Ariel's Wish

The first thing Ariel noticed about England was the sky.

It was grey. Not the soft, silvery grey of the mountains near her old home in Japan, but a heavy grey that seemed to stretch endlessly above the rooftops.

"Welcome to Kent!" Mum announced cheerfully as they drove through the unfamiliar streets.

Ariel pressed her forehead against the cold car window. Rows of red-brick houses stood beside narrow pavements, and bare trees swayed in the November wind. Everything looked different from the bustling streets of Kyoto, where she had lived for all ten years of her life.

"Do you think I'll make friends?" she asked quietly.

"Of course you will," Mum replied. "Just give yourself time."

Ariel wished she could believe her.

Her father had been offered a new job in England, and although everyone had promised it would be an exciting adventure, Ariel had struggled to share their enthusiasm. She missed her grandparents, the little bakery on the corner of their street and, most of all, her best friend, Hana.

On her first morning at school, Ariel stood outside the classroom, twisting the ends of her burgundy scarf between her fingers.

"This is Ariel," announced Mrs Bennett, her new teacher. "She's recently moved here from Japan. I'm sure you'll all make her feel welcome."

Twenty-seven pairs of eyes turned towards her.

Ariel felt her cheeks grow warm.

A girl with curly brown hair smiled from the front row, but before Ariel could smile back, a boy whispered something to his friend. They both giggled.

At breaktime, Ariel wandered around the playground, unsure where to go. Groups of children chatted excitedly about television programmes, football matches and weekend plans. Their conversations seemed to move at lightning speed.

Although Ariel spoke English well, she sometimes struggled to understand the expressions her classmates used.

When one boy told another to "pull his socks up", Ariel glanced down at his perfectly ordinary socks, wondering what was wrong with them.

She felt like a puzzle piece that belonged to a completely different picture.

By Friday, Ariel had begun to dread the sound of the morning alarm.

That afternoon, Mrs Bennett announced a class project.

“Next week, we’ll be creating presentations about places that are special to us. They could be somewhere you’ve visited, somewhere you live or somewhere that holds an important memory.”

Ariel's stomach tightened.

She knew exactly which place she would choose, but the thought of standing in front of the class made her nervous.

Later, while walking home, she stopped beside a small park. A single dandelion stood near the pathway, its delicate white seeds trembling in the breeze.

Ariel crouched beside it.

In Japan, her grandmother had always told her that dandelion seeds carried wishes on the wind.

“Make a wish,” Grandma would say, “but remember that some wishes need a little help from you.”

Ariel picked the dandelion and closed her eyes.

I wish I could belong here.

She blew gently. The seeds scattered into the cold afternoon air, floating over the grass like tiny parachutes.

“That's a lot of wishes!”

Ariel turned.

It was the girl with curly brown hair from her class.

“I’m Sophie,” the girl said. “You’re Ariel, aren't you?”

Ariel nodded.

“I love your scarf,” Sophie continued. “Did you get it in Japan?”

“My grandmother knitted it for me,” Ariel replied, touching the soft wool.

“That’s lovely. My gran tried knitting me a jumper once, but one sleeve was twice as long as the other!”

Ariel laughed before she could stop herself.

Sophie grinned.

For the first time that week, Ariel felt something inside her begin to relax.

They walked towards the park gates together, talking about their favourite books and the class project.

“What place are you going to choose?” Sophie asked.

“Kyoto,” Ariel answered. “It's where I used to live.”

“Really? I'd love to hear about it!”

Ariel hesitated. “I'm worried everyone will think it's boring.”

Sophie looked genuinely surprised.

“Boring? You've lived on the other side of the world! I think that's amazing.”

Over the weekend, Ariel worked carefully on her presentation. She included photographs of Kyoto's colourful temples, narrow streets and cherry blossoms. She even found a picture of herself and Hana standing beneath a flowering tree.

On Monday, when Mrs Bennett called her name, Ariel's heart hammered against her ribs.

She walked to the front of the classroom, clutching her notes.

For a moment, the words refused to come.

Then she spotted Sophie, who gave her an encouraging thumbs-up.

Ariel took a breath.

