

The Disaster Tourist

Yun Ko-eun

Translated by Lizzie Buehler



First published in Great Britain in 2020 by
Serpent's Tail
an imprint of Profile Books Ltd
29 Cloth Fair
London EC1A 7JQ
www.serpentstail.com

Copyright © Yun Ko-eun, 2020

English translation copyright © Lizzie Buehler, 2020

This book is published with the support of
the Literature Translation Institute of Korea (LTI Korea)

1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

Typeset in Tramuntana Text by MacGuru Ltd
Designed by Nicky Barneby @ Barneby Ltd

Printed and bound in Great Britain by Clays Ltd, Elcograf S.p.A.

The moral right of the author has been asserted.

All rights reserved. Without limiting the rights under copyright reserved above, no part of this publication may be reproduced, stored or introduced into a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means (electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise), without the prior written permission of both the copyright owner and the publisher of this book.

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN 978 1 78816 314 9
eISBN 978 1 78283 585 1



Jungle

—

Northbound: High atmospheric pressure, cherry blossoms, news of deaths

Southbound: Dust clouds, strikes, debris

NEWS OF THE DEATHS MOVED FAST that week. Word was spreading quickly, but it wouldn't be long before people lost interest. By the time funeral proceedings began, the public would have already forgotten the deceased.

A tsunami had hit Jinhae, in the province of Kyongnam. Jinhae was where cherry blossoms first bloomed in early spring. When it happened, on an otherwise typical afternoon, life in the city had stopped. In an instant, everything was underwater: tourists beholding the flowers, pedestrians meandering about, buildings that had been warmed by the sun, and street lamps on the edge of the beach.

Yona went down to Jinhae on Friday evening.

Jungle – the travel company where she worked as a programming coordinator – didn't currently offer any travel packages to visit the post-tsunami rubble, but it would soon. After arriving, Yona's first tasks were to hand over donations and dispatch volunteers. She spent the weekend giving out money – ten-thousand-won contributions from nearly a thousand Jungle employees – expressing her condolences and assessing the situation. Jungle divided disasters into thirty-three distinct categories, including volcano eruptions, earthquakes, war, drought, typhoons and tsunamis, with 152 available packages. For the city of Jinhae, Yona planned to create an itinerary that combined viewing the aftermath of the tsunami with volunteer work.

Yona's return to Seoul took longer than the trek down south. As Korea marched into spring, cherry blossoms were blanketing the country. The flowers had already bloomed in Jinhae, and during Yona's weekend away from home, northern blossoms began to bud as well. Once she was back in Seoul, Yona turned on her TV. After the south coast tsunami, the news broadcast not only typical weather forecasts and programmes about the flowers' arrival, but also information about where the ocean currents would take the tsunami wreckage now trapped in their waters. The trash consisted of artefacts of daily life stolen by nature, mostly pieces of plastic and forgettable knick-knacks not yet decomposed. Soon to be forgotten by their former owners, they were destined to swirl about the sea for decades. The debris flowed

south along the currents, bobbing atop ever-moving waves.

Predictions about the trash's future path varied. Some said it would flow into the garbage island in the Pacific Ocean, the one that was seven times the size of the Korean Peninsula. Others guessed that within the next two years it would end up along the coast of Chile. Some people even estimated where the trash would be ten years from now. Most citizens just hoped that they wouldn't cross paths with the tsunami's remains. They wanted to shield themselves from disaster, to hide from risk.

However, one segment of Korean society differed from the risk-averse majority. These voyagers carried survival kits, generators and tents as they searched out disaster zones worthy of exploration. They were the kind of people who would relish the chance to weather the open sea in search of the mythical island of trash. Jungle was the travel company for such adventurers.

Yona had once dreamed of going on treacherous journeys. The first place she'd ever travelled to was Nagasaki, her trip inspired by a single sentence in a guidebook: 'The city is home to statues commemorating citizens who lost their lives in the atomic bomb explosion, as well as those who passed away in local storms.' The guidebook mapped the location of the Nagasaki statues, but as she read, Yona had realised she didn't care where the statues were. Instead, she'd begun to wonder what exactly went missing when a person lost his or her life, and if the lost life was ever

found elsewhere. Yona was always wondering about this kind of unknown information – like where rocks that fell off the side of a mountain ended up. And what about the scales removed from a filleted fish, or unwanted potato sprouts, or even bullets?

