When Grandmama died at eighty-three our whole household held its breath. She had promised us a sign of her leaving, final proof that her present life had ended well. My parents knew that without any clear sign, our own family fortunes could be altered, threatened. My stepmother looked endlessly into the small cluttered room the ancient lady had occupied. Nothing was touched, nothing changed. My father, thinking that a sign should appear in Grandmama’s garden, looked at the frost-killed shoots and cringed: no, that could not be it.

My two older teenage brothers and my sister, Liang, age fourteen, were embarrassed by my parents’ behaviour. What would all the white people in Vancouver think of us? We were Canadians now, Chinese-Canadians, a hyphenated reality that my parents could never accept. So it seemed for different reasons, we all held our breath waiting for something.

### GOALS AT A GLANCE

- Write descriptive paragraphs.
- Use adjectives effectively.