Cleaning Up After Lonely Dead

TEXT BY: Fifield, Anna. “Making a living cleaning up after ‘lonely dead.’” *The Washington Post*, January 25, 2018.

brown stain on the futon

the body

sweltering heat

a shrivel

as winter approached

cleaning up after “lonely deaths”

none … quite like Japan

54 year-old

behind on his rent

four months

the tenant … the body

the smell

not enough to bother neighbours or

the convenience store

below

the futon

brown residue and maggots

vacuum packed

carted off

noodle bowls

cans of coffee

cigarette butts

ashtrays … lighters

newspapers … clothes

disheveled piles

bills … papers …

a dustpan

mould

the walls … the basin … the toilet … everything

Paperwork

divorced … systems engineer

contract positions … no benefits … welfare

passport photos … grey hair parted

wire-frame glasses … checked shirt

prescription medicines

mailboxes fill up

three-generation households … fewer

family … fallen apart

pride … unwillingness to ask

widowed … divorced … unmarried … isolated

careers … not … children … no ties

scrubbed and disinfected

top to bottom

then they were done

as

if

Hiroaki

had

never

existed.