Yona had worked at Jungle for over ten years, surveying disaster zones and moulding them into travel destinations. As a child, she hadn't imagined doing work like this, but she was skilled at quantifying the unquantifiable. The frequency and strength of disasters, and the resulting damage to humans and property, transformed into colourful graphs now spread out on Yona's desk. Next to the graphs lay a world map and a Korean map, place names marked with notations to indicate which disasters had occurred there. To Yona, certain places were now interchangeable with disaster. New Orleans made her think about the remaining traces of Hurricane Katrina. In New Zealand, it was the earthquake that had shaken the city of Christchurch into rubble. Near Chernobyl, the ghost towns that emerged after the region was exposed to radiation, along with the Red Forest created by the fallout. In Brazil, the favelas, and in Sri Lanka, Japan and Phuket – like in Jinhae – the damage wreaked by tsunamis. Ultimately, no city could ever completely evade catastrophe. Disaster lay dormant in every corner, like depression. You never knew when it might spring into terrible action, but if you were lucky, it could remain hidden for a lifetime.

Every year, the world experienced on average 900 earthquakes that measured higher than 5.0 on the

Richter scale, and 300 volcanoes – large and small – exploded across all seven continents. These facts were as quotidian to Yona as the changing colours of a traffic light. Only last year, almost 200,000 people had died in natural disasters. With an average of 100,000 annual deaths over the past ten years, calamity was growing more powerful and periodic. And while technological innovations prevented more and more catastrophe, new and wilier disasters popped up as well. Learning about misfortune was what Yona did. Because calamity was her job, it had a tendency to occupy her mind even during her off-hours. Working at Jungle was all encompassing.

‘It’s the customer service line,’ Yona’s subordinate said as he handed her the phone.

Now Yona would repeat phrases she’d said a thousand times, like an android on autopilot. ‘Ma’am, if you cancel, you’ll incur a service fee,’ or ‘Sir, this is specified in the contract.’ Strictly speaking, this wasn’t Yona’s responsibility, but she had already fielded several customer complaints today. The calls were coming in at the most inopportune moment.

‘I’m sorry, sir,’ she said calmly into the phone, ‘but refunds are not possible.’

Customers always responded to this sentence in the same way.

‘But there are still three months left until the trip,’ replied the voice on the other end. ‘Why would there be a one hundred per cent penalty for cancellation? I’m cancelling because my child is sick. Are

you really saying that there's no chance of a refund? Actually, why is it that none of your trips allow for cancellation?

'Cancellations are possible, sir,' Yona said, 'but we cannot refund deposits already paid in full.'

'Cancellations are possible, but refunds aren't? Is it always like this? That means I should have only paid part of the deposit at first. If this is how you're going to be, I'll have to file a complaint with the Consumer Protection Bureau.'

'Would you like me to transfer you to them now?' Yona asked. 'I'm sorry to say, they won't be of any help. Our contract clearly stipulated from the beginning that your trip cannot be refunded, regardless of the date of cancellation. You signed the contract, sir. Since you've already paid the deposit, you received a large discount, so buying early wasn't a bad idea. If you still decide to go on the trip, rest assured that you received the best possible price. People signing up now are being charged thirty-five per cent more, even if they pay the reservation deposit up front.'

'Look.'

The customer's voice had grown cold.

'I told you that my child is sick. He's in the hospital. In a situation like this, can't you be a decent person and let me cancel?'

'If you'd like, we can cancel your order,' Yona said.

'But a refund isn't possible, right?' the man asked.

'That is correct, sir.'

'What is your name?'

'Sir—'

‘I asked you what your name is! I’m done with all this crap. Tell me your name.’

‘Yona Ko.’

With that, the man hung up. He was angry, and so was Yona. Most of the time, customers were more forgiving of higher-ranking employees, which was why customer service passed calls up to programming coordinators. On a day like today, though, when Yona was inundated with work, she didn’t have time to be bothered by distractions. Jungle didn’t want her to waste her efforts with disgruntled customers, either. Yona was one of the brains of the company, not its lips.

She wondered if her recent role change at Jungle might indicate that she was the target of a ‘yellow card’. She had known about the company’s preferred form of discipline since being hired. A yellow card was less a warning than a siren, signalling a growing and irreparable fissure. Once you’d received one, as long as the moon didn’t fall out of the sky, you could do nothing to stop the already-widening fracture. Yona wondered if she might get an actual yellow slip of paper, by mail or email or even courier, but she knew better: that wasn’t how it worked. Yellow cards showed themselves in a discreet manner, but were unmistakable, so that the recipient could appreciate the crisis that had befallen his or her career.

