

Other Faces - A Series of Prose Sequences written by Taeho Choi

This is an English translation of *Other Faces*,
a sequence of prose pieces exploring fragmented perceptions of a single life.

Chapter 1. The First Face

It had been raining for a long time, but the clean walls of the funeral hall barely showed it. Only humidity seeped in faintly, painting the entire air with a low, gloomy hue.

The hallway in front of Room 2 was quiet. The scent of incense hung firmly in the air, and an old speaker mechanically repeated the eulogy.

The phrase starting with "During her lifetime..." sounded faint as if heard from far away, regardless of the voice itself.

They had all come here in the same way.

A group text message from an unknown source:
"The funeral of ○○○ is in room 2 of ○○ Funeral Hall."
There was no sender.

The message had been automatically sent from the hospital's system, unable to distinguish who her last contact was, and simply pushed out to all stored numbers.

That one message had brought five completely unrelated people to this room.

In the portrait photo, she wore a composed smile — neither warm nor cold. The only certainty was that each person pictured a completely different person when looking at her.

To the left in the room stood Jeok-ui. His gaze was toward the portrait, but his expression carried tension far from mourning.

A bit farther was Eun-hye. His expression seemed empty, or perhaps calm.

Ya-gyeong checked his wristwatch, uncomfortable with the scent of incense — a scent that didn't match the face he remembered seeing at night.

So-on sat quietly on a chair near the entrance, rolling a paper cup in his hands.

Jan-yeong looked at the portrait the longest — his gaze neither flickering nor pausing.

One text message.

A sudden death.

Five people remembering different faces.

They all stood in the same room, yet each was in the middle of a completely different world.

Chapter 2. Jeok-ui (嫉意 / Jealous Intent)

The air in the funeral hall was damp regardless of the mid-day light. The scent of incense slowly rose heavily toward the ceiling.

The man moved slightly forward along the line. He held a single chrysanthemum, staring down at it, awkwardly conscious of the fact that he was here.

When those before him made their offerings, an unexpected feeling suddenly rose within him. His lips trembled slightly and a laugh built up inside him.

Despite knowing the nature of this place, the laugh rose uncontrollably.

When he placed the flower in front of the casket, her photo faced him directly. Though the laugh welled up again, he bowed his head to suppress it and offered the incense.

She was dead, yet he felt neither grief nor joy. It was simply awkwardly amusing.

He remembered the first day he met her. One late afternoon, as he was about to close his workshop, she approached calmly.

"The rent in this neighborhood is going up again. Soon, there will be people packing up."

She spoke without emotion. Days later, when the rent truly rose and clients disappeared, he thought of her face again and again.

She did nothing, yet somehow things went awry. In the silent stillness of the funeral hall, he could not reconcile the 'nice person' others spoke of with the face he remembered.

After placing his flower and stepping away, he wondered — who was she?

To him, a face that made him laugh.

To others, a face that brought tears.

Yet all those faces belonged to one person — a strangely lasting thought.

Chapter 3. Eun-hye (恩惠 / Grace)

Eun-hye stood at the entrance of the funeral hall for a while. Inside, low lights, shallow breath, and the scent of incense came all at once.

Whenever he thought of her, it always began in the same scene — darkness, the smell of blood, winter air.

That day, he was nearly collapsing, mistaking the empty road for open space, unable to perceive light or sound. She grabbed his arm, wordlessly lifting him onto the sidewalk and handing back his fallen bag without expression.

"Be careful," she finally said.

Later, he was briefly admitted to the hospital, and in that process, she left her contact information as a witness. That was the first time he even learned her name.

They never contacted each other again. Her name was simply included in the funeral notice because it was recorded in the hospital's list — a fact he found strangely amusing.

In the photo at the funeral, her face was completely different from her expression that day.

To Eun-hye, she was neither a kind person nor a cold one — merely a momentary intervention that changed the direction of his day.

Perhaps everyone here remembered her with different faces. That thought lightened his step slightly.

Chapter 4. Ya-gyeong (夜景 / Night View)

Ya-gyeong swept his gaze over the muted lights and neutral carpets of the funeral hall. It was a familiar smell.

He sat in the farthest seat, with no intention or certainty of offering flowers. He simply felt obliged to be here.

In the distance, her photo did not resemble the face he knew. He could not stare at it for long.

