

## Chapter 1: The Beginning

It all began with life. Moving to a new country is a hard choice. No one wants to move to a new country with a whole new environment that he or she has never come into contact with, unless life forced them to. Be it for love, for education or for financial profit, all have to do with life. Going to a whole new country with a different culture, language and people, one can imagine it would be hard to adapt to. However, a man sometimes has not many choices in life and moving might be the better one...

Five years ago, Rizin Anwar was still an average boy at the age of eleven, living in the warmth of his parent's love and protected dearly in a corner of Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. However, his life changed after an unexpected burglary in his home. The cold-blooded burglar not only took everything they possessed, but also massacred his parents and three other siblings who stood in his way. Anwar survived this catastrophe but since then, he lived a life worse than death. He no longer received any love.

He moved to his aunt house after that terrible incident. Treated like a maid by her family, he was forced to live in the small cramped storeroom under the staircase and was only fed with leftovers. Life was hard but he managed to endure through it. Every minute, he thought of leaving that place, leaving Malaysia. He could no longer put up with the cruelty of his aunt and the incompetence of the Malaysian police in hunting down the man who caused him so much pain. On the other hand, he did recognize that society had treated him well. Being a Malaysian Malay in Malaysia, there were many chances to further his studies since most of the spots in top schools were reserved for Malays. However, his best friend, a Chinese who scored exceedingly well in the exams, did not have even have a chance to enter the top schools. Therefore, he was upset and sorry for his friend. Thereafter, Anwar did not like the fact that he was given special rights. He desired fairness and equality amongst all different races of people. He had lost faith in Malaysia.

It was not until five years later when Anwar's chance of fulfilling his dreams finally came. Having achieved well in his Malaysian Higher School Certificate examination, he was provided a scholarship to Singapore to further his studies. It was a once in a lifetime chance he could not miss. Singapore, always perceived as a modern metropolis, is definitely much better than Malaysia. Yearning for a better life, Anwar imagined himself living in luxurious bungalow, eating delicious food and with a flick of a finger, a servant would attend to him. In school, the teacher teaches all of the students patiently with a happy smile and everyone is treated fairly. By the roadside, police can be seen patrolling around to ensure that everyone is safe. In offices and factories, the employers treat each and every employee with respect and award employees with high salaries for their hard work. Travelling from place to place seems quick and the walking distance is not long due to excellent transport system. Without hesitation, he took up the scholarship and prepared for the changing point of his life, his better life. His aunt, who could not wait to get rid of him, agreed to it too. Having waited for five miserable years, another few days' wait for that day was not a problem as the moment for the flight to Singapore arrived...

Sitting on the bus crossing over to the expressway, Anwar looked at his mirror image through the window. He looked at his large and wistful eyes, his silky hair and his cheeks that gave off a rosy glow as he thought about what had just happened for the past few weeks. Till then, he could still not believe what had just happened. His dreams were going to be fulfilled soon.

On the other side of the earth, a man by the name of Rohan Agarwal was checking in for his Air India trip to Singapore. At the age of mid twenty, he looked neat, impeccably dressed in a tuxedo and gleaming leather shoes. One would be terribly envious of his chiseled good looks. Though so, that was not how he looked like just a few weeks ago.

He was a fresh graduate from the Indian Institute Of Science. The university was so famous that it only accepted one hundred top students in India and Rohan was lucky to be one of them. He managed to graduate last year and since then, he was looking for a job. It was said that there should be no problem for a graduate with Degree in engineering to find a job. Unexpectedly, Rohan could not find a job suitable for him.

For the past one year, he had sent thousands of resumes to many companies but he was mostly called for interviews by companies that wanted to recruit him for positions that were not the best match for his qualifications. He was also offered jobs that paid low wages. As the sole breadwinner in his family and the only graduate in his family for generations, his parents had pinned all the hopes on him to bring them out of poverty but things were just not going well. He had a mentally weak sister who was of marriageable age, but his family could not afford any dowry. To add to his burden, his father was bed-ridden after a stroke. He was living under total stress and even attempted suicide but he could not bear it to leave his sister and parents to suffer without him.

