



Out of Area

Julie Moon



Shortly before we last said goodbye, as my husband's and my visit drew to an end, I grabbed your Samsung Tablet and said, *Use this to video call me from now on, this way you can see me on a larger screen, it'll be so much nicer.*

Signing into the same KakaoTalk account on a separate device turned out to be a mistake. I accidentally wiped all the conversations you have had over the years with friends and family in the app, including all the pictures and videos you received and didn't save. My husband and I spent lunch at the airport trying to restore your account: I drafted an email to KakaoTalk, and he, a software engineer, tried to understand where KakaoTalk stores all its users' pictures and videos, whether it had a 'cloud'.

You were forced to replace your old account with a new one, and we resumed sending each other photos and videos almost daily. Eventually, my American phone stopped working because of the sheer excess of photos and videos.



I had to delete the largest files I sent you, like my videos of streets in New York. I took those through the window of a bus out of town, two years after watching Chantal Ackerman's *News From Home*. As I went through our album, I realized that the KakaoTalk cloud has expiration dates: all the photos and videos you sent me, that I forgot to save, are lost in the ether.



When you were raising me in Seoul, you went to mass at dusk. I was only around four when I insisted on joining, though you told me not to, I'd catch a cold. The priest noticed me because I was a toddler, and gave me a special blessing, touching my forehead. *I think that's why God has been with you all these years,* you say.

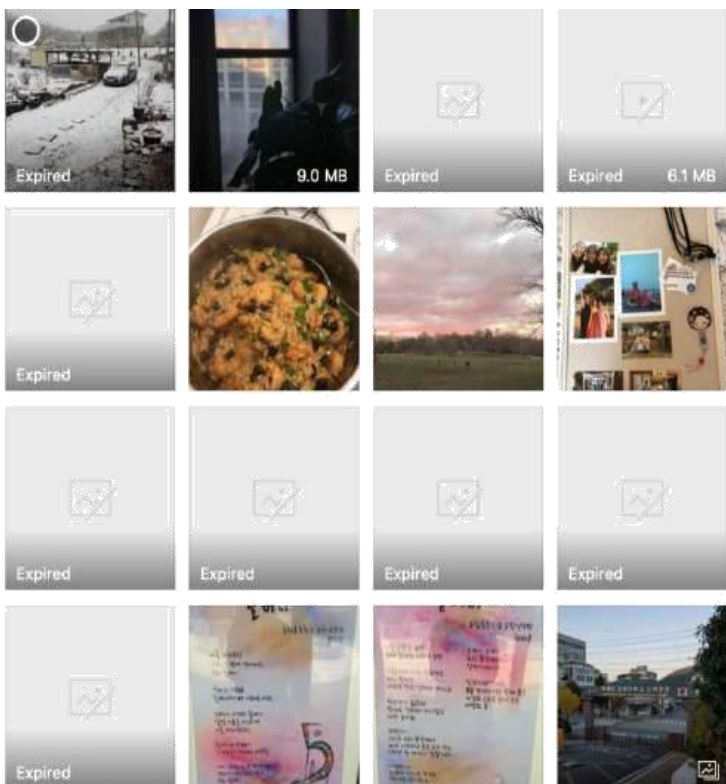
By all those years, you mean the years I spent growing up in my foreign country, away from my mother, your first daughter. In our carpeted apartment in Massachusetts where you raised us on a tourist visa, umma called every day. I knew it was her every time because you always rushed to pick up the receiver, desperate to talk to someone, anyone, in Korean. Plus, when the robot in the phone announced the name of the caller, it always said in its eerie female voice:

CALL FROM

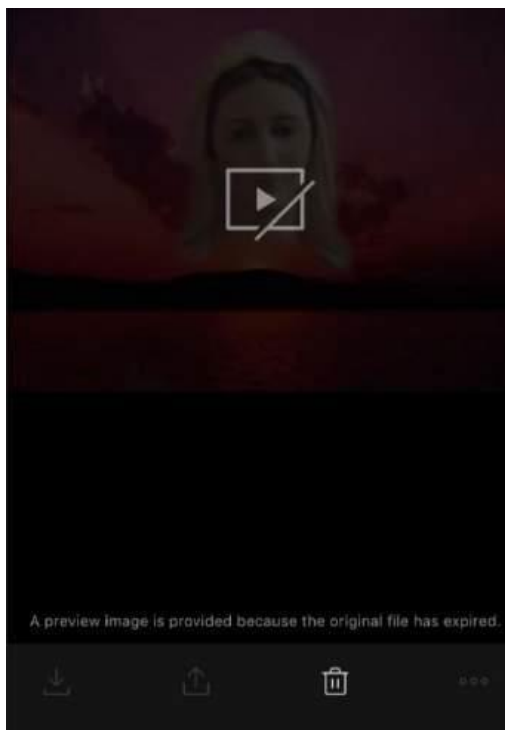
OUT OF AREA

CALL FROM

OUT OF AREA

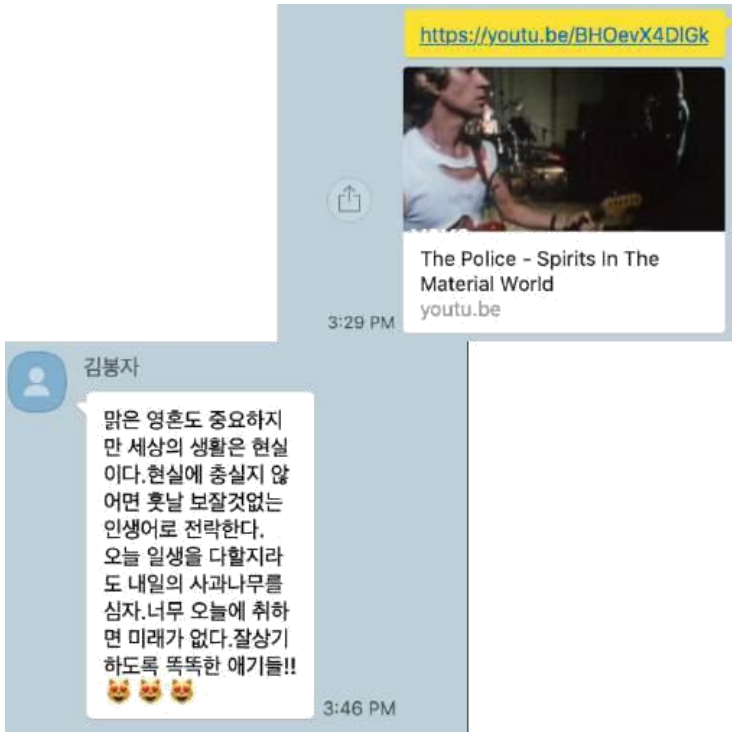


Some of the lost files have dim preview images. One video you sent shows the head of the Virgin Mary,



floating over the sunset. It must have been a gospel song; recently, you started going back to church. That's how I know not to call you when it's Saturday night New York time, which is Sunday morning, Korea time. I know I should spend Saturday night doing other things than calling you, too.





When, to make you laugh, I send you a Police song my husband and I have been dancing to, you reply with your usual philosophy:

Spirituality is important but the physical world is reality. If you're not faithful to reality, life can become trivial later on. As we do our life's work today, let's not forget to plant the apple trees of the future. I'm rooting for you, my darlings!

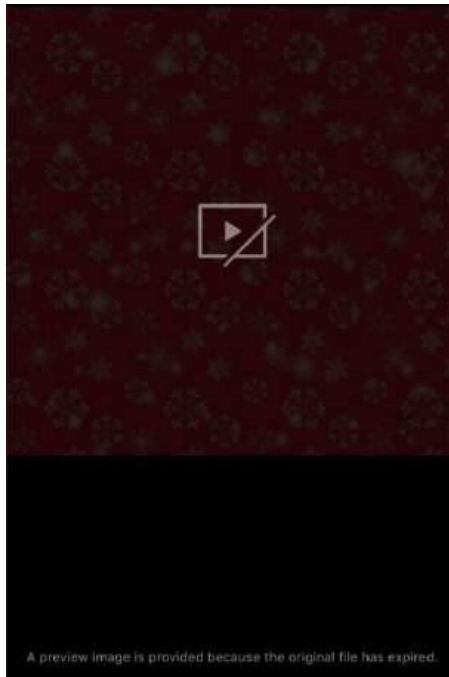




I messaged you screenshots of this cardigan to ask if you liked it. It wasn't until we arrived at your house in Korea that I realized I'd left it in New York. My heart broke when you sent me a picture of you smiling in the cardigan, a month later, saying you'd received my package. Because you were the one to sit in the cologned leather armchair outside of Abercrombie & Fitch, or the plastic stool in the girls' dressing room at BCBG in the Burlington Mall, waiting, saying *sure*.







We had to leave before Christmas, to spend the holiday with my husband's family. I sobbed at the airport. We used to fly Korean Air together on school breaks when I was growing up, so that I could visit my parents in Busan, and you could return to Grandpa in Gunbuk. Across the aisle on the plane you would hold my hand and ask the stewardess to get an extra blanket for me, save your rice cake for me to have another.





On the anniversary of your mother's death, I watch you and Grandpa light incense and pray to her, telling her to come eat the feast you have prepared.

As you bow down to the floor, I can only see you and Grandpa's backs. I lower my head to the screen, trying to conjure your mother's presence, trying to feel her through the radio waves. *Sky Land*, we say, of where she is, now.



After I send my upteenth food shot to prove to you I'm learning to cook, Grandpa says in his blunt way: *Don't just take pictures of what you eat. Send what you can commemorate later in life.*

When they dined together after our wedding, my father-in-law thought Grandpa asked him, "Do you want to visit Korea someday?" when really, Grandpa had said, "Do you like Beethoven?". His favorite is Symphony No.5.

One of my favorite memories is when the three of us sang Red Muffler, the anthem of the Korean air force, in his Volvo hatchback.

*The Red Muffler is
The man
Of the sky*

*Who's the man
Of the sky?
It's Red Muffler*

*Whirling the red fabric 'round his neck
He flows with the clouds and I flow along
Pretty lady please don't believe my heart
Life's as quick as lightning strikes*

Grandpa had learned the song when he was training to be a pilot. He failed to pass the test, something about his nasal cavity and all the flips and turns of the plane.

Grandpa spent his life in the military: a major in the Korean Army who trained infantry all over the DMZ, he planned battle in Vietnam then worked for U.S. Intelligence at Osan Air Base for over a decade.

At Osan, he'd transcribe radio waves coming from North Korean aircraft into Morse code for the U.S. Air Force. Today, Osan Air Base is one of the most heavily trafficked US throughways in East Asia.

Certificate (is issued)	국적(Nationality) 한국	KORIA	출국(Exit)	입국(Entry)
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출입국일자 (Dates of Entry and Exit)	2012.12.02	2012.08.03	2012.08.30	2012.11.22
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공회 기간 (Reference Period)	2001.02.01.	무시(From)		
기밀(조각) 확인 (Verified)	2021.04.06.	까지(To)		
출입국관리법 제 88조 제 1항에 따라 위의 사실을 증명합니다. I hereby certify that the above information has been verified pursuant to paragraph 1 of Article 88 of the Immigration Act.				