Two divergent paths faced the yellow card recipient: work as diligently as possible in a newly hostile office environment, or fight back with all of one’s being. Yona had heard of someone who’d risen back

to his original position, five years after a swift fall from grace. In the meantime, that person's assistant had become his boss. Even after returning to his original job, the man worked for only a brief period of time before quitting. His health was poor. Quite possibly, the shock of the yellow card and five years of tumult had caused a tumour in his brain. Yona didn't know him personally, but the story circulated through the office. Supposedly, the subject was the former head of the team one room over.

Recently, whenever Yona went into work, she'd felt like a dandelion seed that had somehow drifted into a building. The chair she sat in each morning was definitely hers, but for some reason, sitting in it was awkward, like this was the first time she'd ever touched the piece of furniture. She grew uncomfortable whenever she saw the new hires striding up and down the hallways, like giants already in control of the place. When Yona voiced her discomfort to a few close co-workers in the bathroom, they said that her complaints were baseless. As soon as Yona opened her mouth, their casual conversation – light as the paper towels they were throwing into the bin – took on a heaviness, and Yona's co-workers looked at her with very serious faces.

'Is something going on?' one friend asked.

Yona figured that she was making the situation worse by bringing it up, so she quickly washed her hands and tried to forget her unease. But the truth was, several days earlier there *had* been an uncomfortable incident. She'd shown up for a meeting on

time, but when she arrived, no one was in the room. A wide-eyed junior staff member had approached Yona from the hallway.

‘Isn’t there a meeting?’ Yona asked, confused, as she stepped out of the conference suite.

The man replied with a wink. ‘Today’s a foul.’

‘A foul?’ she asked.

‘That’s what they told me,’ he said.

Foul? Was this some sort of new jargon? An abbreviation? A kind of slang? As Yona racked her brains, she remembered hearing a similar sentence a few days ago, in the department next to her own: ‘It’s because of a foul.’

‘Okay,’ she replied in a fluster, losing the chance to ask, ‘But what’s a foul?’ Yona figured that she didn’t have to determine the meaning of the word; she just needed to understand the situations in which it was used. But she didn’t have any idea what those situations were. Of course, she could have just asked someone, but she felt uneasy letting people know that she didn’t know what ‘foul’ meant.

The co-worker hurried away, and Yona stared blankly at the empty conference room before stepping into the lift. After meetings, employees would crowd into the bathroom or smoking area to relieve built-up tension, but today, even without such social exertion, Yona was too exhausted to do anything but rush back to her desk. As Yona boarded the lift; so did Kim – another co-worker. Once the doors closed, he spoke.

‘Johnson is asking me to send my greetings to you,’ Kim told Yona.

‘Who?’ Yona asked.

‘Johnson. My Johnson.’

Kim pointed to his crotch. The lift was descending from the twenty-first to the third floor, and Kim and Yona were the only two people inside. Without even giving her a moment to be surprised, Kim grabbed at Yona’s bottom. The action wasn’t a mistake, it was deliberate: a brazen gesture that suggested Kim didn’t care if he was caught.

‘Are you older than I thought?’ he taunted her. ‘Why didn’t you understand what I said?’

Yona turned her body as casually as she could to avoid eye contact with Kim. Now he was pushing his hand into her blouse. Yona’s chest pounded furiously, although not because she was seeing the unsavoury side of Kim for the first time. Nor was it because her boss was sexually assaulting her. No: according to what Yona knew, Kim only targeted has-beens – employees who’d been given a yellow card, or who were about to receive one. She was horrified to think that her rejection of his advances might be the grounds for a yellow card.

Yona stepped aside, fearful of the CCTV on the wall behind her. She tried to stand still like nothing was happening. She didn’t want the episode to be discovered; the CCTV recorded tirelessly, twenty-four hours a day. Additionally, Yona wasn’t sure when the lift was going to open its door, revealing her and Kim to colleagues waiting on another floor. Kim was harassing her so shamelessly, he was almost asking for his actions to be made public. His touch felt extremely

impersonal somehow: he didn't speak to Yona as he molested her. The doors to the lift lurched open and two people entered. By then, Kim's hand had already moved from Yona's chest back into his pocket. He said something in a low voice that the others may or may not have heard.

'You should pay a bit more attention to words,' he warned Yona. 'Not knowing the language of this day and age, that's like going around wearing a sign that says, "I don't care if I get left behind!"'

