

Chapter 3

Settlement was finally done after a few days. With work and accommodation planned and set, life in Singapore already began before they even knew it. Some of them got good jobs while others got jobs not up to satisfactory standards. However, they must accept it since things already started and there was no other way out. It may be the starting of a better life, or a worse life than their past one.

“Beep Beep Beep”, the classic sound of Michelle’s alarm clock ran off as she unwillingly dragged herself out of bed and snapped the clock once as it shut up, like a child shutting up right after getting hit by his parents. It was five in the morning as stated on the alarm clock and it was time for Michelle to start work. For the past weeks, she had been waking up at this time, sharply, and started to do the routines she needed to do for the day. Having worked there for almost a month, Michelle was used to the schedule as she swiftly proceeded with the chores.

Her life as a maid in that family was hard. Though the family treated her well, their house was too big and too luxurious, giving her lots of trouble. Mr. Chan’s house was not only a bungalow but also a museum. He was into the hobby of collecting antique, like any wise rich man. Therefore with antiques all over the house, it made Michelle’s life very hard. Not only was she needed to clean them, she was to make sure not to move them even one inch from their original position or else she would get it. This made her job hectic and stressful, needing to work till late midnight before her days end due to the long time needed to clean them all with care. However, she did not want to complain to Mr. Chan since she knew Mr. Chan treats her well and complaining is not something a maid like her could do. She could only suffer in silence...

With life so unhealthy, it was not long before something bad cropped up but happy things always happened before disaster strikes. After one full month of work, Michelle eventually received her first pay in Singapore which made her in high spirits. The four thousand dollars of salary made her feel high to the top as it was the highest salary she could ever receive. She could not wait to break the news to her family at night and for the rest of the day, she was so over the moon that she hummed all the way while working. Then something real bad happened.

As she was cleaning the antique all over again, she accidentally crashed onto one of the flower flask in the living room. The flower flask simply plunged into the ground and shattered into millions of pieces. The deafening shattering sound echoed throughout the whole house. The most prized possession of Mr. Chan was destroyed! Shaken by the impact, Mr. Chan rushed off his room to see what happened, just to see that his precious darling was 'dead' on the floor with the 'murderer' beside it. His heart had been ripped out and an aura of grey surrounded around him. He scampered to the shattered pieces as he took up a few small pieces and stared at them in pain. Then, anger channeled in his blood as he was going crazy. "TAKE YOUR BELONGINGS AND GET OUT OF MY HOUSE!" thundered the enraged boss.

Michelle, who was rooted to the ground since the fall of the glass, her heart pumping like the thrumming wings of a caged bird and felt a sudden bloom of cold across her face as she immediately apologized but it was futile. She was shooed off with the cold waving gesture of Mr. Chan. Knowing that this was the end of her job here, the dejected Michelle did not dared to argue and proceeded to take her belongings, leaving the house with her head faced down after taking one good look at the gloomy Mr. Chan, still daunting on the 'death' of his flask. She have no rights to do stay behind, especially when Mr. Chan was already very kind not to ask her to pay the price, something she definitely could not afford.

Not knowing what lies ahead of her, Michelle just aimlessly walked along the stretch of road, not knowing a destination nor having any plans. She had put her life on the hand of destiny.

On the other hand, there was Rohan who also reached Singapore at about the same time but got a job in no time. After the first day of work as a basic engineer at Mr. Lim's company, he got to know all his colleagues and was able to adapt to them easily since most of them were immigrants like him. His job was also very relaxing since he was working with people whom he likes and also, the company was new and major projects were yet poached. They were only working on small projects such as the PCB in a computer mouse designing for small firms. They were simple designs; nothing seems to be able to block Rohan's way since Rohan was one of the best students in his university.

Like this, live passed for about one month as the company's business began to prosper. Rohan was also given a pay rise as he worked harder and he further aimed for a promotion. For such a hardworking person like him, promotion should be simple and his wishes were soon fulfilled. One day after Rohan was done inspecting his prototypes at a manufacturing

factory, he was making his way back to his office when he seen something else that attracted his attention.

A well dressed man with shoulders pulled back and head lifting high up was furiously inspecting his product and he seemed to have some kind of trouble with it. Being a very helpful person in the aspect of engineering, Rohan went forward to find out what was going on. Introducing himself briefly, Rohan carried on to question: "May I ask what troubles are you facing?" in an gentleman like manners. Thinking that Rohan looks really good in engineering, the man thought of asking him for aid as he described his prototypes and the trouble he was facing before handing over the prototype to Rohan for inspection.

Being a specialist with good eyesight after one month of work, Rohan was able to detect the defect in the design of the prototype in no time. Without hesitation, Rohan explained everything to the man as he began to understand what went wrong. He was impressed with Rohan and shot him an amazed look. Then, he went on: "You seem good. What is the company you are working for?" Rohan replied all the questions with the best manner possible and after a little chit-chat session, the man finally told Rohan his identity, something Rohan forgotten to ask.