“In Japan,” she began, “there is a special time of year when the cherry blossoms

blossoms bloom. People gather in parks to admire them, but the flowers only last for a short time.”

As she continued, her confidence slowly grew. She explained how families enjoyed picnics beneath the trees and how the arrival of spring brought a sense of hope and new beginnings.

She showed the class a photograph of her grandparents standing outside their little house.

“My grandmother says that even when things change, we carry our memories with us,” Ariel explained.

The classroom was unusually quiet.

When Ariel finished, Mrs Bennett smiled warmly.

“Thank you, Ariel. That was a wonderful presentation.”

Several hands shot into the air.

“Do you miss Japan?” asked one girl.

“Every day,” Ariel admitted.

“What's your favourite Japanese food?” asked another.

“Probably my grandmother's homemade ramen!”

A boy at the back raised his hand.

“Can you teach us some Japanese words?”

Ariel smiled. “Of course!”

By lunchtime, several children had gathered around her, eagerly practising greetings in Japanese. Some of their attempts made Ariel giggle, but she patiently helped them with the pronunciation.

As she sat beside Sophie in the dining hall, Ariel realised something important.

She hadn't needed to pretend to be someone else to make friends. In fact, sharing something about herself had helped the other children understand her.

That evening, Ariel called her grandmother in Japan.

“Are you happy, my little flower?” Grandma asked.

Ariel considered the question.

“I still miss home,” she replied. “But I think I'm beginning to like it here.”

Grandma smiled.

“Do you remember what I told you about wishes?”

Ariel glanced towards the windowsill, where her burgundy scarf lay folded beside a photograph of Hana.

“Some wishes need a little help from you,” she whispered.

“Exactly.”

The following morning, Ariel walked to school beneath a pale blue sky. The November air was still cold, but the sunlight made the rooftops glow.

At the school gates, Sophie waved enthusiastically.

“Ariel! Come on! We're playing a game before the bell!”

Ariel hurried towards her.

She knew there would still be difficult days. There would be unfamiliar words, moments of homesickness and things she didn't understand. But perhaps belonging somewhere didn't mean forgetting where you came from.

Perhaps it meant finding room in your heart for somewhere new.

As Ariel crossed the playground, a tiny dandelion seed drifted past her shoulder.

She watched it float away and smiled.

Her wish hadn't simply come true.

She had helped make it happen.

Reading Comprehension Questions

Choose the best answer for each question.

1. Why did Ariel struggle to settle into her new school?

A. She disliked her teacher and refused to participate in lessons.

B. She found the unfamiliar surroundings and conversations difficult to adjust to.

C. She was unable to speak or understand any English.

D. She wanted to move to a different school in Kent.

2. What does the phrase “a puzzle piece that belonged to a completely different picture” suggest about Ariel's feelings?

A. She enjoyed solving puzzles more than making friends.

B. She believed her classmates were deliberately excluding her.

C. She felt out of place and disconnected from those around her.

D. She thought her new school was too challenging academically.

3. Why is the dandelion an important symbol in the story?

A. It reminds Ariel of her grandmother's advice about hope and taking action.

B. It represents Ariel's desire to return immediately to Japan.

C. It shows that Ariel prefers the countryside to the city.

D. It reminds Ariel that the weather in England is unpredictable.

4. What can the reader infer from Sophie's reaction when Ariel mentions Kyoto?

A. Sophie is surprised that Ariel can speak English fluently.

B. Sophie is worried that Ariel's presentation will be unsuccessful.

C. Sophie wishes she could move to Japan herself.

D. Sophie is genuinely interested in Ariel's experiences and wants to encourage her.

5. How does Ariel's presentation become a turning point in the story?

A. It convinces Mrs Bennett to give Ariel an easier project.

B. It allows Ariel to share her identity and helps her classmates connect with her.

C. It makes Ariel realise that she no longer misses Japan.

D. It proves that Ariel is the most talented student in her class.

6. What is the main message conveyed by the final sentence, “She had helped make it happen”?

A. Wishes always come true when people believe strongly enough.

B. Ariel's grandmother had secretly arranged for Sophie to befriend her.

C. Positive change often requires courage and personal effort.

D. Ariel's difficulties disappeared because she made a wish.

Thinking

Answers

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