Ash on the Rim

Inés lit the incense and shut the bedroom door. She had ten minutes before she had to leave. She'd set an alarm so she would have time to make the bed and sweep the hall.

She sat on the edge of the bed. The smoke rose straight to the height of the doorknob, then curled toward her. She tried holding the door ajar with her foot. A draft from the hallway made the smoke turn the other way.

The alarm went off just as the ash was about to fall. Inés waited for it to drop. It landed on the rim of the plate. She opened the door a little wider and heard her neighbor slowly climbing the stairs.

When she stepped outside, she found her resting on the landing. Inés stayed beside her for a moment. She still had the broom in her hand.