

BEYOND DEATH

a play by James Y. Lee / 이유헌

characters

- **MARK KWON** / 권명훈 – 32, korean-american. *the director*. well-intentioned. has visited south korea nine times in his life.
- **KIM SANG-CHUL** / 김상철 – 54, south korean. *the actor*. tired. has visited the united states three times in his life.
- **JENNA KWON** / 권수아 – 30, korean-american. mark's sister. *the visual artist*. active. has visited south korea seven times in her life.
- **KWON MYUNG-SU** / 권명수 – 22, south korean. mark's father. *the presence*. was he ever american?

settings / set

- **times**
 - **late 2025**, following the election of donald j. trump and the impeachment of yoon suk-yeol / 윤석열.
 - **1980**, during the gwangju uprising.
- **the suburbs of chicago, illinois**. mark and jenna's childhood home. all on one floor, there is:
 - a living room with a tv.
 - a master bedroom.
 - a bathroom with a mirror, between the bedroom and the living room.
 - a wide, well-furnished kitchen next to the living room.
 - closets, scattered all over the house, but mostly concentrated in the bedroom.

notes

- if you are, at any point, entertaining, considering, or allowing the option of casting any of the characters in this play with non-asian actors, **DO NOT PRODUCE THIS PLAY.**
- when dialogue is spoken in korean, you are free to translate lines in korean that **specifically have accompanying english translations**, however you wish on-stage.
 - all of **SANG-CHUL's** lines in english should be delivered with a somewhat heavy korean accent. likewise, all of **MARK's** lines in korean should be delivered with a somewhat heavy american accent.
- a slash (/) marks an interruption, where the next line or action interrupts where the slash is in the previous line.
- **to directors:** please stylistically delineate between the inside and outside of the house as separate realms of existence. **the outside of the house is the realm of the dead.**

ONE

*my brothers, my young brothers – is there nothing i can do for them?
 will they live and die as trash, ever more burdened, after my death?
 lord, what should i do? what is conscience?
 why do you put me under such a heavy yoke?
 must i beg you for the strength to serve? then, i will do it, lord.
 help me, and forgive us all in your name – and mercy and love for the world.*

– from the final note of **pak yong-jun**, quoted in **lee jae-eui**'s *gwangju diary*:
beyond death, beyond the darkness of the age

TWO

*한 itself is so vast, so impossible to define.
 [...] even today, scholars struggle to describe it.
 we cannot know if the dead possess 한 or not
 because the living are the subjects who accumulate it.
 [...] only we, we, are the ones who have carried it over history.
 in japan, it manifests as the concept of revenge
 but here, it festers within koreans
 like a grudge.*

– director **im kwon-taek**, speaking to film critic **jung sung-il**

第一部 - 항쟁

day one, 5/18/1980

over darkness:

CROWD (from off, repeating)

비상계엄 철폐하라! (abolish martial law!)

휴교령 철폐하라! (end school closures!)

*lights. we see the house. keys rattle at the front door. it swings open.
in 2025 – MARK KWON enters this house. he closes the door behind him and
opens windows.*

*in 1980, KWON MYUNG-SU is thrown into the scene, as if forced into it.
he's wearing glasses. he composes himself. he lingers outside the house,
in the midst of protests. he moves like how he speaks.
the chants reemerge again, lower this time.*

MYUNG-SU

오늘은 태양이 안 보이네
지금 당장 니 도시의 길거리를 바라보며
갑자기 보이는게 많네
니 친구 얼굴들에 새겨져있는 분노
앞에 서있는 군인들
계엄령이란게 무엇인지
처음으로 제대로 맛보고 있네

you cannot see the sun today
you look at the streets in your city
and all you can do is wonder
wonder about the fury on your friends' faces
wonder what those soldiers are thinking
this is the first time you have seen martial law
face-to-face

*mark moves slowly through this house, setting his things down.
he first reaches the living room, sitting down on the couch.*

MYUNG-SU

니가 지금 서 있는 전남대 주변에
군인들이 한 수십 명이나 있는 거 같네
니네들 – 학생들, 시위자들 – 인원을 한 번 세는데
수백 명, 수천 명일 수도 있다

where you stand, near jeon-nam-dae
it seems like there are dozens of soldiers
you count how many students and protesters there
are - hundreds, and probably thousands

*while myung-su says the above, mark examines more details of the living
room, observing the furniture, dusting it off with his fingers, checking
the books there.*

he sits down at the dining table. nothing here astonishes him. he looks at it from different angles. he is thinking of how to frame it.

