



Stories of Stuff

Older than Dinosaurs
by Nell Turner
As told by Mark Gregory



With a spade bigger than his dreams, a little boy digs for gold.
'Billy! Potatoes!'

Sods fly quicker and then the spade stops with a clack. Buried treasure! A tiny metal boat with a hole where the mast should be! Muddy knees scamper home with spuds and sea bounty.

The tiny boat disappears beneath foamy suds later that night, too heavy to float. Billy's lip quivers but he still dreams of pirates.

After school, Billy goes to the canal to draw dragonflies. He likes the blue ones with green throats. He hears the thunk thunk of hammers from the locks, docks and blacksmiths' forges.



Tipsy students wend their way home along a towpath. The dragonflies feign sleep of torpor; wobbly humans pose no threat to ruddy darters. On a barge, a young artist, who once dreamed of pirates, sticks a fresh candle into the hole of a boat-shaped piece of metal, singing, 'Locks, docks and forges.'



Billy meets his first love swimming in a flooded quarry on the moors. They dry off on hot slabs of granite with clouds of dragonflies dancing around them. 'They're older than dinosaurs, you know,' she murmurs. The lovestruck art teacher stares at her, enthralled. His head swims with glinting emerald and teal dragonflies and, as he watches children trying to float matchstick boats, he can almost hear the thunk of ancient hammers in the mines below...

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Billy suddenly leaps up. His tiny metal boat! His perfect candle holder!

'Thank you,' he cries, blowing a kiss at his muse.



It still smells of old potatoes and melting wax.

'I'm sorry.'

'No need, Billy,' it says, 'just make me whole again.'

Wood greets metal. Hammer head and handle become one and their world fires up. Clouds of dragonflies are sculpted. Wings are planished and tails forged. Blue dashers, brilliant emeralds, yellow-winged darters and four-spotted chasers fly on the wing over canals and quarries, moorlands and streams. Hammer and anvil: forever forged.



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