

A poem about a dragonfly nymph
and how it transforms into an adult dragonfly

The Dragonfly

1 There was once a terrible monster
 lived in a pond, deep under the water.

2 Brown as mud he was, in the mud he hid,
 among murk of reed-roots, sodden twigs,
 with his long hungry belly,
 six legs for creeping,
 eyes like headlights
 awake or sleeping;
 but he was not big.

3 A tiddler came to sneer and jeer
 and flaunt his flashing tail –
 Ugly old stick-in-the-mud
 couldn't catch a snail!
 I'm not scared –
 when, like a shot,
 two pincers nab him, and he's got!

4 For the monster's jaw hides a clawed stalk
 like the arm of a robot, a dinner fork,
 that's tucked away cunningly till the last minute –
 shoots out – and back with a victim in it!

5 Days, weeks, months, two years and beyond,
 fear of the monster beset the pond;
 he lurked, grabbed, grappled, gobbled and grew,
 ambushing always somewhere new –

6 *Who saw him last? Does anyone know?*
 Don't go near the mud! But I must go!
 Keep well away from the rushes! But how?
 Has anyone seen my brother? Not for a week now –
 he's been eaten
 for certain!

7 And then, one day, it was June, they all saw him.
 He was coming slowly up out of the mud,
 they stopped swimming. No one dared
 approach, attack. They kept back.

8 Up a tall reed they saw him climbing
 higher and higher, until
 he broke the surface, climbing still.

9 There he stopped, in the wind and the setting sun.
 We're safe at last! they cried. *He's gone!*
 What became of the monster, was he ill, was he sad?
 Was nobody sorry? Had he crept off to die? Was he mad?

10 Not one of them saw how, suddenly,
 as if an invisible knife had touched his back,
 he has split, split completely –
 his head split like a lid!
 The cage is open. Slowly he comes through,
 an emperor, with great eyes burning blue.

11 He rests there, veils of silver a cloak for him.
 Night and the little stars travel the black pond,
 and now, first light of the day,
 his shining cloak wide wings, a flash, a whirr,
 a jewelled helicopter,
 he's away!

12 O fully he had served his time,
 shunned and unlovely in the drab slime,
 for freedom at the end – for the sky –
 dazzling hunter, Dragonfly!

Libby Houston