When Kim got off, the other riders in the lift sneaked glances at Yona. After that day, Kim slipped his cold hands inside Yona's skirt two more times. The important thing wasn't the temperature of his hand, it was the hand itself, but she hated the clamminess so much that just thinking about it gave her goosebumps. Kim had been Yona's immediate supervisor for the past ten years, and he kept her on board every time there were changes in personnel. He was a competent boss. Or to be more accurate, he wasn't a competent boss but a competent underling, and thanks to that he could maintain the facade of proficiency. Kim's employee performance rating was exactly fifty per cent, and his likes and dislikes were clear. He shook people he didn't approve of until they broke. Yona was frightened by the thought of others learning that she had become Kim's newest target. If his sexual offences remained covert, she was inclined to bear the discomfort. Yona thought about her complacency and then shook her head. No, what made her most uncomfortable right now was that

she'd tolerated his actions three times without doing anything. She felt like she was somehow cooperating. But victims would understand her hesitation to act, she thought.

It was a warm spring. The first thing that came to mind when Yona thought of the season wasn't flowers or the budding leaves, but sweat. When she had visited the tsunami aftermath in Jinhae, sweat dripped down her neck the entire weekend. As soon as spring turned to summer, Kim called Yona into his office.

'You've committed a foul,' he said. 'I'm going to have to remove you from the team's current project. Why don't you focus on the maintenance of existing packages for now?'

The work Yona was assigned that afternoon would normally have been given to an intern.

'Shall we have a company dinner tomorrow, Manager Ko?' asked Kim the next day, using Yona's more formal title. He didn't really want her opinion and didn't wait for her response before going on. 'Everyone is busy, but that's exactly why we need to relax for a few hours. Let's not get *samgyeopsal* this time – let's try something a bit more special. Go ask everyone what they want to eat.'

Because of Kim and his love for documents, Yona's team ran out of A4 paper much faster than other teams. Recently, they'd been using up paper so quickly that they had to print everything double-sided. Yona asked her colleagues for their opinions about the dinner menu, and she typed up the results on a page that she printed out and brought to Kim.

The document and the information it contained dissipated into irrelevance as soon as Kim brashly said, 'Actually let's just eat *samgyeopsal*.'

Yona spent the next several days performing similar tasks. If she wasn't told to man the phone, she was stationed at the copy machine. She was so bored that she started going on to silly websites, like one that calculated the user's date of death. When she clicked the death calculator button after inputting her personal details, she didn't react in shock: all she thought was, 'Oh, I guess I've done this before.'

Yona knew this screen with its quickly decreasing numbers. She had probably visited the website a few years ago on a day similar to today. That was when the monitor's digital clock had begun to count down. The clock, measuring the passing of time to the second, even the fraction of a second, broadcast Yona's slowly extinguishing life. Over the past few years, during which time she had forgotten about the site, the clock hadn't stopped once. Today, once again, Yona had satisfied her sporadic curiosity about life expectancy. She marvelled at the numbers shrinking before her.

Yona sat in front of the timer that would someday reach zero and considered how a single second could decide one's fate. Hadn't Yona heard that whenever a fatal fire broke out at a New Year's Eve party, most bodies were found at the cloakroom? If a fire started, if the earth began to shake, if an alarm sounded, you were supposed to stop everything you were doing and run outside. Small actions like looking for your coat or

grabbing your bag, like saving the data on your laptop or pressing buttons on your phone: they divided the living and the dead.

Yona's current situation was a disaster, and she was going to have to treat it like one of the disasters she researched for Jungle. She needed to look back at the actions that had driven her into the situation. Maybe it was a seemingly insubstantial event, but one that she couldn't overlook, that had led her to a yellow card. She couldn't clearly remember the time before Kim's sexual harassment, but she knew the origin of her current malaise was definitely Kim. After leaving work, Yona sent an email to Human Resources. She received a reply shortly after. Choi, from HR, said that she would buy Yona dinner.

Choi was one of the rare older women at Jungle. She didn't seem like an employee, and it was easy to talk to her. When Choi asked Yona what she wanted to eat, Yona felt at ease. Choi paid attention to simple things like choosing the menu for their meal. Yona decided on Pyeongyang-style cold noodles and boiled beef. After asking Yona if she'd like any alcohol, Choi ordered a bottle of soju as well. Yona's lips felt heavy as she began to explain her situation.

