



You ⁱ See
minjue.



i See You



Mom, I know the smell of a dead body.

You gave me the earrings you used to wear, and they still had a tiny piece of your flesh on them. At first, I didn't recognize the smell, but I understood it when I saw you lying on the bed in the mortuary. Your scent was the same as your earrings.

The earrings smell like
you.

You smell like death.

Death is you.

You own the scent because I haven't experienced another death since yours. I couldn't tell anyone how addictive, special, and precious that scent was. I was afraid people would think I was crazy for feeling that way about the death of a loved one. I wasn't crazy. If I had truly gone mad, I would have locked the earrings away somewhere safe, trying to preserve the scent for as long as possible. But I didn't do that.

One day, I will encounter another death.

Will that smell remind me of you?
Will it erase you, replacing your scent with
someone else's death? Do all deaths smell the
same?

Mom, I wanted to keep the earrings carefully so I could hold onto the scent. But I couldn't. Not because I was afraid of being called crazy, but because the smell was too addictive. It kept pulling me back to the mortuary, where the scent lingered. That's where my grandmother wailed at your body, calling your name. She made me touch it and call your name as if you were beside me. I touched the dead, and it was cold. She said it was you lying on the bed. It looked like you and smelled like your earrings. I still don't know if it was you. It was just death.

The smell of the earrings brings me back to the mortuary. That's why I didn't try to preserve the scent. I want to live here, where I am now. Do you understand?

Sometimes, I dream of you lying under my bed, like a nightmare. When I think about looking under the bed, I check for the scent instead. I don't smell anything. The earrings aren't there. You aren't there.

When my friend lost her mother, she asked me whether she should go to the mortuary to see her mother. She said,

“I’m asking you because you’ve been through this. My relatives keep saying I must see her and say goodbye one last time. But I don’t want to face it. I’m scared. I’m not ready.”

I’ve seen a dead body, but I never had the choice of whether to see it or not. I told her to go.

I regret it, I should've told her no, I should've shouted at her relatives to leave her alone.

Mom, I still regret not yelling at my grandmother to stay away from me in the mortuary. I regret not saying how insane it was for people there to call your name in front of the body. How could I have dared to call your name to the dead, knowing that the body wasn't really you?

Do you
forgive me? Do you forgive
me for not wanting you in
my dreams?

As your daughter, I was allowed to keep all your accessories. I looked through them, hoping to find another piece of your flesh. I didn't see any. I felt relieved, thinking maybe now I could finally face your death. It sounds passive, but it wasn't. I knew the exact moment to let go. I was just waiting for that moment to come.

My dad bought you those earrings. We went to a department store, something you'd never have done if you weren't sick. I didn't understand why you wanted those expensive earrings—you were dying. It took me a long time to realise that you were ill enough to want something shiny, just for yourself. Even after everything, the earrings are still gold.

My brother and I often talk about our health and the likelihood that we'll get cancer one day, because of the gene you passed down to us. We've each chosen our own paths, but we expect the same outcome. He doesn't mind smoking or drinking because, to him, it doesn't change the fact that we're genetically predisposed to cancer. But I care a lot about my health. You know I'm mindful of how many carbs I eat, and I only smoke a couple of times a year when I'm really happy. I drink occasionally, but this conversation always ends with the same line:

“Well, let's just
hope the cancer comes after our dad is
gone.”

I experienced loss and watched others lose you. When our family visited you during your treatment, I cried in front of you and then left you to go home. I thought crying would show you my love, and how sad I was that you couldn't come home with us. On the way home, my dad scolded me,

“You shouldn't have cried in front of her. She's alone, probably crying in that room by herself now. You should've held back your tears.”

Since then, I often imagine you crying alone in that room. Those tears didn't save anyone. My death came before I could even accept yours.

Do you miss the life you couldn't get
to live fully?

Did you try
hard enough to stay longer with
me?

Did my
sadness reach you so you
couldn't be sad?

Did it
even reach
you?