*he pulls out his phone. takes a photo. at a specific angle.
he moves to the bedroom. lies down in bed. sits up. as that's happening:*

CROWD (from off)

전두환 물러가라!

MYUNG-SU

갑자기 나머지 시위자들이랑 뭉쳐져있다
뭘 외쳐야 되는지는 알지만
나는 어느 방향으로 가는지 모른다
어느 순간 부터 금남로에 왔다는게 보이고
시위자들이 광주공고로 가기 시작한다
그 혼돈 속에
너도 같이 따라가기 시작하네

you're swept up in the crowd now
you know what to chant
but you don't know which way you're going
and before you know it, you're in geum-nam-ro
and part of the crowd drifts to gwangju gong-go
and in the mess of that blind feeling
you head there with them, too

*mark stands up again. this time, he moves to the bathroom. right now.
the mirror reflects his face. as he washes his hands, then his face:*

MYUNG-SU

거기서 경찰서의 창문을 깨고
그 짬새들이 쓰는 오토바이, 차들, 다 부순다
내가 들고 있는 성냥과 기름을 써서
그중에 오토바이 두개를 불태운다
오늘은 태양이 안보인다면
여기서 그냥 태양을 만들자

you start breaking windows in police stations
and then these pigs' motorcycles and cars
with your fuel and a match
you burn two of their motorcycles
if the sun won't come out
we'll make it right here

*amid this, mark pulls out his phone. takes a photo of the bathroom.
he leaves the bathroom, turning the lights off behind him, and goes this
time to the kitchen. he checks the stoves. they work.*

MYUNG-SU

그런데 결국엔 신경 써야 되는것은 경찰이 아니다
네 흥분속에 까먹은것은
공수부대가 아직도 근처에 머물고 있다
니들에 인원이 군인들보다 더 많다는것은
결국엔 상관 없다
니들은 방망이 있는것도 아니고
총 마저도 없는데
군인들이 다가오고 있다
다가오고 있어!

but it's not the police you need to worry about
because you forget in the rush
that the soldiers are still there
and it doesn't matter that there are more of you
than there are of them
because you don't have clubs
nor do you have rifles
and they're coming this way
they're coming this way!

mark pulls out his phone. takes a photo of the kitchen, casually.

he returns to the living room, sitting down on the couch, breathing in fresh air.

*screaming begins. myung-su runs for his life and exits. the second he does, **one of the windows in the house slips shut**, startling mark.*

MARK

old-ass house...

someone knocks on the door. mark goes to answer. JENNA KWON enters.

MARK

thought you weren't coming for a bit

JENNA

my meeting ended early
god the protests downtown are getting crazy

awkward beat. jenna waits for mark to say anything more. he doesn't.

MARK

this is weird

JENNA

there's a lot of weird stuff going on right now
you're gonna have to pick something

MARK

both of us being in dad's house, for starters

JENNA

that's a good start

MARK

yeah
only so much can change about a place i guess

JENNA

and now it's all yours LA boy
get ready to look after a house that lives in single-digit november weather

MARK

... you *really* don't want a single inch of this place?

JENNA

absolutely not man
you have better memories here than i do anyways

MARK

he did include you you know
i feel like that part's going under-acknowledged

JENNA

i genuinely don't care about the will man
for all i know he threw both of us on the house because like
he didn't realize he could give it to just you

MARK

that's harsh

JENNA

it's realistic
you know as well as i do how great his english was

MARK

oh don't be an asshole man

beat. jenna sighs

JENNA

what are you gonna do with the place now that you have it

MARK

well it's gonna make for a pretty amazing set

JENNA

wait hold on are you filming your thing about dad here

MARK

yeah

JENNA

god. do you have a timeline

MARK

we have pretty much everything ready for pre-production same as the last few movies i made. i have weeks of rehearsal time scheduled full shot list, all locations arranged, the studio is rented out for the set all the equipment's there, funding's secure from our investors and studios a24's already on board for distribution, and our cast looks / great-

JENNA

okay mark man you gotta pump the brakes for a second i'm not talking about your movie

MARK

wait you have to hear about who i got to play dad though

JENNA

god what a crazy sentence - yeah sure who did you cast

MARK (incredibly excited)

i got kim sang-chul!

beat. jenna's brain loads. no results. she shrugs.

