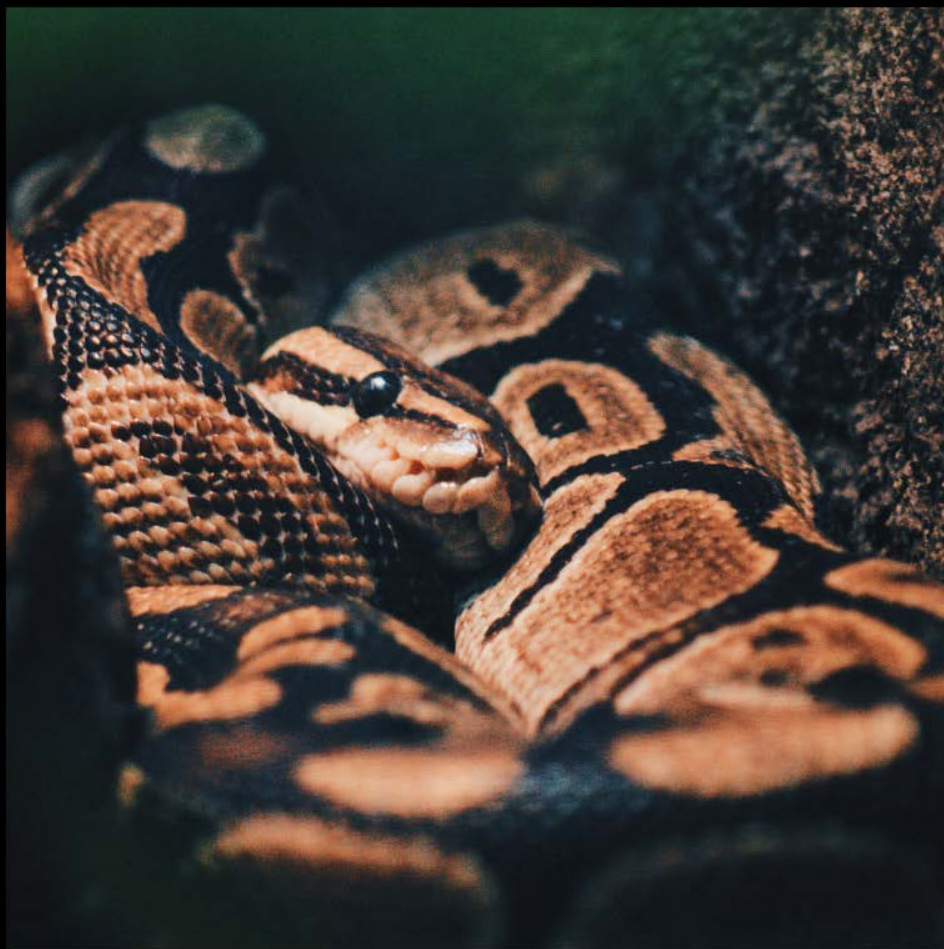


S H E D D I N G S K I N



I S A B E L L E J I A

Shedding Skin

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thanks to you

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flashes

mama lifts me up,
high on shoulders
palm leaf, freedom.

careful to grab at my knees
so plush and young,
i am soft and young.

white buckets splattered with
laughter. abandoned ladders
sturdy against
tree trunk men.

somewhere, a few rows down,
a girl is crying from a scraped knee.
we use four hands to hold
a hundred pitted hearts
so she doesn't have to stop living.



i find myself longing for you
there are too many snakes to fend off alone

before the yellow house

if you angled your body just right
you could see how the neighbor's eucalyptus trees
swayed to the beat of your Ma's heart.

it goes:

uhna, pat, uhna, pat, uhna, pat

two fat arms wrapped
around two hollow waists,
waiting to be filled with life
and hearth.

dense heads on each of her breasts.
you're too old to suckle,
too old to crave.

nestled bodies on top of the old mattress,
screeching under sky cotton
and split springs.

your Ma would point to the ceiling and say,
"that's where babies come from."
and you believed.

