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Burning Crosses

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Burning Crosses
By: Laurie Reiche

Every time I’ve hung a crucifix around my neck it burned. No matter what size or style the cool gold metal sizzled. The first time was at seventeen, a going-steady gift from Russell, a commitment even though my being Jewish made him squeamish.

A delicate gold cross from Sears, it had a speck of a diamond in the center, a tiny fragment like chipped mica or bone. He was doing me a favor, protecting me as a garland of garlic would to keep demons away. His fingers grazed my neck and as he locked the clasp, I think he was relieved I didn't shriek.

I couldn't tell him that it burned or that I'd have to hide it from my father. Thirteen years later as defiance in the face of that father's death, I bought my own cross-choker--- the singe against my skin felt good. But then one day in a store, I spied a thin chain around a woman's neck, it lay flat against her linen-white collar bone, and I was scared— I can’t say why. When I let my eyes glide to where her pendant lay, it glowed and stung like a bite from the sun, it blinded me:

a Cross in many pieces,
the Star of David burning, too.