

ARTIVISM: ISSUE 02

WINNER

THEIR SUN RISES BEFORE OURS –

WAKA

“Draw your life map,” the career coach yells,
pacing a room full of graduates too busy for this.
“Include your personal relationships.
Anyone seen *S Line*?” he adds with a wink.
I smirk at the blank paper,
writing 96 in the middle, the year we won the world,
not in a corner.

I’ve dated a Korean, kissed a Mongolian,
and spent too much in *Roppongi* bars.
With one, I fucking believed in the red string of fate.
They enjoyed my tea, jokes and wit –
they all disappeared.
Brown paper wrappers, torn and thrown.

“The earliest memories should be from kindergarten days,”
the microphone blares.
We played cricket in the sun every day, family and village kids.
My younger cousin mastered traditional Ves,
now she dances K-pop for a local survival show.
She wants a beautiful Korean man, like the idols on her walls.
Knife and glass skin, she calls her hurdles, a small price.
She stashes toxic and illegal Pettah whitening creams.

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Streaming costs thousands, 5G works only for Colombo kids.
I see *KinnPorsche* discs but Yibo and Zhan on covers,
inside stationery stores, heaven for pirated dreams.
At my parents, behind Austen and Dickens,
I hide *TVXQ* and manga in the bookcase we share.
Amma keeps calling them disgusting picture books,
but they are just *Haikyu!!*, *One Piece*, and *Akira*.

My older cousin moved to Japan overnight,
left his six-figure job and the three-storey house built on debt.
He cries on WhatsApp on weekends, begging me, "Don't let *Amma* know."
His wife doesn't speak, his boss a racist, he skips his meals.
I saw his mother paint the second eye on her *Daruma* last week,
the one she started the day he flew away.
She doesn't know he is beneath the cold bamboo ceiling.

The "Asians" around me, not my kind,
the friends I made, volunteering in their towns,
neon-lit, high rise, corporate hubs,
stare in fascination because I speak fluent Korean,
can drink Sake and know how to make *Wontons* from scratch.
My best friend sends a screenshot of her *Amazon* cart,
eighty dollars to ship a matcha whisk to *Galle*.
We start drawing milestones on the map,
thirty years too short to draw any of that crap.

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At a classmate's wedding, at the corner singles table,
an engineer brags: a new job in Taiwan.
He will queue overnight for his passport.
A torn banner hung in front of the passport office gates,
of a light rail project that never saw the light.
The groom works at the Port City IT Hub,
their wedding favours, *Pu-erh* tea bags, not the love cakes.

My best friend protests governments, dreaming of a state pension,
an unemployed Asian History major.
She doesn't tell them she has a data entry job for a Hong Kong firm,
or she bought a BYD, paying thousands a month.
The car cannot climb the gravel path leading up to her place.
It stays at Gunapala Uncle's, the elderly neighbour,
next to the shed where he raises buffalo.

"Now continue to draw your dream life,"
The room goes quiet.
My paper is blank, only the birth dot staring back.
My phone pings.
Singapore Airlines price drop for Kaohsiung.

All our dreams are
made in China.