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Spitting Embers

by Janet Calderon

The mother, smile strained, tried to balance her daughter and son on each hip. They swayed. The children were her music, often loud enough to drown the TICK TICK TICK that sounded in her head. Sometimes their melodies weren't enough. Certainly never loud enough once the father arrived home from work. The embers that flew out of his mouth always caught her fine paper instruments and set them ablaze. The guitar behind her ear, the piano sitting atop her head or the drums nestled against her neck- all charred to ashes. Instruments gone, the TICK TICK knocked too hard against the inside of her skull. It cracked the mother's jaw open to allow her own sparks to spill out, too. Whenever this occurred the children would hurry into the nearest dark closet. The room had become too bright for their eyes. Often, it was the father whom would take them out again. Stretched their lips over tiny teeth as they bounced upon his round hill or were thrust into the air above his clouds. But music and clouds cannot forever forestall the coming flames. Embers and sparks huddled together in the living room, relatives joining them now and again. Over the years, the parents stoked a fire that eventually flickered too quick out of their mouths, their ears, their eyes, their fists. Their daughter and son could no longer hide in the dark. No longer did there exist any shelter. One last grand fire took their home, their parents, and burnt them altogether.