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For Bosnia

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For Bosnia

By Mimi Mendes de Leon

The grey cloud came first. It was sudden, just as she was bending over, her long braid falling over her shoulder. The cloud blossomed out of the cobblestones, starting small, the size of a wheel, and spreading across the storefront. The thick smoke choked our small main street, blocking from our view the grimy 'Closed' signs that had been hanging in the doors.

The store windows would not be covered in dust anymore. Shards of glass flew in and out of the grey, their jagged edges spinning and spinning. Smaller flecks glittered amidst the cloud, highlighted by the flames that grew behind it. They caught the light of the fire just as the water had sparkled in the bowl she had brought out for the dog. The blue ceramic fragments of the bowl had been split too small to be seen, but her red speckled flesh dotted the explosion. The bits of her charged toward us, mixed in with the mangled fur of the dog and the pebbles from the street. Her body did not arch gracefully in the air, as we had seen in the films. There was no frantic leap out of the flames, no dive forward toward safety—just traces of our friend rolling along the cloud's mushrooming surface.

The rumble that came with the flames and shrieks lifted us up and left us there, in the air, to fend for ourselves. The noise hit our ears like the grumbles of our stomachs after the soldiers came. It was the same sound our fathers made when we were late hiding in the woods; the same sound her dog had made as it limped after a rat; the same sound that sent waves straight into our chests and refused to leave.

But, it was the sole of her shoe that we remember. The sole of her pretty brown sandal, which we all had envied, came floating down off the mushroom and bounced off the cobblestones toward our place in the woods. The same rubber that, moments before, had supported her small frame as she bent forward to give the dog water. It came to a halt, just there past the forest line, within reach. The black rubber still bubbled with bits of leather. The imprint of her foot on the sole headed toward the growing flames.