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Rachel Chu & Me: A Step Closer to Self-Realization

Another summer afternoon, another day closer to the start of school, I dreaded. Eyebrows knit in concentration, my fingers swipe sluggishly across the endless abundance of photos that decorated my feed. *Europe. College visits. Beer parties with half naked people.* Gross, not to mention unoriginal. Suddenly, a deep desire to get out of the house simmered at the pit of my stomach. Altogether, I silently prayed for any offering of an escape to my summer doldrum. The answer came in a series of rapid knocks at my bedroom door, behind it, my sister's face with an earnest grin appeared.

"Hey, big bro told me to get you ready. We're going to the theatre for 'Crazy Rich Asians'." my sister said.

I weighed my options. A movie sounded way better than lazing about and my intrigue build at the recall of an all-Asian cast.

"Sure. Give me five minutes tops."

Soon after our arrival at the cinema, we made our way towards the entrance of the darkly-lit room. At the view of the wide array of people that filled the reclined seats, I tug on my sister's hand in pleasant surprise. It was an amazing show of support given the little exposure of diversity in mainstream Hollywood films. But before I could finish that thought,

"Oh, it's starting!" My sister exclaimed as she rushed to our spots. She wasn't the only one that heavily anticipated the film, as I too surely questioned if the movie's performance would be

enough to provide justice and leadway for more Asian-centered stories to come. At last, I let my eyes sweep up to the screen as previews played through and gave way to the movie. A projected woman known as Rachel emerged from the darkness. She looks like me, I first thought to myself. Ebony hair with almond eyes, all contained within a small frame. An hour into the movie, it wasn't solely physical attributes that linked us together, I found out.

Rachel's Mother: *Your face is Chinese. You speak Chinese.* (15) follows the soft and wise tone of an older Asian woman, as her voice rises with the distinctive highs and lows of Mandarin.

Rachel's Mother: *"But here.. and here,"* Rachel's mother gestures to her head and mouth.

"You're different." She firmly states in English.

My chest becomes tight as a whirlwind of memories from primary school came through at hearing those words. *"Go back to your home country"* the kids would call out. Instances of kids grimacing at the tupperware my mother would pack, resurfaced. And choruses of the same mockery only cemented what I already knew, that I didn't belong because of my differences. My face becomes hot and for once, I'm thankful for the darkness because it at least masked the streak of tears that fell from my eyes. The edge of my seat practically dug itself into me as I couldn't help but slant forward, taking in as much of the portrayed characters in front of me as possible.

Eleanor: *I know this much... You will never be enough.* (96) rings the voice of Rachel's mother-in-law. With every inflicted syllable, she made it clear that Rachel did not belong, not with her socioeconomic status as an Asian-American. Her stare was downright blood-curdling. The background commotion then slows to a complete silence. Rachel is seen folding her cards after it is revealed to be a winning combination of tiles in the game of mahjong. The meaning there was two-fold.

Rachel: *There's no winning. You made sure of that. Because if Nick chose me, he would lose his family. And if he chose his family, he might spend the rest of his life resenting you.*

(128)

Her clear voice expressed vulnerability but also represented equal resilience.

Rachel: *I'm not leaving 'cause I'm scared or because I think I'm not enough. Because... maybe for the first time in my life, I know I am.*

My eyes flicker in awe at her unwavering stance as she struts her way out of the scene. The theatre audience later followed suit and gave a deafening applause at her executed power. To anyone else, that confrontation would have crushed their entire self-worth, but not Rachel Chu. The Rachel Chu that I grew to idolize within the span of two hours, the confident and self-assured protagonist that didn't need to be accepted by anyone else but abide by her own defined standards.

Once more, my stomach turns at the former memories of ostracization, of lowered eyes at the presence of peers my age ; laughter that soon ceased in fear of giving them a chance to hurl the most hurtful of insults. But the tension eases as I remember the very words my mother would repeat to me each time I walked through our doors in shambles of cascading tears.

"Be kind and courteous, and people will foremost remember you for your humility instead of your appearance" she used to whisper, her hands smoothing over my stray hairs as I leaned into her comforting embrace.

"Know that to me, you deserve the world, no less."

I am brought back to the present when I see Nick catch Rachel before she leaves Singapore.

Nick: *I know this is a far throw from a hidden paradise,* (134) he begins and Rachel looks earnestly into his eyes.

Nick: *But wherever you are in the world, that's where I belong.* She takes this in as he pulls out a ring box.

Nick: *Rachel Chu, will you marry me and make me the happiest man in this world?* Just as Rachel is teary-eyed, I swallow back my own. Instead, a smile blossomed on my face in utter happiness at Rachel's discovery of wholehearted acceptance through love. Before Rachel is able to form a coherent answer, a chubby lady interjects with

Chubby Woman: *"Yes, Yes, Yes! She will!"*, the room erupts into laughter and both of the leads are in beaming smiles as well. And just like that, a velvet curtain pulls together to indicate a close. I return my gaze to my sister, both of us shared a look and a knowing smile, glad that we took part in this memorable experience together.

Works Cited

Chiarelli, Peter, Lim, Adele. '*Crazy Rich Asians*'. Warner Bros. Published manuscript, 2018.

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