

The Favorite
by
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A clock is ticking, its relentless syncopation endless, droning, pronounced.

FADE IN:

...on two boxes designed for safekeeping; possibly ornate, definitely feminine. Boxes reserved for something special.

INT. KITCHEN - EVENING

Three WOMEN are gathered around the table of a breakfast nook alcove, staring at the boxes. SARAH, 39, nibbles bland wheat crackers; she is dowdy, frumpy, unadorned. Misty, 37, sips bottled water; she's suburban soccer Mom-casual. JENNA, 35, clutches her wine glass like a lifeline as she smokes; she's dressed to kill.

No one speaks for a moment.

SARAH

(finally)

I dreamt about her again last night. Third time this week.

MISTY

(interested)

Really? Was it a nice dream?

SARAH

Oh, yes! And you know the significance of threes in my life: the three spelling bee trophies in school, the three fender-benders in college, three surgeries for my deviated septum...

JENNA

(impatient)

Yes, your threes are legendary, we're all in awe of your threes!

(off her watch)

Look, can we just get this over with? Some of us have places to *be*!

SARAH

(sad)

I can't believe you're going *out*. Would it have killed you to spend a whole evening with us?

JENNA

It's Saturday *night*! I don't know why this couldn't wait!

SARAH

(adamant)

It had to be on Mom's birthday!

(reverently)

A special task...

JENNA

...calls for a special occasion, God, you're a broken record!

SARAH

...calls for a special occasion!

MISTY

Look, I say we just *dive in...*

there's really no other way.

(suddenly coughing)

Sweetie, I mean, do we really need the cigarette, *really?*

Jenna's cell phone rings and she excitedly takes the call, heading into the kitchen to talk as Misty puts the cigarette out in the ashtray.

JENNA

*Omigod, is it totally amazing?... No way!...Have you seen the owner?...No, he's blonde, like **six-eight**, useta manage La Boheme!*

She snatches her glass, leaves the room with her cigarette.

JENNA

(her voice trailing off)

*We'll **find** him and drop my **name!** We were **off-the-charts** flirting at yoga last night, he'll get you an awesome table!...No, I know...*

Sarah just glares after her, hurt.

MISTY

Of course she's going out. Did you really expect her not to?

She lights the candles in the center of the table as Jenna's laughter rings out from the kitchen.

SARAH

(sad)

These are Mom's own words...the last we'll ever have. And she doesn't even care.

MISTY

That's not true; she just won't show it.

Jenna laughs as she returns to the table, finishing her call.

JENNA

Right...okay, no, I'll call you from the car! Ciao!

She slams her phone shut.

JENNA

(off the candle)

What, now it's a *seance!*? Let's just hold hands and sing *Cumbayah!*

Misty takes her hand with a wink.

MISTY

(playful)

Lighten up! A little *ambiance* never hurt anyone.

Jenna settles in, pours herself more wine. They are as they were before. Sarah rests her hands on the box.

SARAH

Okay. Now I've given this a lot of thought. We should go slowly. Mom took a lifetime to write them, the least we can do is take our time.

JENNA

Oh fuck *that!*

She roughly grabs one of the boxes and turns it upside down, spilling onto the table several personal journals of different types and designs; like the boxes, they're feminine and stylish, of varying ages and in various conditions.

SARAH

(stunned, horrified)

NO!

She frantically rescues the journals, whisking them out of Jenna's reach, handling each one lovingly, as if they're precious jewels.

SARAH

These are precious, they should be saved for posterity, maybe in a safety deposit box even...

JENNA

(to Misty)

You wanna field that? She's being *psycho* over the goddamned things!

SARAH

Why are you being horrible?!

JENNA

(dripping contempt)

Newsflash! They're not the Dead Sea Scrolls! They're *diaries*! And for a bunch of old *diaries* I am missing the opening night seating of Food Whore,

(dripping contempt)

which although I know it's escaped your attention, is Gavin Kaysen's new downtown loft space! With, incidentally, a three-month waiting list and sweeping skyline views!

SARAH

(to Misty)

See?! She cares more about a restaurant than she cares about Mom!!!

JENNA

Not *a* restaurant! *The* restaurant!

SARAH

Why can't you show some *respect*?

JENNA

You still don't get it: she's dead! She won't notice you now any more than she did when she was *alive*!

Impulsively, Sarah throws a cracker at her...and instantly caves with regret.

SARAH

(blurting it out)

Oh I'm so sorry!

Jenna laughs, eats the cracker.

JENNA

(amused)

Wow...don't be. That showed *backbone*.

MISTY

(irritated but calm)

Ladies! This doesn't have to be difficult! Let's just read quietly, then share some highlights.

