

Stories of Stuff

A Close Shave

by P. T. McAllister

Story inspired by a razor exhibited at Liskeard Museum

I pinch his nose gently, lift and run the razor across his top lip. Watery mud drips from somewhere above onto his face, but none of us look up. Nobody takes their eyes off him.

'Did you nick him?' Dave says – almost whispers – over my shoulder. 'His mum wouldn't like that. Not like it's gunna heal now.'

'I didn't nick him,' I say. 'He's fine.' I pull the blade down his cheek. It glides over his pale skin, taking the thin layer of soap with it.

Far away, a shell explodes. We freeze, waiting for the order.

Nothing.

Hurried footsteps slop past us on their way through the trench to the officers who decide our fate.

'You think his mother's gunna see his body anyway?' John says. He pulls tobacco from his pocket with shaking hands and lowers himself onto the wet mud. 'They don't send our bodies home, ya eejit. Just stack us up and bury us all in one go.'

'Alright, John.' I catch his eye before taking another swipe of the boy's cheek. I smear the suds on my trouser leg, lift his chin to look at him. He was so young, barely any hair growing on his face at all.

'Well, what are we doing this for then?' Dave asks.

Silence, as I stall – razor poised.

I take a breath. 'It's just proper, alright?'

Stories of Stuff is a community arts project discovering the stories inspired by treasured objects. It has been created by The Writers' Block.