He first saw her in a dim bar. Among people, she was always quiet.

She stood up at the precise moment without a word, moving in a rhythm slightly off from the flowing music.

Her departure left only a disordered table and rings of liquid. To Ya-gyeong, she was not flesh and bone, but rather the essence of wandering.

Seated in the funeral hall, that air once again rushed in.
They called her a 'good person,' but to him, it was incomprehensible.

To him, she was a night face.

Even when it was his turn, he did not look at the photo.
Her photograph was exact — but his memory was hazy.

Which face of hers did he remember?
And was it even really her face?

Chapter 5. So-on (素溫 / Pure Warmth)

So-on wandered in front of the funeral hall before entering slowly. He took the paper cup handed to him without any intention of drinking.

The scene he remembered of her was singular — early spring, strong winds, and the moment he dropped his receipts and envelopes on the sidewalk.

She stopped while passing by, quietly picked them up, and handed them back without expression — as if handling a task.

"If anything's missing, call me."

On the back of the last receipt, she wrote her number.
He never contacted her — yet she apparently hadn't deleted his number.

The funeral notice likely was delivered to all contacts stored in her phone.

Inside, the incense scent was consistent. So-on looked at the portrait. Her face was not much different from her blank expression that day.

He placed a flower and stepped back.
It was not an act of kindness. There was almost nothing warm, nothing intentional in her behavior.

Yet that moment remained with him for a long time — though he could not say why.

As he left the funeral hall, he found a crumpled receipt in his pocket. He wasn't sure if it was one she gave him — but he folded it again and moved on.

He remembered only the few seconds she left behind.

Chapter 6. Jan-yeong (殘影 / Afterimage)

Jan-yeong stood quietly at the back of the funeral hall, observing the patterns of people moving in and out.

His way of knowing her was simple — they had briefly attended a reading group in the same building, and as lists were shared, their contact details were stored automatically.

Her name and number meant little to her.

Jan-yeong remembered her in moments that were barely moments — sitting by a window with a book, neither fully reading nor not reading, expressionless in a way that left a distinct trace.

At the portrait, the expression did not exactly match his memory of those minimal gestures.

People spoke of her as if she were certain things, but none of those descriptions matched exactly.

To Jan-yeong, she was not a person — but a presence that slightly altered the density of a space.

After placing his flower, he bowed silently — not even sure what he was mourning.

He stepped outside, and the sound of rain steadily fell. In that sound, he pondered what her final face had been. Ultimately, he concluded that the question itself was meaningless.

To some, she was harsh. To others, kind. To some, sharp. To some, blurred.

To Jan-yeong, she was closer to an unfinished shadow where all those boundaries gently faded.

That — was enough.

Chapter 7. Faces

The funeral ended quietly in the afternoon. Visitors dispersed at their own pace.

Though it was a moment of organizing one life, no one could truly say what that life had been.

Jeok-ui left the building first — the rain falling lightly. He shrugged the water off his shoulders and laughed briefly for no reason.

Eun-hye opened his umbrella and walked slowly, turning once to look back at the funeral hall. The sign bearing her name blurred with the rain.

Ya-gyeong took out a cigarette at the corner of the building, then put it away again. He wasn't sure if he would think of it again when darkness came.

So-on slowly examined the wreaths at the main gate. He slipped a small piece of paper into his pocket without much expression.

Jan-yeong was the last to step outside. The rain-soaked air now mixed with the lingering scent of incense.

He stood motionless between the two smells for a moment.

The five of them did not know each other.

They did not speak.

Their memories never intersected.

They happened to be in the same place at the same time — nothing more.

Their memories of her could not be said to be right... nor could they be said to be wrong.

Jeok-ui remembered cruelty.

Eun-hye remembered intervention.

Ya-gyeong remembered faint night.

So-on remembered a small act.

Jan-yeong remembered an afterimage.

Those faces did not touch.

Perhaps the trace one person leaves is not her true face — but the surface seen by others.

It continued to rain.

The shadows on the wet road lost form.

Her face seemed as if it remained nowhere.

Yet the memories of the five swayed in different directions — quietly enduring in their own lives.

Which face was her true face?

Now that question had no meaning.

She remained, finally,
vanished in the midst of many faces.

And those faces — in their own lives —
might again surface as other afterimages.

The End

Draft for archival purposes.

A revised and expanded version will be prepared for publication.

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