'Like I said in my email,' she said, 'it's about programme team three's leader, Jo-gwang Kim.'

'Oh, Jo-schlong!' Choi exclaimed.

Yona was surprised by Choi's response, but her familiarity with the issue allowed the conversation to continue smoothly. Choi said that she knew exactly how Yona felt.

‘Kim hasn’t just caused problems once or twice,’ she explained. ‘I’ve had to deal with him a lot.’

‘He must have a lot of enemies, then,’ Yona mused.

‘Well, he does,’ Choi replied, ‘but everyone’s too embarrassed to call themselves his enemy, so there’s no backlash. It’s like a battle between an elephant and an ant.’

‘Have you heard the rumours?’ Yona asked. ‘That the people Kim touches are already on their way out?’

That was what Yona was most curious about.

‘Well,’ said Choi, ‘I’m only familiar with the employees who’ve contacted me for help. But if the victims do end up being fired, I imagine it *would* be because they spoke up. How many people in the company could fight with Kim and stay?’

Two hours later, two more bottles of soju were empty, and Choi could speak frankly.

‘Yona, I’m telling you this because you remind me of my younger sister,’ she said. ‘Put the issue behind you.’

The soju stung Yona’s throat as she took another sip, but she knew the stinging wasn’t the only thing she had to ignore. Choi said one last thing.

‘This kind of incident happens all the time. You can press charges and turn it into a problem, but in the long term, that will just make things hard for you, Yona. Kim’s a snake: he’s always got away with transgressions. If you can’t take the heat, get out of the kitchen.’

Yona had a tendency to bob her head when she was listening to someone speak, and the speaker inevitably

interpreted the nod as agreement. That's what happened now. Choi took Yona's gesture to mean that Yona wasn't going to go after Kim, and she gave her an approving pat on the shoulder. By the time they had emptied another bottle of soju together, Yona really did agree with Choi's advice.

Complaints made to HR were guaranteed confidential, but victims who shared a harasser somehow learned about each other's existence. Several days later, Yona began to receive messages from people who said that they were 'in solidarity' with her. She met four of them (three women and one man) after work one evening, at a restaurant quite far from the office. She could only guess how they had found her.

'We have to use this opportunity to oust Kim,' one of the other victims exclaimed. 'We tried to do it two years ago, but we weren't prepared and lost the case. Since then, we've been biding our time. We heard that you've been dealing with the same issues as us, Manager Ko, and of course we feel nothing but empathy for you, but we're also reassured.'

They were asking her to help prosecute Kim, but Yona wasn't convinced by them. As she listened, Yona wondered if rumours about the targets of Kim's sexual harassment really were just rumours. Yona was the most senior person at the dinner. The others seemed to draw comfort from the fact that she was a top programming coordinator, but she felt just as burdened by them as she did by Kim. The group told her their stories, and she realised she was lucky that

Kim had only targeted her three times. Some of the victims had suffered more explicit molestation and serious physical violations. Compared to them, Yona had scarcely been touched.

The most desperate-looking person at the table spoke directly to Yona.

‘Next Monday, we’re going to hold a protest in the lobby,’ he said. ‘All the victims will be on strike, so it won’t seem like we have anything to hide. We’re not the people who need to be ashamed – it’s that bastard Jo-gwang Kim, isn’t it? Manager Ko, join us, please.’

‘I’m sorry, there’s been a misunderstanding,’ Yona replied nervously. ‘Something unsavoury did happen to me, but I don’t know if I’d call it sexual harassment. I think I misunderstood Mr Kim’s intentions.’

Everyone looked surprised by Yona’s statement. The desperate man spoke again.

‘Team leader, we all saw it.’

This time, it was Yona who was surprised.

‘There are multiple CCTVs in the office,’ he said. ‘You may not realise it, but for all you know, everyone in the building knows what happened to you. If you try to hide something like this, something that everyone’s talking about, our situation only becomes more awkward.’

Yona grew uncomfortable hearing the man say ‘our situation’. She tried to think of a prior engagement as an excuse to escape.

‘We know you’re embarrassed,’ he continued. ‘But that’s even more of a reason for us to pool our strength. We’ll get in touch. You need time to think.’

Yona hurriedly replied, 'All right,' and stood up from her chair. She pushed open the door to their private dining room and walked out into the hallway, but she couldn't find her shoes. The restaurant consisted of private booths lined up against a central corridor, and customers had to remove their footwear before entering the rooms. It seemed that another customer had left wearing Yona's shoes.

