

**Chuah Guat Eng**

*Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia*

**To my doctor from China**

Before you, I am deaf and dumb.  
A Chinese woman with a Chinese name  
who speaks no Chinese.  
Speaking through the translators  
you hardly looked at me.  
But you didn't turn me away  
and I was grateful.

The first time you spoke to me directly  
you spoke in Chinese and I braced myself  
for a rebuke: What kind of Chinese am I  
Who knows no Chinese? But no.  
In the sadness in your eyes  
as you pointed to your stomach and head  
I sensed a different, gentler rebuke:  
For too long I've identified myself with my brain  
and treated my body as a slave.  
As an enemy when it gives me pain.

It is a rebuke as old as humanity, based  
on an understanding older than concepts  
of race and nations,  
coeval with sound but  
older than words -  
older than language itself.  
It stirs to a dim awakening  
inner senses I never knew I had.

Now as I drink your medicinal tea  
each morning and night, I am aware.  
This is a unique brew - from leaves and roots  
and berries and bark  
carefully, thoughtfully, knowingly selected  
from unknowable millennia of recorded experience  
residing in you -  
A brew for me and me alone.

Now as I tend to my physical needs and urges,  
I'm learning the language of my body.  
I understand at last that pains and disorders  
are not to punish or undermine me  
but desperate cries for help  
from me to me.

On the day you declared me healed  
you made me the most precious gift of all.  
You told me the meaning of my name  
And gave me another way to see myself.

Today I know I am no hero  
destined to dissolve the sorrows of my world.  
Today I know I am of the flower but not a flower  
I am only a petal  
destined to be  
and then  
not be.