At this desperate period, he suddenly came across an article about Singapore. It was about the Singaporean government encouraging immigration due to the country's low birth rate. Foreign talents were desperately needed in Singapore to fill up the jobs due to the tight labour market. This appeared as a golden opportunity to him. Since life was not possible in India, going to Singapore to work seemed a better choice for him. However, this was a risk and also he had things to worry about. Working in Singapore meant leaving his family members behind in India and he might not be able to take care of them. Also, if this plan failed,, he would lose everything. It was a bet – live or die.

Surfing the net and gathering information from friends, he was able to have some background information about Singapore. He learnt that Singapore was a systematic and advanced country where high-rise buildings could be seen anywhere. Being a

popular tourist spot, Singapore was also very clean and safe. However, he was told that the cost of living in Singapore was very high and people were also not as friendly as people in India. With this information, he started to hesitate as he might meet with problems in Singapore. After further considerations, he decided to give it a go. He did not have many choices to choose from. Using the limited money he had left, he bought a one way ticket to the 'country of opportunity' and there he was, at the airport...

In Philippines, there was also another woman facing the same plight as him. Her name was Michelle Malunas. However, she was not as lucky as him. Born in a poor family as the senior of eight other siblings, she was required to work since the age of ten to support the family. As the senior, she was not given any opportunity to study as her job was to sacrifice herself and use the rest of the money to allow her other siblings study. Thus, she was left uneducated to work in this society where education was important to get a stable job.

Without education, she could only do odd jobs in Philippines. These were jobs that many people did not want to take. She had two odd jobs. One of them is work as a *takatak boy*. Even though, majority of the people doing the job were boys, she had no choice but to take on that job. She would walk on the streets and sell bubble gums, menthol candies and cigarettes. Her other odd job was the *konduktor*. She would take care of collecting bus and jeepney fare to issue tickets to passengers. These jobs were obviously not profitable and hence, she was required to work around the clock to make sure that her siblings can study. Even so, what she earned was simply not enough. From eating crumbs of bread, they started eating leaves. She had a life similar to a slave's and it was pathetic. She knew she needed a better job but believed she could not find one in Philippines. She suddenly felt a constant, dull ache on both sides of the head, like a band around the head. The tight feeling in her jaw and neck muscles only heightened her anxiety.

It was at this moment when her childhood friend just returned from Singapore. Many years ago, she left the village in the same plight as Michelle but now, she was a whole new person. She had grown fatter and looked healthy as compared to her previously skinny body. Not only that because she was wealthier, she wore gold bands and even decided to spend some money to renovate her home in Philippines for her family. When questioned by Michelle of how she was doing, she rattled on like a machine about all the good points on working as a domestic helper in Singapore. Beaming, she sang praises of Singapore, "Singaporeans are friendly and the bosses are kind. Also, the pay as a domestic helper in Singapore is very high. Most of us are even allowed to have a day off on Sundays!"

This chat left a deep impression of Singapore in Michelle's mind. For the next few days, she kept thinking about it and finally, she decided to have a go. Life in Singapore seemed too good to resist compared to her life in Philippines and the miserable amount of profits she was making. Having decided on that, she proceeded to the maid agency in her village and applied for a job in Singapore.

At the agency, her diligence and previous experiences enabled her to secure a three years contract to work in Singapore as a domestic helper. By signing the contract, she completed the deal and was given a chance to work in Singapore; a place which she believed was good. This might be the changing point of her life. Three weeks later, she was given her work permit and on her way to Singapore on board AirAsia.

Living in the province of Anhui in China lived by the name of Ong Jia Tan. For generations, her family members were farmers and she was no different from them. Life as a farmer was not easy but it was enriching and there was much family bonding as she could work daily with her family.