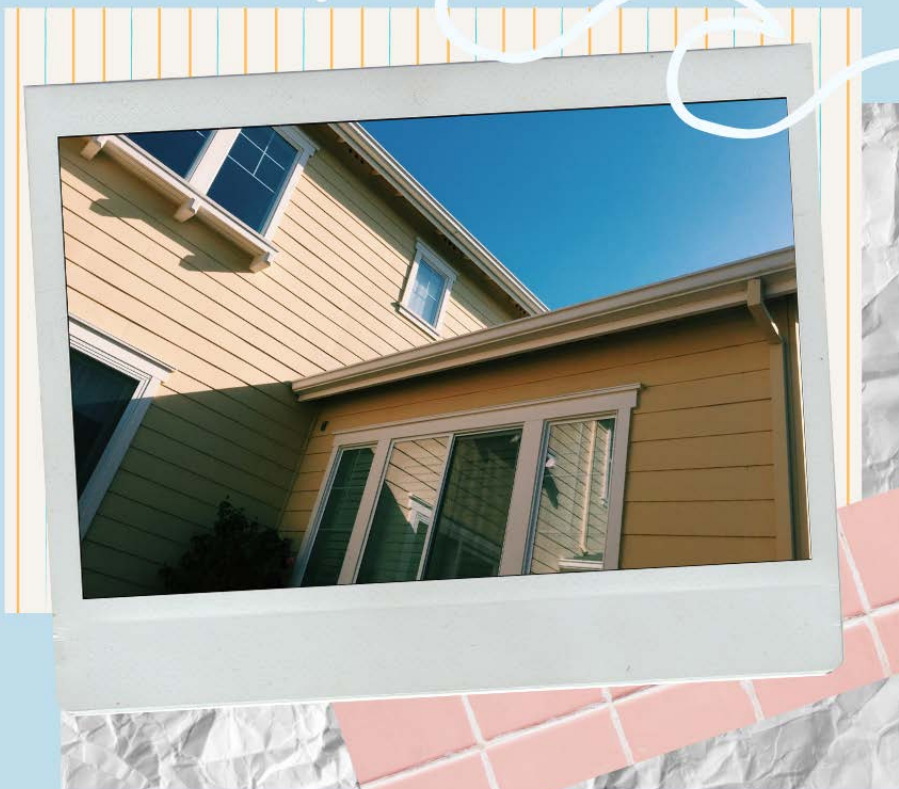
you thought of the looming light
from the moon, cloud cover.

but Ma meant heaven, Ma meant God
Ma meant He who gave her her precious girls.

angels that He hand-picked to land into your
mama's belly and
grow, grow, grow.

she'd heave a breath
and tickle your sister with her nose.
giggle giggle.

tell me:
where did you go?



the place i loved the most.
the place i dreaded the most.
can they be the same?

still life

soft girl
you know the buzz of cable
doesn't muffle anything.

your mother's hair is ripping
like the sound of
body bags and goodbyes.

you are too young to think
of ways to fit your green flesh
in a grave.

you don't just take a girl
try to set her on fire
&burn.

there's a certain glee that comes with
leaving, this is how it goes—
yes he hits us like a drum

but no you are not ashen.
you are picking your lip
like you know how to have a voice

but don't want to use it because
you haven't learned to savor the lostness
that comes with growing up.



i wish i could
飞走

incomplete metamorphosis

standing in the midst of this mapped world
i flicker between state and entity
and my mama is entirely the same
as she was fifteen years ago

when i was four years old and crying
on the balcony of our villa
in hawaii like a privileged pear-eating girl

when my sister's head knocked off of a rock
like why can't she be more careful
why can't she be more like me.

yet in-state i am still here because i wasn't
smart enough to flee the place
that taught me how to hide in the corner
of the room not to be seen
or heard by the laughter of rich families

passing through me i am in-a-state
of being forgotten like
why couldn't i leave this place
like she did

and why does she get to freeze in a blizzard
when i am unable to feel anything
but alone.



i drive to kill time
i wish driving would kill me

complaining to my mother about our differences
when we take the long way home

mama i want to be reborn
like a shade of yellow ivory,
one which is free of worry
from being caught or slaughtered
or exterminated by those
greater than i.

mama i want to be reborn
like a smart boy who doesn't
need to find himself
because he has enough
to depend on, enough to be
equivalent to a world.

and mama why wasn't i born
like a gift, wrapped up
in a box, filled with curiosity
and perfection and
why wasn't i born like a
child that you wanted

she says,
baby, daughter, please
you are nothing but
everything to me.

she says,
you were born like an ocean
raging and full,
wanting to monsoon me whole.

she says,
how can you do this to me
when all i've ever done
is try and love you.

she says, stop.
i don't want
another
girl



people blur by until i blur with them
but i still can't feel anything

angels in a tomb

open for holidays:

i am a flashing red light
underneath a motel sign.
men strung around my body
like ornaments or wishes.

tell me what's inside the glass, they say:

i press my pines,
cool and thin
against a window of
hot breath
heavy tongue.

