

Mrs. Messing's Feet (Housekeeper's notes)

EMILY MILLIKEN

The high heels of her
secretary days
made her ankles what
they are at eighty-seven:
like knees fallen to where
ankles should be, bloated, wider
than her calves, begging
needle-puncture to release
pressure. She walks cautious:
a circus elephant on a ball.

Her post-divorce walking
(He got the car, I got the kids)
made her feet the shape they
are at eighty-seven: toes
twisted at angles, joints
stuck in a caricature of feet
that must be negotiated
into her black leather Rockports.

Hours standing graveside through seasons
made the skin on her feet the
colour it is at eighty-seven:
royal blood blue, cold on the eyes, matrix
of veins under a pale sheath of skin, flaking: white flesh petals
shed in her slippers, in her bed, around her room.

I look away when Mrs. Messing takes her slippers off,
hold my breath and shake the sheets when I change her bed,
wonder what this life will do to mine.