

**Bourne**  
**toWrite...**  
creative writing  
workshops

## Gallery of Faces

by Mia Sundby

It was hard to find a good face. Increasingly so, these days. She had been looking for so long, searching high and low, low and high, far and wide, east and west, north and south, and still... And still she could never find the face she wanted.

She had thought she had found it forty-three years ago, when she was young and wondering, and she had met Tijan. Tijan had been beautiful. In that angelic way that the ancients always portrayed young men to be; lithe and muscular with jawlines like cut glass and eyes so deep and sparkling that you could see the stars in them, that you would rechart the course of your life just to stay within their orbit. Tijan had been beautiful. But he had been cruel. Worse, he had not been perfect. His beautiful face would twist into snarls when he drank, and he would spit hideous comments in her direction, say ugly things in front of her friends and family. His eyes were not the guiding stars they once had been. She had mourned for their loss. She had mourned as she had held his head in her hands. She had taken it in his sleep, and so his face was kept forever frozen in a peaceful expression of unparalleled beauty. His eyes were closed --and would never open again-- which was a shame, but they would not have sparkled the same as when he had looked through them in their first few years of love. Cradling Tijan's face to her breast, she kept him, and went on through life, sure she would never find another to match it.

She met Luka four years later. He was not beautiful, not as Tijan had been, but he had a good face, a wonderful face, and a brilliant smile. His smile lit up any room he was in. They were married two months later, and they were happy. Or she had thought they were happy. For all his smile lit up a room, Luka could not light himself up with it. He was melancholy. It was not his fault, she told him, but she doubted. If he could smile for everyone else, if he had once brought such joy into their lives, why was he failing now? Luka's face was purple when he died, from the lack of blood flow --cut off at the neck by a taut rope. She wept at the sight. She had failed Luka.

She had failed their marriage. But she could save his face. So she kept it with Tijan's, and looked upon it every day.

Orlin was next. Orlin had a wonderful square jaw and long, curling hair. He was broad and strong and solemn, and she loved him. She loved him even when he forgot to do the dishes, when he forgot to stomp the mud from his boots, when he forgot to trim his long, curling hair. Orlin was handsome. Orlin was strong. And Orlin was unlucky. It was a senseless killing, they all agreed. Stabbed along a dark country road. She found his body before the animals got to him, at least, so she could save his broad, square-jawed face, and that long, curling hair. It was only right, she thought, that he join the others. That she keep them all safe.

With Milo she didn't take any chances. He was slim and not classically beautiful but he was charming and good-looking enough. She liked Milo. She liked him so much that she couldn't risk anything happening to him. He died with poison coursing through his veins and she tutted as she had to drag his face out of the soup she'd made. She didn't mind cleaning him up, though, and he looked right with the others.

She did the same with Borik, Will, Kelton, Egan, Bron, and all the others whose names had faded from her mind, but whose serene, smiling faces she kept so carefully looked after. With Pierre, she gave him too much and his face forever had a slight green tint to it, but Pierre had not been handsome before so she didn't mind too much. He had a good face, but not the best face.

No, not the best. But this one --her latest--, well... He was something to look at. She didn't remember his name but she hadn't remembered most of them in the last few years. It didn't mean that she didn't care. It didn't mean that she didn't love them. She did. She loved them all.

She smiled, sighing contentedly. After looking for so long, high and low and low and high, far and wide and east and west, and north and south, her long, long, long search was over. It was finally over.

Opening her eyes again, and seeing her husband's face across the table, she leaned forward to give it a pat on the cheek, and sat down to supper, declaring it to be the best face in the world.