The man was actually the senior consultant of a big construction company named 'Sukee' and he was there checking the prototypes before he mass-order them for the building he was going to build. Having a good impression on Rohan, the man instinctively had a new idea- working with Rohan's company. The previous company he was working with was famous but simply insincere and gave him defective designs. However, he believed Rohan would not fail him. Hence, he expressed his interest with the partnership with Rohan's company and with Rohan knowing that this is not a change to miss, he agreed immediately and in less than one week, all the conditions were ironed out in a win-win situation and the contract was signed.

All the credits for this major project should go to Rohan and Rohan's boss did not forget about it. A promotion was given and needless to say, another pay rise. Rohan's future in the world of engineering would simply be limitless if he could continue to work hard and improve himself. He knew his family on the other side of the earth would definitely be happy for his achievements and also thankful for his few thousands sent to them over the past few weeks for living. Things were just going to well for him.

For Anwar, things may not be so good after all. Though he was only in Singapore to study, he was still unable to live well. With the 'friends' in school already discriminating and stereotyping him since the first day of school, life for the following month was not much better. For group works, people were always disallowing him to join their groups and almost all the time, he was left to solo all the work. Even if the teacher forced one of the groups to let him in, things were not much better as everyone pushed all the jobs for him to do, not caring if he could manage them at all. Coming from Malaysia, Anwar's English base was already very weak, needing lots of time for practicing and yet, his classmates were not caring at all.

With all this unhappiness, Anwar could still do nothing much as he was already seventeen and whining might seem atypical. Also, junior college is a level where one must display self-independence and teachers do not really play much of a role. Therefore, the teachers were also not helping him solve the problem. With no one helping him and with him not able to help himself, his life got worse and worse by the day. The only thing he could console himself with was that at least, the way he was treated was not as worse as how he was treated in Malaysia by his aunt.

Eventually, his classmates even started doing childish things despite their age such as wetting his pants purposely during lessons to make him look like a fool in front of the teachers. All these actions were simply unbearable. Anwar could not imagine how he was going to survive the two years in school. His school life was bleak from what he could see that month but things started to change in a way he could not expect after one of his friendly motions.

Once, as usual, the playful bunch of hooligans in his class was trying to make fun of him once again. They were more daring this time round. All four of them ganged and surrounded him right after school and with each of them holding onto one of his limbs, he was carried off towards somewhere hell-like once again. This time round, Anwar was towed to the deserted storeroom at the top floor of the school building. It was moldy and dark inside. Without feeling sorry at all, they threw him onto the ground of the storeroom and went off, locking the door on their way out. Again, Anwar knew he needed to stay inside for two or even three hours before they would allow him to go out. He could not stop thinking how pitiful was himself?

Just then, something inexplicable happened. There were suddenly some commotions outside and for no reasons; the door was unlocked and opened from the other side with the headmaster standing beside the other hooligans, looking infuriated. "How do you explain this!" exclaimed the headmaster as she pulled the ears of two of the hooligans. Though in pain, the hooligans dared not answer as an immediate exit from the school would be imminent if they were exposed of their crime.

Understanding how serious the matter could be, the kind-hearted Anwar made his decisions to help them even though his hatred for the four of them was deep. Anwar lied and explained that they were actually doing experiments on human's psychological mind. There was something that the headmaster and the boys did not expect to hear. "You sure?" confirmed the headmaster in a softer tone, doubting what she just heard. A decisive 'Yes' reply was given and there was nothing the headmaster could do but let the hooligans go since there were no evidences. At the same time, the hooligans were starting to regret what they did to Anwar, especially after how Anwar helped them. Each and every of them expressed their regret to Anwar sincerely and ran off, embarrassed.

Since this incident, everyone's' attitude towards Anwar changed. The news of what happened at the storeroom was spread throughout the college and everyone was awed by how generous Anwar was and everyone wanted to befriend with him. No one continued to make fun of him and those who did before also went to apologise to him. It was a perfect start of a new college life for Anwar but he was unsure if these relationships would continue on for permanently or was it temporary only.

Back to the adult's world, things seemed good for Jia Tan and her husband. After the first day of work, Jia Tan's husband was inspired to do even better for the sake of the praises from his bosses. Therefore the next day, he returned to his workplace with the kind of mindset a worker should have and strived for the best. With the similar attitude, he worked for the next month and achieved greater heights in his career, successfully completing major projects on the way and impressed his boss. He even clinched the best worker of the month award. From the current situation, Jia Tan and her husband thought after all, the immigration choice was after all the best since their love with each other grew closer as they had more time to spend together and Jia Tan's job was also stable. They had all the things needed for a happy life, except for a baby and with everything going so smoothly, it was time for them to start planning for one.

