

After Dinner/Ice Melts/A Sage in the Copse

by Kari Nguyen

AFTER DINNER

Another cycle gone, wasted. She stares into her bowl of full-fat ice cream (just half a cup a day, every day, for fertility). Beside her sits her husband, building a sundae. When he's done she reaches over, picks the cherry off the top, and hurls it into the sink.

ICE MELTS

She broke into a million pieces — shattered — in front of the cat. He later stepped over her on his way to the litter box, still fresh from that morning's changing. *It happened between three and five*, they said when they arrived, officers in badges and detectives in ties.

Barefoot, and careful, she'd taken small steps. *White linoleum in a dark room*, her final thought. Ice melts and leaves a small puddle, the only sign it ever was. A still moment can pass many hours.

The cat looks on from a distant corner, tail twitching. He knows two things. Her name was Bess, and there was no one left to scoop.

A SAGE IN THE COPSE

"Change it!" The young man screams it into the night. Owls hear him, and rise higher.

"Can't you see?" He falls to his knees in dark earth. Stains unseen, but there.

The old man listens, up the knoll and through the trees. He sits outside his house, a makeshift, ramshackle arrangement of boards and branches, tied by rope to a tree trunk, and covered in blue tarp. He crosses himself, and shouts back.

"You idiot!" He is giggling now, to himself.

The young man raises his head, sees trees swaying, their outlines confused with the sky. The wind brings a voice, and dim echoes.

Tiptoeing away, the old man lights his step with a glow stick from last weekend's carnival. He can't help but smile.

