



ANDREW (UNDI) LEE

## Korean faggots

Nothing could take away the currency of ghetto glamour, violence and street cred from Kevin, a self-proclaimed animal who took joy in pickpocketing and sleeping on rusty benches in parks. For he was a westie cunt. An Asian cunt. A poor, go back to your own country faggot cunt, who rejected the migrant dream and appeasing others—Fervently proud to be a Korean who liked the taste of his own blood.

I on the other hand lived the assimilated formula. The obedient Catholic altar boy who listened to my elders, respected the hierarchy and feared the Bible's lessons of eternal damnation. I wasn't that vulgar faggot cunt like my compatriot Kevin, the foul-mouthed, chain-smoking, *gae-sae-kki* who was always soaring in his own world. He was my complete opposite and I really don't know what he saw in me. This self-sabotaging, quietly spoken and closeted homo. Though his company was always reassuring as I didn't know any other queer Korean Australians my age, or any at all for that fact.

In seventh grade I was told to stay away from him by my school principal as an attempt to separate the fruit from spoiling. I ignored her of course, but in ninth grade he was kicked out of school. Despite both of us not being surprised that he lasted that long, I was crushed by the fact that our best soccer player was no longer in the team. He was my striker and I was his left wing. Literally his wing man who set up his goals. I only wished that I could have done that more for him in life.

One thing he used to enjoy doing was shoplifting and more often than enough I was his lookout. We only stole from big corporations because he always told me that Asians were being underpaid in factories overseas. So one day he rocked up to school and I truanted the second half of the day. The other boys loved it when he came back to school, even though it was only for mediation between one of the substitute teachers he fought with. Basically Kevin knocked the substitute teacher out and sent him to



the hospital. A fourteen-year-old standing up to an adult and planting him cold on the floor. Quite the disastrous scandal, but a legendary story as we all knew the teacher was a racist. Kevin's fists had no filter of how he felt and he could never tolerate injustice. During his mediation with the substitute teacher Kevin spat at the principal leaving him no chance of any redemption. So with Kevin and his newly blonde bleached and buzz cut hair, we headed to Parramatta Westfield shopping centre. An air-conditioned refuge for drug runners, underage credit card scammers and young mothers trying to escape the heat with their newborn babies. Then there was us, two little shit cunt Koreans, filling their void by robbing the rich.

I must admit that I never really had the ability to stay calm during Kevin's willin escapades. All my skin would go bright red whenever I felt I was doing something wrong.

"It's what I find irresistible about you", he often would say, "Your blood vessels just have high morals." I hated it.

It was actually more than that as I suffer from a chronic and rare blood vessel disease, restrictive, dysfunctional and irregular. I just never shared that with him or anyone outside my family because I was told that I would most likely die young from this disease. Basically I convinced myself that that if I never vocalised it or wrote it down, It would never become true and I would die old.

Entering the sportswear store was like entering an overpriced concentration camp of gym junkies and overenthusiastic sales personnel flirting, flexing and revealing as much flesh as possible. They used their bodies as trophies from their countless hours of press benching, squatting and deadlifting, all for the female species. Kevin didn't give a shit about these muscle freaks as he was focussed on his mission. I would get distracted by the cheap body deodorant intoxicating the whole shop with their cookie-cutter concepts of masculinity. I was drawn to it and despised it. Maybe I just secretly wished they were flirting with me.

Kevin punched me.

"Oi! Focus and put your tongue back in your mouth."

"Fuck off."

"You're such a faggot."

"Go eat a dick, cunt."

"Whatever squinty eyes."

Kevin would shoot out this wistful smile when I broke the altar boy mould and was vulgar with him.

However, those words irked me, "Korean faggot". Not because of it was offensive, but for the fact that a Korean faggot couldn't exist in the Korean Australian community. We were non-existent, excluded and almost erased by our culture of denialism. Also being dirtpoor meant we weren't allowed to be gay for some

reason. Like it was only for the elite and educated. Kevin hated when I spoke about 'gay issues'. It made him uncomfortable as he was so comfortable with being gay. Though he had nothing to lose, no family honour to uphold or any shame. He was depleted from it before he was even born. Kevin's mother migrated to Australia from France in the 1980s, but not how everyone would think. He was born in an attic in Paris after his mother fled Iran during the Islamic Revolution. For you see, his mother was the maid of one of the Persian princesses while his father worked for a Korean construction company building Iran's highways. When the Islamic Revolution broke out the princess gave Kevin's mother nuggets of gold and precious jewels to start a new life in France. However, she never received papers to reside in France or any of the other same privileges that the royal family received, so for years she lived a non-existent and low key life. As for his father, he was never tracked down after the revolution, so all links to him were unfortunately lost.

"One day I will write about you. This gay Korean conceived in revolution and born with treasures from the Persian empire," Kevin would laugh every time I'd say this.

"Just don't focus on all the shit things that happened in our lives", he would reply.

Kevin had his ritual of scanning the store as I set myself up to be his extra pair of eyes. As usual, I'd flush red as he swiftly stuffed clothes up his jumper. Puma, Champion, Nike, Adidas—the brands of

ghetto glamour suburbia. Oversized and baggy. Acting as a concealment of our insecurities and fashioning it as trendy. The second test for juvenile shoplifters came at the exit. The dreaded alarm gatekeeper of our ticket to social assimilation amongst the older boys in our neighbourhood. Our sprouting facial hair and cheap sneakers wouldn't cut it. Street cred in the suburbs mattered a lot more for those who were excluded from the real privileges of life. Every time the alarm sounded off, there would be an instant rush of adrenaline. Our hearts pounding with this stinging desire to mask our pain. Dashing through the mall, dodging people like fighter pilots during the Korean war. Though our war wasn't for ideology, it was a war for feeling some sense of control in our lives, claiming back a fraction of our identities of what was taken from us when we were not allowed to be who we wanted to be. Independent from powers suppressing us. Telling us how we should live, who we should be friends with and most of all, having the freedom to exist as vulgar and proud Korean faggots.

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Andrew Lee, also known as "undi", is a Korean-Australian writer who works both in film and theatre. He has great passion for writing intimate narratives from the Korean diaspora and queer identities that live on the margins.