MARK

emmy winner kim sang-chul? the guy who did *kingslayer*
your majesty - *the follower*
twelve other joseon dynasty k-dramas from the 90s broadcasted on kbs

JENNA

that's maybe the first time i've ever heard a list where the last entry literally multiplied my options instead of narrowing them down

MARK

okay well he was also in the latest fast and furious movie and that new star wars show if that helps you

JENNA

... oh wait yeah that guy!
how'd he end up in those things if he's had such a / long career in-

MARK

okay look all i'm saying is that it's big news

beat. mark is clearly disappointed at jenna's lack of recognition.

MARK

anyways-

JENNA

mark if you don't ask me a single question about myself
in the next ten seconds
i will walk out of here and i will see you later

MARK

how have you been

JENNA

are you fucking kidding me

MARK

what am i supposed to come up with in ten seconds

JENNA

you've never asked me how my exhibition's going

MARK

... i was meaning to

JENNA

yeah only after i brought it up right

MARK

no not really

JENNA

i told you my meeting about it ended early and you didn't even ask me why

MARK

okay then why did your meeting end early

JENNA

no particular reason!
it just ended early it was fine nothing happened
so it's not like it matters
i just wish it felt like we were on level playing ground

MARK

well dad didn't make that easy for either of us

JENNA

he certainly made it less hard for you than me

MARK

because you're working in a more esoteric field—

JENNA

sorry, *what?*

MARK

which is not to say that it's worth any less! but
it's harder to picture. long-term. for someone like dad

JENNA

you're one to talk about entering a long-term career
at least you got lucky as hell
but i'm doing well for myself thank you

MARK (sincerely)

well that's good

JENNA

you don't mean that

MARK

i do man. seriously
how are things at home

JENNA

they're - they're alright!
still talking with my husband about
you know, plans for a family and all that

MARK

that's good

beat.

JENNA

you never sent me your script by the way

JENNA (cont'd)

you kept promising me you'd interview me and it just never happened
and now you're just making it?

MARK

you know i can't
contract terms

JENNA

i think you can probably swerve some of those for your literal sister
don't you think

beat.

MARK

listen i'll find some way
i owe you that much

JENNA

i know how much this means to you
is it what i think it is

MARK

what do you mean

JENNA

like are you just telling the story of what he did in gwangju

MARK

yeah. and not just all ten days of the uprising
but also how he raised us here

JENNA (passive-aggressively)

sure. and how are you portraying him in that part
where he raises us in the u.s.

beat.

MARK

look jenna i have to be honest about my perspective

JENNA

i just think you should have interviewed me

MARK

i know what you've been through - we both / experienced that

JENNA

okay you're framing it like he beat me or abused me something

MARK

no obviously he didn't

otherwise i wouldn't be making this movie

but i knew enough about your experience to just write it from scratch

JENNA

if you really understood how the competition between us kinda fucked with me
you wouldn't be doing the exact thing that would basically be reinforcing it

MARK

yeah well i can't actually reinforce that 'cause he's gone jenna

we should at least *try* to honor him, and honor this house

*in 1980, myung-su reenters, invoked by mark's mention of him.
he does not initially pay attention to the inside of the house.*

MARK

and honor that he fought for the right thing
especially NOW!

JENNA

yes obviously! i don't even disagree with you there mark, i just
you know there's other things to do with him besides honor him right
like seriously! i hope you wrote about his temper
or about how the last thing he ever did was drink himself to -

MARK

come on man

myung-su turns towards the house. a door swings shut, startling jenna.

MARK

oh - sorry - windows are open

JENNA

jeez - ok look we pretty much fought for his favor the whole way through
and you won! and you understand that. i *know* you do

beat. mark sighs. he cowers.

lights down on the inside of the house. mark and jenna exit.

myung-su starts looking for a place to hide.

*beatings, strippings, brutal attacks – the sounds surround the place.
he huddles in a corner, shivering.*

MYUNG-SU

다 들린다
어떡해 안 들릴수가 없다
하루밤 내내 지속돼니
잘 틈이 하나도 안 생긴다
그래도 다행인 거는 몇 개나 있다
그래도 총을 안 쏘다
그래도 너라도 숨었다
그래도 여기는 군인들이 못 들어온다

you hear it
how can you not
you hear it all night long
you can't sleep
at least some things are a relief
at least they aren't firing their guns
at least you managed to hide away
at least they can't break in here

blackout.