

Crossed cultures

A child, I skipped alone
over cracks in concrete

not daring to look behind
not daring to fall. I was the
dark shadow

that moved
beneath my uniformed body
a shadow stamping its rhythm
on my skin

the threads
of my mother's tongue reaching out
to furl me in close embrace
her hot orchid breath

whispering
you are not one of them.
but I am! I cried, jumping higher,
running faster

but still
the shadow curled its wily
blossoms about my knees, my hands
my throat

and others
saw and shook my hand and welcomed me
to my own country and asked,
how does it feel
to be you?

And I lied
and said, *fine*, the words
like sandpaper on bare skin
and I said

*fine, kia ora,
no worries, yeah, giddy mate*
and they told me my English
was amazing.

So I took
my shadow home with me. I stood
so the shadow
was smaller. I opened my eyes,
stared directly at the sun.

I wanted to be blind
so at last I'd fit in.

Renee Liang

RENEE LIANG is a consultant paediatrician, poet, short-story writer, and playwright. As well as her medical degrees and specialist qualification as a Fellow of the Royal Australasian College of Physicians, Renee holds a Master of Creative Writing from the University of Auckland, and has recently graduated with a Postgraduate Diploma in Drama Studies.