Life, however, was not a bed of roses and it was no longer than one month before something catastrophic took place. This morning, Jia Tan's husband was in his office at seven sharp to start his day when a rumor was spread to his ears. He overheard several of his colleagues whispering something among them. Something that sounded like "CEO ran off...company funds". The workers all widened their eyes and held their breath upon hearing the rumor. At first, he took no notice of it until his secretary told him of an emergency meeting. It was only at the meeting when he realized what was really going on. The CEO of the company had taken the company's fund and fled the country. The country was now just an empty shell. Everyone was devastated. The company was going to topple and Jia Tan's husband was going to lose his job.

It takes months to work to the peak but it only takes seconds to fall from the highest point. Both Jia Tan and her husband started panicking. Their plan for a baby had to be put on hold. They were afraid that they would run out of money soon as they had just paid the deposit of their new house. Jia Tan, after a serious thought, decided to go out and work in order to have more earnings to support their high living costs, especially when there would be lots of unemployed people like her husband since the company just collapsed.

Hesitated for a moment, her husband eventually agreed due to how dire was the situation was but under one condition: Jia Tan's job should not be too tiring. He felt that women like Jia Tan should rest more and let the men do the job. Jia Tan agreed with the condition and fortunately, not long before, one of her newly-made friend introduced her to a job in a college canteen to sell tidbits after seeing her being so free. This job would perfectly satisfy the condition her husband had given and solve their problem. She hoped her job would go well so that she and her husband would not have any financial problems.

Back at the gym, everything was not going as well as expected for Mike. The training ground that the agent had arranged for him was really bad as compared to the one he always went in America. In America, there were the incline press, vertical press, seated overhead press, triceps extensions and they were all the newest, and the most advanced one. However, here in Singapore, all the equipments looked rusty and even dusty. Adding to that, the models looked as if they were those models he used when he was a teenager. They were too outdated. With such technologies, how could the people here train up?

He grumbled on as he started using these equipments that managed to withstand the test of time to 'train-up'. Seriously, he believed that if he continued on to train there with these

things, his muscles would become just bones and fats even before the competition. Nevertheless, he still trained on...at least for a while. One hour later, Mike still could not stay inside the gym and train anymore. He did not feel stretched at all even after doing 100 counts of triceps extensions when he almost 'died' in America after doing eighty counts.

He decided to go for boxing where he might get better results but his expectation was not high. He taunted silently, "What kind of strong person could these machines produce?". As predicted, the first guy he saw on the ring had terrible figures. He did not even have the basic packs on his stomach, let alone humongous back and shoulder muscle. That guy was already in his thirties and seemed weaker than his grandfather.

He seemed to be waiting for challenges in the boxing ring and without hesitation; Mike volunteered to have to go with him. In America, Mike challenged with people that looked fiercer than him and were even boxing champions but in front of Mike, no one ever stood a chance. The elderly in front of him did not seem to stand any chance either. Once they both were on the ring, crowds started to gather. Mike thought it was because they had never seen someone as muscular as him before and must be flattering him with awe, wanting to make him their idol. To make things even 'fun', Mike announced to the elderly "I would beat you in thirty seconds". Chattering began to spread among the crowd.

This foolish thought never lasted long though. Without warning, as the bell rang, Mike pounced onto the guy in front of him. It would have been the ending if the man was caught but the man seemed to have foreseen it and just shifted to the right easily, causing Mike not only to grab the air but also to lose balance before fall onto the ground. "ohhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh" the crowd jeered. Not wanting to be disgraced, Mike quickly scrambled up but even before he balanced himself, he was attacked a fatal blow: A direct hit on his face with two fists, something easiest to block.

The currently muddled head Mike had another fall this time round, a longer one. However this time round, he suddenly found out he could not stand up as the counts went on "1...2..." He felt as if he had fought for one hour and had run out of energy. He was helpless and he wanted to give up. Nevertheless, he managed to crawl up but it was too late. The thirty seconds was over and he had lost the match as the bell went off. He fell back onto the group after the first failure of his lifetime in the gym.

While daunting over his failure, his opponent came to his side. Mike expected some taunts like what he always did in America after winning but instead, the guy talked for the first time in a polite tone "Are you okay? Need help?" as he reached out his helping hand. Unable to rely on his own, Mike had no choice but to accept the aid. Then, they went off in different direction after the man made sure Mike was alright. This made Mike have a different opinion about Singaporean. Though they did not have technologies as good as America, but it seems that Singaporeans are more friendly and helpful. They were also not proud and some of them, like the one he just fought, were stronger than he expected. Singapore was indeed a special and mysterious place.

After one full month living in Singapore, these five characters have seemed to get used to Singapore in one way or another. Regardless of new challenges coming up or an easier life up ahead, it is a fact that they are here and would be here at least for a few more years before they go back. Therefore, it would be best if they get adapted to the Singaporeans' way of life so as to live happily here.