(to Jenna)

Because Sarah's right, these are Mom's thoughts, they deserve consideration.

(to Sarah)

And Jenna has a point, too, not every word's a pearl of wisdom. And we're not gonna get through all of this in just one sitting anyway.

She gives each of them a journal and takes one for herself.

SARAH

Wait! I want this one!

She exchanges hers with one from the unused pile.

SARAH

(defensively, off Jenna's look)

I like it. It's pretty.

They settle in with their respective journals, immersing themselves in their mother's words.

After a moment, Jenna absently refills her wine glass, splashing some on the journal she reads. Appalled, Sarah rushes to the kitchen for a towel to blot it dry.

SARAH

Oh my God be careful, what is wrong with you?! And why not just drink the whole bottle while you're at it!

JENNA

I plan to! And then just to piss you off further it's *José Cuervo time!* Maybe I'll break out some blow and do a little *freebasing*, too!

MISTY

(insistent, delighted)

Listen!

(reading)

...after the party he kissed me and called me Sandy. Then he said "Sorry, got Koufax on the brain.

(MORE)

MISTY (cont'd)
*Damned shame he can't pitch with
 the arthritis."*

She looks up, smiling.

JENNA
 (annoyed)
 I don't get it!

SARAH
 (to Jenna)
 Read something from yours! Pick
 something, anything!

Jenna reluctantly flips through her journal.

JENNA
 (reading)
*Watched "The Golden Girls" tonight.
 They sure are sassy gals.*

She looks up to find the others waiting with baited breath;
 she flashes what she's just read.

JENNA
 That's it. Exciting day.

Her cell phone rings; she grabs it and answers.

JENNA
*Hey...no way! Is she there with
 Sean?!...oh, the little tramp!*

She tosses her journal aside, rushes away.

JENNA
Uh-huh...yeah, no, definitely!

Sarah shoots Misty a frustrated look, which Misty returns
 with a shrug as she continues reading. Sarah picks up Jenna's
 discarded journal, skims through it. Neither looks up from
 her reading as they speak.

SARAH
 (absently)
 Oh, Mom had beautiful penmanship.
 You got that from her. I wish I
 had.

MISTY
 Yours is lovely.

SARAH
 No, I scrawl like an impatient
 adolescent. I always have, I...
 (she's *jolted* by something
 she's read)
 ...always will.

Her tone attracts Misty's attention; she looks up.

MISTY
 Somethin' good?

Sarah reads to herself for a moment, then closes the journal.

SARAH
 (shaken)
 No, uh...*Jenna was right, it was
 a...a slow day.*

She sets the journal on her lap, staring off.

MISTY
 (smiling)
 Hand it over.

Jenna returns, finishing her call.

JENNA
*I dunno, soon, we're almost done!
 'Kay, great, see ya 'bye!*

She disconnects, finds her sisters in a stalemate.

JENNA
 (impatient)
 No one's reading! Why aren't we
 reading?!

MISTY
 Sarah found something. She's not
 sharing.

JENNA
 (irritated)
 Well *share*, for God's sake, *share!*
 It's why you're *here!*

She snatches the journal from Sarah's lap.

SARAH
 (halfheartedly)
 No. Don't.

MISTY

What year's it from?

JENNA

'07, the one I was reading. Mom's contemporary musings.

SARAH

Right before she was diagnosed! I'm sure it's just *rambling!*

JENNA

(reading)

Jolene closed the beauty parlor and moved to Lubbock, she wants a baby but Rick shoots blanks!

(irritated)

Who **are** these people?!

SARAH

Her soaps...when she was delusional she thought they were real.

(insincere)

It's embarrassing, we should throw that one away.

JENNA

(absently, still reading)

She's dead, she doesn't mind.

(then)

Whoa.

She shoots a look to Sarah, then...

JENNA

(reading)

They say your firstborn has an automatic special place in your heart. What a crock of shit.

MISTY

(smiling)

It doesn't say that!

She takes the journal from Jenna to inspect it, but Sarah reaches across the table and forcefully snatches it from her.

SARAH

(reading)

Sarah was a disastrous baby. Difficult delivery, wouldn't sleep through the night, impossible to potty train.

(MORE)

SARAH (cont'd)

A whiny kid, too, never satisfied with anything you did for her. Went through six majors in college, finally settled on "Poetry" or some shit. Almost 40 years old now and livin' in a dumpy garage apartment. "Cat-sits" for a living...nice job for a grown woman.

MISTY

(quickly)

She never understood your entrepreneurial spirit...

