

## Crystal Wang

The exact year he does not know, but he was born a tiger. There's a lack of fierce intensity and predatory snarl, but that sharp observance is not lost on him. At ninety-one, his hearing remains keen and his memory impeccable. He lies in wait, poised not to pounce, but to listen with ears perked. And observe, for he was never one for words.

His eyes, however, are failing him. The cloudiness of his vision bloomed alongside cornflower rings around his irises. And thus he wonders if what he sees is the true melancholy of time's passage, or just the blurriness of his eyesight. It feels as if he is watching them through a leaden glass pane, images bleary but sounds ringing with perfect clarity. In the beginning, he looked on as his children and their children conversed and laughed and grew, speaking rapid-fire in a tongue he did not understand. Now, it seems, that the only words they exchange are written by thumbs on a screen, face-to-face contact driven apart by years of apathy. He wonders through his quiet musings if these little snow globe inhabitants can see him as well.

Their lives move so quickly, with their newfangled handheld devices and strong limbs. Always buzzing past, rushing urgently by--for what, he will never know. In these moments, he thinks that he might be the one being watched through a glass window, a snow globe, isolated in his own little world. Loneliness thuds dully in his chest, barely noticeable after years of acceptance. He's always been lonely.

The youngest granddaughter tries to understand. She breaks away from the quiet of the family's touchscreen conversation to take his hand, strike up conversation with him about his past in broken accents. He blinks slowly.

It is not that he holds many secrets; rather, he will not go out of his way to tell. Yet, somewhere in his mind where memories flow and ebb lies the faint outline of a finger pressed to a pair of lips, shrouded in the mists of silence.

These dormant stories are meaningless to tell to a fifteen-year-old girl born into every conceivable opportunity. They are simply things of the past, irrelevant--she will probably forget them the moment after the recount is finished. It was a different time. He drifts off into his thoughts, but a gentle squeeze around his hand and repetition of the question tether him back. The granddaughter is still smiling hesitantly.

How funny it is, to think of two people sitting side by side with a broken bridge of seventy-five years between them, living in vastly different worlds. His lips almost part to speak his mind, but he halts. And smiles at her wordlessly. He is silent. He was never one for words.

He watches as her smile wavers, as she leaves her seat to return to the family, heads drooped over captivating screens. The tiger observes faithfully, and listens once more to the silence.