

Exchange

By Wendy French

for Poom

Too much food prepared and after a long haul from the Far East
you can't eat all this western produce, most of it from the allotment.
You bring some special dried fish, blessed in a Buddhist Temple
for the old cat on its ninth life. And while we're eating or picking
at chicken on our plates you talk of *Stevens Johnson syndrome*.
I've never heard of it but Will with his medical background is horrified.

Later I look it up on a site for health professionals and click for the photographs
ignoring the *this might shock you* sign and then I'm gasping at pictures of burns
covering mouths or whole bodies. The child dies before he's eight and the old man
never recovers to go out again. Infection or reaction to medication can cause this syndrome.
But now here is this beautiful girl without a blemish on her body trying to eat Western food.
You've never heard of gooseberries but you survived a syndrome I now dream about.

Wendy French is a poet, whose latest collection of poems is *Thinks Itself A Hawk* (Hippocrates, 2016). Her collaboration with Jane Kirwan resulted in the book *Born in the NHS* (Hippocrates, 2013). She won the Hippocrates Poetry and Medicine prize for the NHS section in 2010 and was awarded second prize in 2011. She has worked for the past twenty years in healthcare settings. She was Poet in Residence at the UCH Macmillan Centre from April 2015-2016 and this year will be working with patients/caregivers on writing memoirs. She is one of six poets invited to Bucharest to work with MA students on translations of their novels into English. She currently is writing poems to celebrate Waterloo Bridge.
