

## A fresh start

### Elizabeth and Caroline Shove

Mr Jewell made his way through the long grass to the little pond. It was a short walk and one that he'd taken almost every morning for the past nineteen years. He sat on the rickety wooden bench and gazed at the reeds. It was his last day at the museum and tomorrow he would make a fresh start. Retirement beckoned.

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I live under water, that's my realm. I eat everything. That's my habit. I still don't know what compelled me to make my way up the vertical face of a green stalk. I broke through the surface of the water and for the first time experienced fresh air. To my amazement, the little holes in my thorax opened up. I didn't need my gills anymore. I climbed higher and higher. Wow! I felt a bit giddy. The surface of the pond glinted below.

The stalk swayed. I tried to turn round but my exoskeleton just would not move. Had I rusted up? What was going on? It was then that I heard a loud crack. It was me. My back! My armour split from top to bottom. I have never been so scared in all my life. I clung on desperately. But then I began to think. I had to get out. It would be terrible to be eaten alive, half naked and helpless.

I could feel my legs now, and I leaned back. Yes! They moved. I leaned back further. My front legs pulled out of my rock-hard socks. Well, this was something. There was no going back. I couldn't think how I'd extricate my tail, but I'd have to work that out. I arched back and back, and my casing ripped apart. I was now upside down and on show to any passing bird. I flipped upright and gripped what used to be my head. From this position I could ease my tail out of its socket.

That was it. Phew. I'd survived. I should have headed for the safety of my pond, but somehow that didn't seem right. I quite enjoyed the view, so I decided to stay for a while. Just as well I did. It's hard to describe what happened next. I felt a pleasant tingling along my body. That must be my new skeleton hardening, but something odd was going on behind my back.

I glanced around and there were some huge damp flaps. I twitched and they wiggled. They were definitely connected. I couldn't go back to the water with these things, they'd pull me down and I'd drown. Not for the first time I wondered what I was supposed to do.

The flaps began to spread out. I counted. Four. As if that wasn't enough it turned out that I'd emerged a brilliant turquoise blue from my mud brown casing. It was then that I spotted something swooping about above the pond, not on a reed, but quite on its own, unaided other than by two pairs of fully extended wings. So that's what they are, I figured. OK. But how do I start.

The more I thought about it the more complicated it seemed: how many gears did I have, how did I take off, hover and land? After a while, I just let go and that was it. I was airborne. I was a majestic creature of the skies. I was thrilled.

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Mr Jewell had seen it all before. He had studied the inhabitants of the pond for many years and had watched generations of dragonfly larvae hatch and fly. He'd always been enthralled, but until now he'd never really appreciated the awesome scale of the transformation. From water to air, from ugly

monster to iridescent acrobat. From working life to retirement: his own life cycle also had a momentum of its own. If a dragonfly could adjust to its new environment then so could he.