out of order:

girls hang suspended
by christmas lights—
blinking like this is what
i am meant for, too.



i wish i could press pause
but the train of life never stops running

the intersection between

standing here, i sway to the beat of
the pops in my ears. thinking of how
long it's going to take to get off this train
how long is it going to take to
find my way
how long will i sway how long will i—

there is a girl with her legs pulled in
like she's cold or

alone

i wish her good blessings
it's easy to get lost
these days

on the train, we all want to
run run run away.



sometimes i want to ask
is this real life? am i still alive?

i am > you

i am a telephone cord wrapped around
your neck like this is the only way
i can reach you, this is the only way i know
how to pray

it's like writing you a letter at your funeral
and when the service ends it sits in my chair
until i can find it a home
under my tongue

i am tired of waiting for your phantom
to show up every next day
and there's no space to derail in between
finding myself and finding you

because i'm the only person
who doesn't know where to look
and i'm the only person
still not found.



home is where i feel the most alone
i find myself at home everywhere i go

the carbon monoxide would've killed me
had i not found the car keys

the memory's not quiet. the garage is dark
and i am crying. i trace my shoelaces
tie, untie, tie, untie, i am tied to the
door handle, *i am good*.

the side door is sticky
the spores, growing.
inside there are only tape
and cables—both hurt.

a deer trampled our backyard
when we were landscaping.
it's hard to hide hoof marks in quick-dry cement
like it's hard to hide bodies in the light.

what's the explanation party guests want
when they ask, *what happened to your bathroom door?*
do i tell them we're renovating or
do i tell them i was choked through

how he clutched me like a steering wheel
learning how to drive with splinters in my face
they stick out like a—*sorry, who did what?*—
black hole.



look at me
don't

Dear Z

Someone will come for you love return your
love someone will return with love
with flowers you are young this love is bare
it might ruin you run you over
in your dreams find flowers flour flourish without
me my dream girl dream



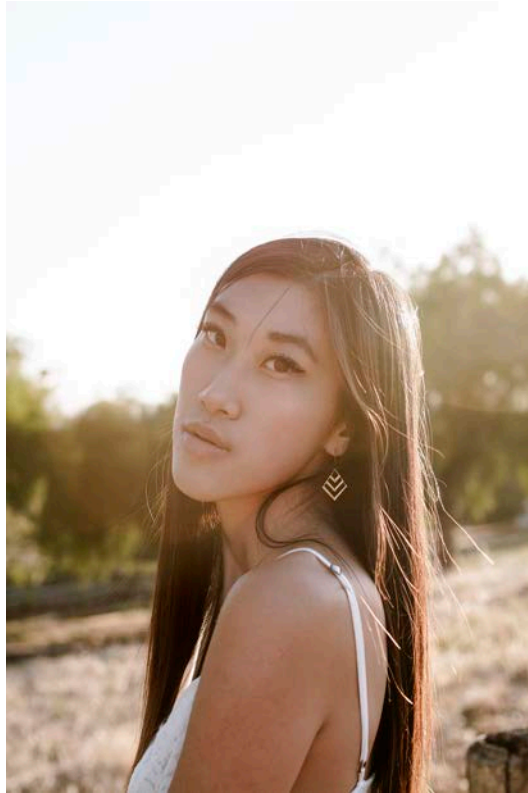
it took me a long time to realize
brown eyes are beautiful too

being poeta

a poem should be like a girl,
 plump and mature
 worn in and swollen
 i already have stretch marks
 and honesty yet
i am still not. a poem
 crawls the backs of
 stingrays who want to
 kill my father for all that
 he hasn't done. i am still
shadowed in the dawn
 like some kind of bird
 one with no wings, only body
 only carcass, i am only rain.
a poem should swallow itself
 no tooth is too rigid
 to gulp down like a shot
 in my mouth, a bullet wound baby
speaks for itself.
 there are so many words in the
 English language
 there are so many words in the
 food i don't eat
 there are so many words in the
poems i cannot write
 they're locked in an empty jar
 on the eighth floor of my brain

you can find them between
_____ and _____ and
a poem should fill in the blanks, please.

a b o u t t h e a u t h o r



Isabelle Jia is a writer and student from San Francisco, CA. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Alexandria Quarterly*, *The Blueshift Journal*, *Rising Phoenix Review* and many more. Jia has been recognized as a California Arts Scholar, by the Walt Whitman National Poetry Foundation, Hollins University, and the Alliance for Young Artists & Writers. For more on her work, go to <http://isabellejia.weebly.com/>