You lived your life fully, never sharing any piece of yourself with me. Now, I'm the one left in the room alone—the room where the death was around.



You texted me to make a wish on the full moon. I was looking at the moon, and it was clear I should wish for your recovery. I didn't make a wish. I didn't text you back. I had already seen your death in a dream, even while you were sleeping downstairs. The moon was definitely not going to grant my wish. I don't even know what I truly wished for. Your death felt so real when you were with me, but after you left, it turned into an illusion.

You were sick for months, and I was prepared for your death. When I got a call from my dad saying you had lost consciousness in the hospital, I was with my grandparents, having breakfast or dinner—I can't remember which. The rice I was swallowing felt too bulky, and it hurt my throat. I know the rice couldn't actually hurt me, but trust me, it did. Sometimes, rice can be too much to swallow. Sometimes, anything can hurt you.

The smell of alcohol, the
smell of medicine, the smell of sad people around
you in the hospital—it wasn't addictive. I told you,
I was prepared.

What does
it feel like to receive
death?

I wonder if I'll ever be able to make a wish on a full moon.
Since I didn't make a wish for your recovery, it should be
something bigger than that. What could possibly be enough?

My uncle held your portrait at your funeral. I was wandering around, looking for something fun. I saw him at the front of the line of people on their way to cremate you. He waved and smiled at me. I felt happy.

I was playing with the incense in front of your portrait at the funeral, and it burned my clothes. No one noticed, but you did. You were there.

There was a day when my dog was sick, I slept in my bed next to her. She slept like she was dead, I fell asleep thinking she might be gone by morning and knowing that it wouldn't make me cry. I felt like I could live without her like I had never had a dog. It doesn't mean I didn't love her, I just knew how to survive.

Do you
blame me for
not missing
you?

While you were in the hospital, I never visited you on my own accord. You had already become separate from my everyday life. Every time I saw you sick, I felt like throwing up. I was struggling to survive.

I fought with my grandmother. I told her I blamed her for not letting you live the way you wanted when you were alive. I called my dad, crying, and he said,

“The living have to go on. You don’t have to fight
with your grandmother. Don’t dwell
on it.”

Mom, we are people left behind, still struggling to survive.

I don’t see my grandmother anymore because my presence reminds her of you. As your daughter, I have the privilege of carrying part of you within me. I left your family before it was too late, before my presence could be erased. It felt like I had to overcome you. I left before I could come to hate you. Your death hasn’t ended.

Do you think my grandmother
believes I stole you from
her?

I've considered selling the earrings since I don't have pierced ears. Just as my grandmother wanted to protect you, I wanted to protect myself. I didn't want to hurt myself by making holes in my ears. Your earrings are tucked away somewhere, never allowing anyone to be their owner.

I was watching someone on TV talk about their mother who'd had cancer. My mind had already decided the end of their story. Yet when he said his mother recovered, I burst into tears. It was the first time I cried from sadness, not fear. I was sad that my mother didn't have the same story. That was the moment when your death became real.

I ran into your friends at your cemetery after years. They said they missed me, and I smiled back. Even though my dad wanted to leave, I insisted on staying with them a little longer. They have the same eyes as my grandmother. I have the privilege of carrying a part of you, and my sadness comes from that privilege. It's not your fault.

You thought the earrings you gave
me,
would be a gift for me?

Right after your funeral, our family went on a trip. My dad was driving, my brother sat beside him, and I looked at the sea in the back. I felt a comfort I'd never known before, something I couldn't quite explain. We never talked about you. For the first time, I finally felt safe from everything.

I didn't ask for much. I only asked you to bring an umbrella to school when it rained and I didn't have mine—something other parents often did for their kids. But you never did, saying you were busy. Then, when we moved to the countryside for your recovery, you stopped working and stayed home. One rainy day, I got off the school bus, and you were at the bus stop, waiting for me with an umbrella. Maybe, in the end, I did wish you had brought an umbrella for me, just once more. My wish was something like that.

The doctor told us this night would be the hardest for you. I watched the monitor as it displayed your heartbeat gradually slowing down.

