.

Edward's generally dour, sarcastic personality seems to buttress a rather classic British repression of intense feelings as well as an intriguing vulnerability. Timid Julie clings to a New Age self-help book that promotes positive thinking, eventually managing to twist its teachings into her own curiously surprising power play.

Caught up in a triangle of tension, miscommunication, emotion, and memory, the characters of *The Favourite* are appealingly dysfunctional, flawed, and not soon forgotten.

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