SARAH

And I guess she could be a looker...but Jesus, she thinks she's Hillary Clinton with the goddamned headbands! Never touches make-up, dresses like a cyclone. If you ask me, she's petrified of sex.

MISTY

You don't need to read anymore.

JENNA

But it's just getting good!

SARAH

(reading)

Which isn't surprising since she lacks self-confidence, direction, and drive. She's settled for a life of mediocrity, plain & simple.

No one speaks for a moment.

SARAH

(finally, numb)

Well. Socrates said *Know thyself*.
So thank you, Mother.

She impulsively hands the journal back to Jenna.

SARAH

Then she talks about you.

JENNA

Hmmm...

(reading, delighted)

(MORE)

JENNA (cont'd)

Then, of course, there's our very own head cheerleader and Homecoming Queen who, if you ask me, has gelled into a tragically self-absorbed--

(turning the page)

--bitch.

(rolling her eyes, irritated)

*I especially love when she rolls her eyes. Like she's thinking "How long will this **take?! When do we get to the part about me?!"**"*

MISTY

(weary)

That's enough.

JENNA

(mean)

No, "sweetie," it's not!

(reading)

And what can you say about two divorces before age 35? I think Todd & Mark both wised-up and realized they'd married a very selfish girl. Bravo for them! Cutting their losses while they're still young. Very smart. At least she makes a decent living...but if you ask me she became a pharmacist strictly for the bucks, with zero thoughts of altruism.

She tosses the book onto the table.

JENNA

Well *that* was a fab idea! Anyone up for an enema, or a black eye? I, for one, sure could use some more flagellation!

MISTY

(carefully)

She didn't...mean for any of this to be shared. I think it's only fair to Mom that we remember that.

JENNA

Hey, *here's* a novel concept: say shit to people's faces instead of writing it in frilly little books they'll find after you die!

Sarah has picked up the journal again and is silently reading.

MISTY

Well, what would you have said if she'd said it to your face?

JENNA

Oh, gee, for starters *Thanks for setting high standards we can't ever fucking live up to!*

MISTY

Really? Well isn't that what you're doing right *now?! No one's perfect, Jenna, she was a good mother.*

JENNA

Oh sure, she was a peach! I fell asleep each night awash in the glow of her undying maternal empathy!

Sarah offers Misty the journal.

SARAH

It's your turn.

MISTY

(gruff)
Let's just skip it!

SARAH

No, let's not.

She sets the open journal in front of Misty...who reluctantly reads silently for a moment.

JENNA

Hello, I don't *think* so! *Out loud!*

Misty sighs...and tries to rush through a random passage.

MISTY

(reading)
She never failed to make me proud...even today...

SARAH

(forceful)
Don't do that. Start at the beginning.

MISTY

Guys, c'mon! Haven't we read
enough?!

Her sisters just stare at her defiantly; their surprising solidarity wins the moment.

MISTY

Fine.

(reading)

*Maybe it's wrong to have a
favorite.*

Jenna impulsively grabs her cigarettes, lights up.

MISTY

*But parents who say they don't are
liars. Growing up, she never failed
to make me proud. Even today...
especially today...her wonderful
husband, those adorable kids...
These things don't just happen in
life, one **makes** them happen. Of
course I love all three of my
girls... but looking at the big
picture, a mother sees what's what.
And Misty clearly stands head &
shoulders above her sisters in so
many ways. She's my biggest
accomplishment. She's my true pride
& joy.*

(pause)

Then she...then she talks about
Jolene & Rick.

She tosses the journal onto the table, looks at her sisters.

MISTY

(defiant)

There. Happy?

Jenna blows smoke in her face.

JENNA

Ecstatic.

MISTY

(no-nonsense)

Look, it was the drugs. I mean, she
was, she was *delusional!*

JENNA

Her diagnosis was June, she wrote
that in February. She was lucid.
Nice try.

Her cell phone rings; she whips it open.

JENNA

I'm on my way!

She slams it shut, heads to the kitchen.

MISTY

(calling out)
You can't leave!

Jenna breezes back into the room with her keys & purse.

JENNA

*We got engaged at Shea Stadium!
Cloth diapers versus disposables!
Whoops, he's been fucking the Avon
Lady Sue for four years!*

She grabs a journal.

JENNA

You two can put these under a
microscope for all I care, I have
better things to do!

She drains her wine glass.

MISTY

Look, you're not being fair! She
did the best job she could!

JENNA

Really? *Newsflash*: it wasn't very
good!

She starts to leave, but is stopped by Sarah's sorrow.

JENNA

(to Sarah, pragmatic)
It's the *past*, okay? It's *called*
that for a reason.

She leaves.

JENNA (O.C.)

You two know how to lock up.

