

ANALYSIS TEXT 2

INSTRUCTIONS: Read the following excerpt from “The Gold Mountain Coat,” and answer the multiple-choice questions. For each question, select the **best** answer and record your choice on the **Answer Sheet** provided.

The narrator remembers her childhood in small-town Ontario during the 1950s. “Gold Mountain” is the name by which many Chinese referred to North America.

The Gold Mountain Coat

by Judy Fong-Bates

- 1 The small town that was my home was typical of many small towns in Ontario. It had one main street, one elementary school, one district high school, and five churches – Presbyterian, Anglican, United, Roman Catholic, and a Dutch Reform Church on the edge of town.
- 2 The main street of our small town had a dime store that sold everything from *Evening in Paris* perfume to stationery and hammers. It also had a clothing store, a jewellery shop, a hardware store, a drugstore, a barber shop, and a restaurant that served Canadian food. And, typical of all small towns, it also had a Chinese restaurant and a Chinese hand laundry.
- 3 My father operated the hand laundry and the other Chinese family managed the Chinese restaurant. I was the only Chinese child in the town. When my family first arrived, the restaurant was run by two brothers and their father, Sam Sing. The floors were covered with old-fashioned black and red lino tiles laid out in a diamond checkerboard pattern. There was a shiny speckled Formica counter with stools of circular seats upholstered in vinyl, and rimmed with a wide band of shiny chrome. There hung from the ceiling, a huge, four-blade fan, that in the summer hovered and whirred – a huge humming dragonfly.
- 4 The proprietor, Sam Sing, stood behind the counter of his restaurant. He was a tall, straight-backed, grim-looking man with deep wrinkles cross-hatching his face. Sam rarely smiled, but when he did he showed a set of gold teeth that matched his gold-rimmed glasses. He rarely spoke, but when he did his voice had the raspy quality of sandpapers rubbing together.
- 5 There was nothing ingratiating about Sam. He glared at his customers from behind his glasses. In his presence, I was always struck speechless. I was afraid to return his gaze. I felt diminished and insignificant.
- 6 When I first met Sam Sing, he was already in his seventies; he had a head of thick, almost totally black hair parted at the side. He seemed robust and alert, and for a man his age he moved with amazing agility. My parents told me that Sam owed his exceptionally good health to drinking medicinal turtle soup. According to local legend, whenever Sam felt unwell, he asked a couple of local teenage boys to catch him a turtle from the nearby creek. Then followed hours of simmering to produce a clear, brown, pungent, tonic soup.

- 7 Sam was proud of the fact that he had fathered two sons who would carry on his business and his family name. In contrast to Sam's stern, imposing demeanour, his sons were round-faced, smooth-skinned, and smiling. They reminded me of bookends; they looked almost identical, except that one was very fair-skinned, while the other was very dark.
- 8 The brothers, Ken and John, were kind to me. I remember visiting the restaurant and frequently coming out with a double-scooped ice cream cone. Often the brothers came to visit my parents in the afternoon, during the quiet time between the lunch and supper hours in the restaurant. But Sam Sing never entered our house. His enterprise was prosperous, whereas ours was poor. Did he feel that we were beneath him? Or was it that we reminded him of earlier and more meagre times that were best forgotten?
- 9 What I remember most about Ken and John, though, was that in the winter they visited our house one at a time. Between them, they shared a single coat. It was a shapeless, black, wool garment. The pile was completely worn, the sleeves were permanently accordioned, the buttons were all mismatched, and the corners of the collar curled upwards. Occasionally, when the weather was not too severe, one brother would arrive at the laundry dressed in the coat. A half hour or so later the other brother would dash over wearing just a thin sweater over his white shirt. This made my mother laugh and she teased them about their excessive thrift.
- 10 For many years, Sam Sing and his sons lived contentedly in this bachelor existence. The sons each had a clearly defined role in the running of the restaurant and Sam presided over everything. Ken had come to Canada unmarried, but John had left his wife, son, and daughter back in China. After working through government channels for several years, John was finally given permission to bring his family over.
- 11 My mother often helped John compose his letters back to China. Whenever he received mail from home, he rushed over to share it with my parents. One day he showed me a picture, taken in a studio, of his wife, son, and daughter. The wife and daughter had freshly permed hairstyles parted at the side, revealing high broad foreheads. The son was dressed in too-large overalls, the bib almost touching his chin. The mother was sitting down with her hand resting on her son's shoulder, while the daughter, who was a few years older, stood slightly but noticeably apart. I looked at this picture and felt the solemnity of their stares. It seemed strange to me that John was really the father. His youth and exuberance were in such contrast to the personality of my own father, who was over sixty when I was born. My mother was pleased that I would at last have Chinese playmates. Although both my parents were proud that I had learned English so quickly, I knew they were concerned that I was becoming "too Canadian." John told me that I would be in charge of teaching his children English and taking them to school. As he spoke, the brown in his eyes took on a liquid quality and his eyebrows were arched so that dark vertical furrows appeared between them. Once more, I looked at the children in the photograph. Then I looked at John. Did he expect me to be friends with them? I was the only Chinese child in the town and since coming to Canada I had only played with *lo fon*¹ children. Did these children from China know about *Howdy Doody* and *Captain Kangaroo*²? What would I have to teach them besides English? I began to feel a weight on my chest.
- 12 When an arrival date for John's family was established, Sam permitted his sons to close the restaurant for a half-day. Both brothers were to go to the airport to greet the family from China. The brothers