Life was as usual until a terrible drought struck the province. It was easily the worst one that had struck their family for generations. The crops were all dried up in no time and there was simply nothing Jia Tan and her family could do to salvage with the lack of technology in this rural village. As all the crops began to die, the family

became to start worrying. Each batch of crop could barely feed them and now, without this batch of crop, there might be more problems to their livelihood. With so many things at stake, Jia Tan's parents decided to betroth their daughter to someone rich and caring, in a bid to resolve their current crisis.

It was not long before the matchmaker managed to find a rich man from the city and the man soon fell in love deeply with Jia Tan. Their marriage was imminent and being a good son-in-law, Jia tan's husband provided the family with funds to tide over the waves. With all the problems solved, Jia Tan's love and devotion to her husband developed.

One day, her husband got transferred by his company to work in the headquarters of the company in Singapore, It meant promotion and the prospects there were definitely better than in China. His family agreed with him migrating to Singapore but he needed Jia Tan's agreement to migrate with him. He could not live without her. For him, migrating to Singapore was an easy task but for Jia Tan, it was a hard choice. For the past twenty-five years of her life, she had never left her parents for more than one month and she was worried about them. Moreover, her parents were reluctant to go with her as they were attached to their village and land, having no interest to move to a new environment. That was not the only consideration as she also had never heard of Singapore, let alone seen the city. She was in a dilemma, not knowing what to do.

After much deliberation, Jia Tan's love for her husband overcame her uncertainty and fears. She decided to migrate with her husband at the last hour before her husband's flight. She managed to grab a ticket as she rushed to take the plane. She could not imagine life for a few years without her husband.

At 'the land of opportunity' lived a man by the name Marton Mike. Life was well for him in America with no worries at all. There, he was free to do whatever he wanted and he had no worries about living at all. When he ran out of money, the government would feed him and thus, his life was stress-free. He could spend all his time going for body building classes where he aimed to have the best body figure without the urge nor need to go to work. Life was easy for him until one trip changed his life.

Trainings provided Mike with a great body shape. Well-toned muscles were visible from his neck to waist. They were simply magnificent, the best anyone could imagine. With such great shape, attention from people was inevitable. On one particular occasion, a man approached Mike when he was having his routine training and offered him a deal to be a professional bodybuilder where he would be his private agent. This deal would provide him great salaries and also, he would have opportunities to go overseas to take part in body building competitions worldwide, something he was inspired to do.

The offer was too good to reject and the deal was closed in no time with his first competitions in Singapore coming in a few months' time. With Mike's body already in great shape, he did not require much training to win and his agent therefore decided to send him to Singapore earlier since there were some factors of Singapore that may affect his performance in the competition. These factors included the high humidity and the food culture there. These details of Singapore would make it hard for Americans like Mike who had never visited the city before and therefore, might affect his performance.

Listening to his 'boss', Mike hence made his first adventurous trip of his lifetime after spending all his life in America. He dreaded an overseas trip, especially to Singapore. He had never even heard of the country 'Singapore' and even thought that Singapore is a city in China. The only things he knew about it was that it was a

'fine' country where eating gum and vandalism such as graffiti were all banned and any offenders would be fined or even punished heavily. This made Mike exceptionally fearful as he had the habit of chewing gum every time to make sure he could flex his muscles fully.

Even so, he knew he needed to make this trip no matter what in order to fulfill his dreams. Therefore, he ended up in Delta Airline's Boeing777-200LR three weeks later, peeking out onto the blue-blue sky on his direct flight to Singapore, wondering if Singapore's sky was also blue.

Because of life in one way or another, all these five people from different countries ended up in the plane, on their journey of their life. None of them had been to Singapore before and they did not know what lay ahead of them. There were simply too much things to worry about, as if they were embarking on a different planet. Is the temperature there suitable? Can I make a living there? Is it going to be better in Singapore, or worse as compared to their country? Will the people accept me? What language and accent do they have? All these questions filled these adventurers' minds as they travelled along the blue sky, but they were left unanswered. Most of them had used the remaining of their limited wealth and took a bet to go to Singapore. This was a one-way ticket for most of them, there was no U-Turn.