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poem

Peripheral Neuropathy

Johanna Emeney

is, at least, an elegant, ladylike affliction,
 advancing, as the medical books will tell you,
 in a 'stocking and glove' formation, and although
 the burning's a bit much in summer, by winter
 toes are colder and numb – more numb,
 not more numerous. Ambiguity is odious,

never mind the threat of slurred words in a year or two,
 myclonic jerks that shake or nod the head, raise an arm,
 making you a dunce without an answer, not to mention
 'steppage gait' with each flapping foot snapped forward
 under a high knee and planted flat – a bit like Basil Fawlty
 but not as funny.

You may ask yourself what you've done to deserve nerves
 that die back, shrivelling like wicks that fell into wax
 or dud fuses at Guy Fawkes', disappointing the kids,
 but whether you're diabetic, alcoholic or just plain
 idiopathic, the fact remains you've got these new
 accessories for life, no matter how clean-living you are

in retrospect. Your tee-total, low-glucose, gluten-free
 diet will only make you look trimmer in your small fibre
 stockings and gloves – accoutrements that now come
 in two striking colours: hyperaemic red and cyanotic blue,
 hues changing with the seasons and, sometimes, with the hours.
 Usually, when it least suits you.

Johanna Emeney lives and works in New Zealand. Her first collection of poems, 'Apple & Tree', has been published by Cape Catley. This poem is from *The Hippocrates Prize 2011*, published by The Hippocrates Prize in association with Top Edge Press. © Johanna Emeney.

Chosen by Femi Oyeboode.

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