

## Bones

When I was little, my leg shattered into a million pieces.

I had been walking home along the seawall when my friend's baby sister wandered into the busy bike lane. My dad, holding my hand, rushed after her, and in the blur I stumbled into the lane and a man ran over me. Like the rhythm of the afternoon ocean a dozen metres away, the pain in my leg came in a quick, crashing wave. Despite the magnitude of the injury, I refused to go to the hospital for a day. When I eventually obliged, the staff said that I had broken my leg, and I wasn't old enough to get crutches. But I was old enough to get a long, pink cast spanning the length of my leg, wound around my femur and tibia and fibula. My dad used glittery glue to pipe sparkly drawings onto the scratchy, netted surface. The playful pink dulled any inklings of apprehension I may have felt. It made the cast feel like a long hug. Partially immobilized, I watched educational videos about fossils, satiating my curiosity formerly quenched by the outdoors. It was through this satiation that I decided I wanted to be a paleontologist.

Eventually, my leg healed. My body's bone cells worked day and night, crafting themselves into lengthy spindles, stretching across the cartilage and tissue holding the wreckage together, until they finally reestablished their strength. When the cast was taken off, five-year-old me was aware that my bones had finally rebuilt themselves. But it had been so long since the incident that I couldn't remember what had *exactly* happened to my leg. And even when I rack my brain now, I don't know precisely where my leg broke. It was probably just one crack, but at the time it felt like my bone had fractured in a thousand tiny places.

*Birth Certificate*

Name: Sharman, Millicent Joan Sun Hui Liang

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My grandma is called Nai Nai; that's not her real name, though. Nai Nai means grandma in Mandarin. I haven't visited her many times, but she was the one who gave me my Chinese name: Hui Liang.

MILLICENT: Hey. Who are you?

HUI LIANG: I'm Hui Liang... who are you?

MILLICENT: I'm Millie. What's your meaning?

HUI LIANG: "Benevolent light".

MILLICENT: Huh, that's cool. Millicent means "hard work". What are your Chinese characters?

HUI LIANG: Oh, you don't know them?

MILLICENT: It's okay. Nevermind. I'll search them up.

HUI LIANG: But you won't remember them later, will you?

MILLICENT: No, I guess I won't.

HUI LIANG: I thought you'd know. I'm a part of you.

MILLICENT: I'm sorry.

The name Nai Nai gave me fills me with a soft warmth. But tell me to put my pen to paper and write it in a sentence, and I can't—I don't know Mandarin. It feels strange to know one half of yourself more than the other. My nib sits on the paper and the ink slowly drains into the white, a pitch black blemish.

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For my sixteenth birthday, Nai Nai sent me jewelry in the mail. One of the items she sent me was the strand of pearls she wore on her wedding day. When I first spotted it, it was sitting gently on a velvet pouch. I smoothed my fingers over the surface of the pearls and eyed their satin shine—the same shine Nai Nai would've seen in a misty autumn five decades ago. An autumn captured in freeze frames of black and white, belonging to a century untouched by me.

To the left of the decades-old pearls sat a thin jade bracelet. It wasn't the first to catch my eye, but when I saw it, I smiled. I'd seen these before: my friend had one. Mine looked so small, smaller than hers. I tried it on, and sure enough, the bracelet wouldn't move past the base of my fingers. I told my friend and she said they're meant to be tight. People wear them for their entire lives. It's better if they can't slip off. I liked the band's grey and green stone, cool to the touch, but I knew I wouldn't ever see it around my wrist. Maybe if it did ease over my hand, the bracelet would've been a little too close for comfort. I don't know. But I long for it to fit, for a part of me to feel closer to complete. So I keep running my fingers over the glassy surface. I feel like if I push my hand in too hard, the stone will break into a hundred little bits, just like my bone.

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Little me was very invested in paleontology. Each dinosaur skeleton was a puzzle, and the paleontologists had to go on a scavenger hunt to find each part. Maybe it's these childhood aspirations that led to some sliver of me thinking that when something is in pieces, those pieces need to be united. But old me now knows something that young me didn't: digging up an entire dinosaur skeleton isn't easy. My body healed itself with the help of a pink cast, but my mind can't expect everything else to feel as complete. You see, paleontologists in the field spend years poring through sand and dirt. The forces of the world reign over them, heat and cold alike. I like to think that when an excavation ends, the vague sense of the unfinished, the slim chance of there being more, does not faze an experienced paleontologist. They live on, happy to have found not all, but enough. Happy to own a jade bracelet in spite of its size. If they had a pen and paper and were told to write their name, the deep ink dot from the pen would stare up at them. No longer an unsettling blot of black, finished before it started, but the tip of a Chinese character, patiently waiting. Sun Hui Liang.

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