For a moment her sisters just watch her go.

Then Sarah springs into action, gathering the scattered journals, returning them neatly to the boxes...but her hard tone belies her chirpy demeanor and fluttering hands.

And she absolutely cannot look at Misty.

SARAH

(covering brightly)

Well I guess that's that! Pointless to read any more, no point in a "family moment" without the whole family!

MISTY

Sweetie, listen...

SARAH

(rambling)

I don't know what I was expecting, they're just diaries, Jenna's right. I didn't find any of that *remotely* enlightening, did you? You'd think that a woman recording her *thoughts* would make it *interesting*, at least to her goddamned *daughters*...

MISTY

I know you're angry. You have every right to be.

The journals are stored, the boxes closed. Sarah sits calmly with her hands folded on the table.

SARAH

(forced politeness)

Let's don't talk about it, shall we?

MISTY

She couldn't look below the surface, she didn't see you like I do.

Sarah finally looks a her.

SARAH

(challenging)

Really? And how's that?

MISTY

Well...

(reaching)

...you're a...a *work-in-progress!*

(MORE)

MISTY (cont'd)

You're constantly evolving...your poetry, your charity work...and animals! I *wish* I was as good with them as you are, it's so great to see you with the cats!

SARAH

Yes, I'm sure it is. But cats aren't children, or a spouse.

MISTY

(a maternal approach)

Honey...honey, here...

She reaches across the table, takes both of Sarah's hands.

MISTY

...I think, I think writing in a journal is like...living in the moment. Being totally in your own *world*...

But Sarah's hard, cold stare derails her train-of-thought.

MISTY

(at a loss)

It just *is* what it *is*.

SARAH

(mock empathy)

Well, that's...deep, I'll have to remember that.

She pulls her hands back.

SARAH

I don't care what she wrote, it doesn't matter; she knew who was always with her, she knew who those home nurses *trusted*, she knew who spent a month on that lumpy pull-out couch! She knew who *cared* the most!

MISTY

(shocked)

Now wait, that's not *fair*! We discussed that! You were the only one who could be there!

SARAH

(even)

That's true; no family or respectable career.

(MORE)

SARAH (cont'd)
 (mock regret)
 Silly me, I forgot to get a real
 life.

MISTY
 Don't put words in my mouth!

SARAH
 You want *words*?! Try *dementia*,
vomit, and *bedpans*!
 (sudden thought)
 In fact...

She impulsively grabs a journal, scans pages...

SARAH
 ...I'm sure it's in here somewhere!
 IV drips...and sponge baths-- Oh,
 well, look there!
 (off a journal entry,
 vicious)
 There's your name again, quelle
 surprise! This is kinda like that
Brady Bunch episode, remember?!
Marcia Marcia Marcia!!! Didn't we
 all laugh and laugh about that?!
 Well, I guess the joke's on us
 because it wasn't really very
 funny, it was pathetic!!!

MISTY
 You're acting like a spoiled child!

SARAH
 (mock compassion)
 Awww, you're angry, I know...
 (winking)
 ...you have every right to be.

MISTY
 Why are you being so mean? What
 have I *done* but try to support
 you?!

SARAH
 Yes, I suppose you have, in your
 own fashion, and I really thank you
 from the bottom of my, oh, very
 grateful & spinsterish heart!

MISTY
 Hey, y'know what, don't blame *me*
 for *your* choices!
 (off the journals)
 (MORE)

MISTY (cont'd)
 Or for Mom's opinions! They're just
ramblings, you're making a big deal
 out of nothing!

SARAH
 (steely)
 Well, that's easy for you to say,
 you're her pride & joy!

MISTY
 (exasperated)
 Oh **please**, it's not like we didn't
 know how she **felt!**
 (instantly regretting it;
 gently)
 Nothing's *changed*.

SARAH
 That's not entirely true, because
 she loved you a little more. And
 that changes everything.

The ticking clock has resumed, its relentless syncopation
 piercing the silence as Sarah considers her next move...then
 slides all the journals toward Misty.

SARAH
 (flat)
 You should take these home...they
 belong to you, anyway.

She gathers her things.

SARAH
 (pragmatic)
 Don't forget to lock up; Jenna
 changed her code to
 (rolling her eyes)
D-K-N-Y.

Misty helplessly watches her leave.

INT. DINING ROOM - A FEW MINUTES LATER

Misty pours herself a healthy glass of wine and considers the
 stack of journals, selecting the one on top before choosing
 instead the one which started all the trouble. She unties and
 opens it, settling in with her wine as she reads, stoic at
 first...but then breaking into a barely perceptible smile as
 we...

FADE TO BLACK.