¹ lo fon: *caucasian*

² Howdy Doody and Captain Kangaroo: *1950s children's TV shows*

recognized their father's generosity in giving them a half-day off. For five years, the restaurant had never been closed. However, there was one problem. It was winter and they had only the one coat to share between them. Both John and Ken realized that a new coat was a significant purchase, one that would have to have Sam's approval. As the arrival date of John's family drew nearer, and the temperatures grew colder, the need for a second coat was becoming urgent.

- 13 John and Ken discussed the purchase of a second coat from every angle. How could they convince the old man to part with enough money for a new coat? Timing was essential. After closing time, Ken and John always scurried around the restaurant. They swept and washed the floors, filled the glass sugar dispensers and the miniature china creamers, and cleaned up the dirty dishes. Meanwhile, Sam sat alone in the wooden booth at back of the restaurant. He carefully calculated the day's profits, his fingers flying over the rings of a black wooden abacus³ brought many years ago from China. If the earnings were good, Sam invited his sons to share a glass of whisky. But if the earnings were poor, Sam drank alone and glowered at the wooden walls of the booth while his sons continued silently working. Naturally, John and Ken decided to approach Sam on a night the whisky was shared.
- 14 The day after his discussion with Ken, John came to visit my parents. Though I heard him chuckling as he confided to my mother about the logistics of the timing, every word was coated with resentment. At first he decided that Saturday should be the asking day. But then my mother pointed out that if permission to purchase was granted on a Saturday night, Sam might change his mind by the time stores opened on Monday. She convinced John that Friday was a better day. Business was usually good. And the stores were open on Saturday.
- 15 On the chosen Friday, John visited us late in the afternoon. The wind sounded particularly shrill that day as it sprayed blasts of white powdery snow over the sidewalks. When John walked into the laundry, he looked as if someone had dusted him with icing sugar. He seemed quite agitated. I remember hearing him speak with great determination. "In a few days my family will be here. We'll all be living upstairs. I will be the one responsible for them." He glanced at my mother who nodded in agreement. "I'm going to have to stand up to that old man. I carry all his money in my pocket." He patted the front pocket of his pants emphatically before continuing. "And I have to ask permission to spend it. What right does he have to object? I work hard. This isn't China. Things are different here." Again, my parents said very little. They mostly smiled and nodded reassuringly. Then John suddenly remembered, "Today is payday at the mill!" He smiled and exclaimed, "Today business will be good. Guaranteed!"
- 16 Just before he left, John walked over to the corner where I sat pretending to read a comic book. He patted me on the shoulder and grinned. "Not too much longer now." I looked up and smiled. John looked so happy. As I nodded I felt an ever so slight cramp in my stomach.
- 17 That Friday, after the restaurant closed, Sam counted his money, smiled, and invited his sons for a glass of whisky. This was the moment John had been waiting for. His father offered him a glass. He took a large, quick gulp. "Father, you know that my wife and family will be arriving on Wednesday. You have been generous enough to let Ken come with me to the airport to greet them." Sam nodded his head.

³ abacus: *manual calculating device*

- 18 John continued, with Ken nervously looking on. “But, Father, we have only one coat. The weather is very cold. We need to buy another coat.”
- 19 Sam carefully set down his whisky glass. His face slowly hardened at the boldness of his son’s request. John was ready to panic but then Ken blurted out, “John’s son will need a coat for school. Your grandson cannot walk to school without a coat. A second one for us, one the boy can grow into.”
- 20 Sam’s face broke into a smile. His gold teeth gleamed. “Very good,” he said and finished his whisky. The brothers breathed a sigh of relief.
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