

Grace Ji

Grade 11

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399 words

Que sera, sera

A nurse bows her head as I rush into the Taipei hospital, my breath ragged, heart thudding. Her mouth forms an apology I can't bear to hear. I push past—desperate to hear the crinkle of my grandma's favorite *niu gá táng* candy wrapper, feel her calloused gardener's hands, smell the faint scent of oolong tea on her clothes. But I am too late.

"I'm so sorry," a nurse murmurs, resting her hand on my shoulder. "She passed away two hours ago."

Our relationship had been a patchwork: every-three-years visits to Taiwan, handwritten letters, and care packages with special Taiwanese ramen flavors. My grandmother NaiNai's lilting accent felt like home, but at school, it marked me as different. My shame started when I was ten.

"Say 'Ron isn't wrong' again," a classmate grins.

I repeat it, confused.

Laughter follows. "Your accent—it's just funny."

Whenever I said "wrong" it never had the *-ng* sound. It was never crisp enough. Never American enough.

I'm fourteen again, crying in NaiNai's kitchen. I can't fold dumplings right, can't pronounce things right, can't even be Taiwanese or American right.

"Will I pretty? Will I rich? *Que sera, sera,*" NaiNai trills as she folds dumplings, dough creasing beneath her fingers.

"NaiNai," I complain between sniffles, "that's not the right tune."

She ignores me and gently ladles dumplings into my bowl. I bite into the tender dough, savoring pork, chive, and hot broth.

Lunar New Year is coming. She'll hang red paper, cook *tangyuan*, and slip me red envelopes. But when I return to America, I'll let her calls ring—I'll say I'm too busy. Truthfully, I'm afraid of sounding like her, afraid her culture makes me less.

If I'd realized that making dumplings together and talking under a yellow kitchen light were fleeting moments, maybe I would've called her back and visited more often. Maybe I would've loved myself more—my mispronounced *Que sera, sera*'s, "wrong"s that sound like "Ron," and messy dumpling folds. Self-acceptance means loving the parts of you shaped by your family, cultures you're part of, and your voice—even when the world tells you otherwise.

On my flight back from Taiwan, I trace my mother's tear-streaked hands while the hum of engines fills the silence. And somewhere between heaven and earth, I softly whisper, "*Que sera, sera. Whatever will be, will be.*" This time, I let it sound like me. Like home. Like NaiNai.