

Housecall
by Eric Cecil

As he lounges on the slab of his couch, he is losing. Time knuckles his body. Pills knot his mind. His joints swell in their sockets, and he rages against them, twisting in ways that he was never meant to. Not even in youth. His has left him. His women. The apartment is next. Its floor staggers from the couch, cantering toward the entryway. I linger in the alcove and study the curious designs of rot that mar a nearby wall. The patterns resemble lightning the color of coffee. I imagine us, then, weathering a great storm: my left arm winging at my side, his wrist dangling in the eave of my elbow, the two of us shouldering into the wind. It lashes leaves against our ankles and wrists. The lightning forks in the key of dirt, pulses the sky.

He catches me staring at the wall and apologizes. It's a mess, he says. No, I tell him, it's fine. He blinks and raises a clubbed hand to a room deeper in the apartment. They're in there if you want to have a look. I smile and say, That's why I'm here. He asks me to repeat myself. The phrase sounds harsh in its echo. Shrewd. I don't know how to soften it.

Don't know how to navigate this man's home. I am stuck in years of his ruin. I am wandering through his kitchen: over the floor missing tiles, past the faucet beading and shivering behind boxes of drain cleaner, pancake mix, large bottles of wine that buoy cigarettes spent like some kind of larvae. Like some kind of life. I am living it now. I am living his life as I enter a bedroom powdered with more dust than I have ever seen. He will soon become it.

A phone rings, its bell trilling twice before he answers. Yes, he says. There's a pause, an exclamation: I told you never to fucking call me again. I don't care how much. No. Never again. Something slams, flutters: a book, a magazine. Pages shuffle and clap. Maybe, I think, he will become the words on those pages. Maybe he is already. The phone rings again. I imagine myself calling: I am here in your home. I am buying your past. I am breathing your dust. He lets it ring.