

Dragonfly

by Sarah Black

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She danced out of the burning rubble, wrapped in a shawl made of iridescent silk. It must have been her grandmother's. Her arms were wings, the silk translucent and fluttering. Fire fell from the sky. Thatched roofs, walls of mud-daubed sticks, the huts burned like paper, sending sparks spinning into the trees. He snatched her up, brushed burning from her wings, and she clung to him, skinny legs wrapped around his waist, her tiny head burrowing into his shoulder.

The others stared at him, weapons resting lightly in their hands. He shook his head and they turned away, studied the scene, the line of bodies tumbled over each other in the ditch.

He would explain it all to her one day, how the screaming just went on and on until he felt like his head was going to explode. How long had it been since they'd slept- Sticky yellow dust and cordite burning their throats. They only wanted water. Why couldn't the women have come out with some water- Nobody had come here looking for a fight, that's what he would explain to her, but you can't raise a stick and run screaming at a man holding an automatic weapon, not when that man hadn't slept for days.

He would take her back to a land with soft green grass and lakes so blue and still and cold they made your heart ache, and in the summer she could swim in the shallows, dart here and there with her little wings, and he would watch over her and keep her safe for all her days. That's what he would do.