Tick—

Tick

Tick

Tick

Tick

—Tick

Tick—

My dad got me cancer insurance. He says he wants to pay the premium for me. Your death has always been present in our family. I don't know if this is his strong desire to protect his daughter or if he feels guilty about everything. This isn't the kind of death I can control or make come and go—it is his death he has to deal with.

I've had your sweater and worn it for years. I used the wrong temperature to wash it, and it shrank. I didn't know how to feel about it. I sat on my couch, trying to find some meaning in it. It was the sweater you used to wear, where I could still feel a part of you. I sat there, worried that I was losing even the meaning of you. I realised something was getting vague.

Is your death
getting vague,
or are you
becoming vague to
me?

Death is
you.

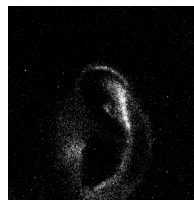
I got tattoos. They hurt, but it was okay. I don't know why I never wanted to pierce my ears.

I remember your face;

you're standing,
looking at something.
But you never speak to me.

I remember my dad crying during dinner. I ran to him to check if he was okay. He said he felt sorry for you, that you didn't get to live as fully as we do. I had never seen my dad cry before. Since then, he hasn't cried in front of me. I feel sorry that he can't cry anymore.

When the doctor told us you were gone, everyone at the hospital was crying. I saw my grandfather crying, my brother, my dad, my aunt... I was crying too, but I could clearly see everyone else's tears. It felt like I had been too prepared for your death, so I didn't cry as much as the others in that room.



We took you to the waterfall because you wanted to see the sea, but you were too sick to make it all the way. You wanted to see the vast water, where it endlessly flows yet remains. The waterfall was too small to satisfy that longing. You had to see where the water begins and ends. Watching the falling water together, we all couldn't escape from the beginning and end of death.

 , If you are the
beginning of death,
 where does it
 end?

It's sad that you are death itself, yet I can never be truly alive.

I heard you went to search for your own cemetery with your mother. I wondered what the expression of someone looking for their own grave might be. I wondered how it feels to know your end. I wonder if death is truly nothing more than desolation.

My grandmother blamed me for not telling her that you couldn't sleep lying on your bed because of the water in your lungs. You barely slept, sitting upright. I didn't even tell her about the sound you made whenever you tried to sleep but couldn't—the sound I can't even mimic.

— The
sound,
I can't,
even mim-
ic.

In my room, when you made that sound, I secretly wished it would stop soon. The sound I can't mimic, the scent I haven't smelled for a while, the text I didn't reply to, the words I have to say to you—your death is made up of all these kinds of things.

Did you
hear all my wish-
es?

Mom, what have I missed from you? How can I know what I've missed if I didn't even realise it? When I was a teenager, my friends told me I needed new underwear because I was still wearing the bras you bought me in primary school. I told my dad I needed a new one, and he looked flustered. How can we truly understand something we're confronting for the first time?

What have you missed
from me?

I was about to start middle school when you gave me my school uniform, telling me how happy you were to see me heading into middle school. You said your only wish was to see me go to primary school. We went through those years together, and your wish was granted. Why didn't you make another wish on the full moon?

Something I can no longer get back
isn't what I've missed
—I set it free.

Something I
can no longer hold isn't
what I've lost
—I gave it
life.



I was standing in front of you, already unconscious, thinking you should have said something to me—just a single word—before you left. I screamed, asking if you wanted to tell me you loved me.

Death is you,

but
you were my
mother.

There is nothing in this world that isn't strange. When I could see you, I could confront your death. But when I couldn't see you, I couldn't confront it.

Your death
will only be complete
when
I see you again.

if you want to tell me you love me.

I wasn't sure if I could handle all the following changes after your death. Every night before I went to sleep, I imagined what it would be like if you were gone—trying not to let it frustrate me, trying not to let it ruin my life. I had to breathe quietly because you were downstairs, seemingly sleeping.

Your death
will only be complete
when

I see you again .



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