

Quiet

by Katie Arnt

He held out his hands to show me his liver spots.
*I'm becoming a black person, one square centimeter
at a time, he said. In two years I will be able to dance.*
I told him that maybe wasn't quite appropriate and he said
Why be appropriate? I'm old.

Calm your foot down, he said.
I told him that when I enjoy what I'm reading –
Hemingway at the time –
that I jiggle. He stopped my foot, and I couldn't read anymore,

so I told him a story about the time I saw a hobo
sleeping on a department store window sill, and how
in the window display there was a bedroom set
with an enormous bed covered in dozens of pillows
and wasn't that terribly awful? He told me that was an
interesting story and wouldn't I tell it again sometime because
he'd probably forget it.

His beard trimmings would bung up the sink,
hundreds of white stubs gumming up the pipes.
Gross, Grandpa, I'd say. *You think that's bad?*
You should see my big toe. It has no nail.
He told me he was coming apart, one little
piece at a time. I told him he was becoming
more gross, one little unwanted detail
at a time. *Captain Too-Much-Information, I said,*
That's what they should call you.

I will never unchoke
those pipes or move that pile of yellow-crusteds socks,
or spray that couch that smells of pipe tobacco, canned soup,
and feet.

The piles of junk and bunk and rubbish and stink
absorb the sound of one solitary pair of feet.

And God, it is so quiet in here these days.