

# Year of the Snake

*Allison Zhang*

My grandmother was born in the year of the snake.

She says memory is a skin you outgrow.

Whole villages lived inside her throat, roofs tiled in memory. She swallowed them when the soldiers came.

Some stories stay folded like dumplings. Because the spilling would be too bright.

At night she counts numbers in Mandarin: birth dates, death dates, numbers that mean safe passage. I write them down. Like learning radicals. As if stroke by stroke, I could rebuild the country she left behind.

She tells me sadness travels through blood. Quieter than breath. Faster than a red envelope slipped from hand to hand.

She says I was born with a shadow coiled under my ribs.

I think of snakes. How they leave behind the shape of what was living. A skin. Still shining.