'This is why you should have put your shoes on the rack,' the owner of the restaurant grumbled to Yona. 'Our customers are always losing their possessions, especially recently. What will you do without your shoes?'

The owner made more of a fuss than necessary looking for the missing sneakers and opened the door to the room full of Kim's victims. One of the people inside offered to go out and buy Yona a pair of shoes to wear to her next destination, but Yona just wanted to get as far away as possible from everyone in there. She forcefully declined and decided to borrow a pair of rough slippers from the restaurant for the time being.

The shoes she had lost were actually part of a pair and a half. The store she'd bought them from offered a second right shoe for free with the purchase of each pair. If only the first two of her three shoes hadn't been stolen at the restaurant, the remaining survivor wouldn't have taunted her from the hallway of her apartment when she got home. But the leftover single shoe reminded her of the group of victims and of Kim, and it made her anxious.

Yona received several emails and phone calls after the meal, but she didn't answer them. She would rather not accept the fact that she'd been sexually harassed. Neither did she want to stand unashamed in the lobby and attack Kim. More specifically, she had no desire to join the group of victims, the has-beens and the losers, the dregs of the company. She thought again of what they had told her about the CCTV, that everyone already knew what had happened to her.

On the day of the protest, Yona ran into them in the lobby, holding a large banner. They didn't cover their faces, but Yona unwittingly hid hers as she passed by them. The protesters were disciplined within a few days. That night, Yona threw out her third shoe.

'Please, just take it,' Yona's co-worker said, handing her the customer service call. The man on the phone kept asking, 'Why can't I?' over and over again. *Why can't I cancel the trip?* was what he meant. 'Why can't you hang up?' Yona wanted to say in response. As she listened to the man speak, she forgot her prepared script for dealing with customers. The person with whom this man was planning to travel had died.

'Is it a direct relative?' Yona asked. 'The person you were going to travel with.'

'No, she's not,' he answered.

'Let me check our policy and I'll call you back.'

Yona unnecessarily asked for the man's phone number a second time and hung up. She didn't want to, but she *had* told him that she would check on his case.

The cancellation of this trip depended entirely upon Yona. If she decided to, she could cancel without a fee, although of course Jungle officially discouraged doing such a thing. But how could someone go on holiday after his travel partner had died? Yona decided that she would cancel the trip for the man. But that afternoon, a brochure for the Jinhae trip landed on Yona's desk. Its acknowledgements page bore the name of a co-worker from another team. Yona was filled with such feverish anger that she couldn't sit inside the office any longer. She left work early, before she could file a cancellation request.

Yona usually took three different subway lines on her way home, even though she could get home by taking only two. Over the past few years, the possible routes between Jungle's office and her apartment had increased. Stations dotted the city with greater density, new lines had emerged and existing lines had expanded to neighbouring towns. It varied a bit depending on which route she took, but travel time between Yona's apartment and work kept decreasing. This surprised Yona, because now there were more stations than ever. In spite of her shortened commute, the typical journey home felt lengthier and even more boring than before. It was exhausting, too, that in spite of so many new lines, train cars were always packed during rush hour. The city was satiating its ravenous hunger by pulling more and more people into its belly. Yona's phone rang. It was the customer who had called her that morning, already forgotten in the midst of Yona's distress. *Didn't he say that his*

travel companion had died? She had told him she would cancel his trip, because of course he couldn't go now. She was angry with the man for following her home by phone, but more than that, she resented Jungle for giving out her mobile phone number so people could call her after hours. Yona gave the man the following verdict:

'Refunds are only possible in the case of death of the purchaser,' Yona said as she was swept up into a large crowd. 'This means that the person you planned to travel with can cancel for a refund, but if *you* cancel, you won't get your money back.' The man hung up. Yona looked at the subway map. Lines under construction suffocated the city with one new stop after another. Yona wanted to set the end of one of the subway lines on fire, like using a match to stop a run in a sweater. She wanted the threads to stop unravelling.

Summer began. It had been a while since flowers fell off the trees, and in their place black cherries were now plummeting to the ground, so that the pavements were covered with juicy bruises. Yona finally sent in her resignation letter.

'Be honest,' Kim said as he grabbed a drink for her from the coffee machine. 'Do you need a break, or are you looking for another job?'

It was a fitting question.

'I just need to rest for a bit,' Yona said. 'I haven't been feeling well recently.'

Kim nodded. Who knew if Yona was repeating the words of so many employees before her?