

***ARTHUR'S SEAT***

**By Mark Cornell**

Mervyn points to the top of a faraway purple mountain. He reckons there's a footprint in stone that's been there since the dawn of time. If your foot's the same size as the one in the stone, you'll become king. We jump on our pushbikes and cycle out of the suburbs. The old highway hugs the shoulders of the foothills. Dusty city disappears behind the massive trunks of mountain ashes. Our bikes whirr, my beating heart threatened to explode. Man ferns lean over the road to block out the sun. Sweet fragrance of eucalyptus flows into our heaving teenage lungs. Hear the distant ring of the lyre bird. We zig zag. Mervyn knows all the safe spots so we won't get hit by Sunday drivers. We step off our bikes then enter a brown track which snakes through the mountains forever.

Native grass brushes my ankles. We watch bull ants carry away the carcasses of their fellow workers. Mervyn tells me they carry their dead and toss them into a creek nearby. He shows me the face tree, a giant mountain ash whose base is covered in nodes of faces. He points to the possum face, the hippo face, the screaming monkey face and my favourite the steaming dragon face. We arrive in a green plateau dominated by a cathedral of rocks. Mervyn reckons the creek water here's the colour of blood. Some claim that when they come back to their parked cars, they're been moved further the mountain from where they originally left. I get a sick feeling in my guts.

My family told me not to trust Mervyn, he lives in a tin shack in the scrub with his frizzy grey-haired mother who's always hunched over a cooking pot muttering to herself. Poor old Mervyn comes to school, stinking to high heaven, in a school uniform full of holes. His bedraggled red hair brushes over his bony shoulders. He has the beginnings of a beard, and wild look in his pale blue eyes. Some people reckon he went bush after his father vanished. They found him half naked howling like a dingo. They reckon he was put in a looney bin and given the electric treatment. Poor bugger ! But we are both outsiders. When I collapse in a paddock covered in blood and tears after getting the daylight beaten out of me by the bullies, Mervyn jumped off his father's old red World War 2 bike and tries to help me.

We lean our bikes against the bush grass and climb up the grey track weaving through huge boulders who guard the crest of Mt. Dunadd. We see the blue waters of the two bays, the pale dome of sky above us is full of screeching cockatoos. Distant buildings of our city

stand like yellow blocks of Lego. Brown dirt clouds of our home town give way to the green foothills who stretched all the way to the base of our mountain. Mervyn points to a pair of eagles circling the invisible thermals of nearby cliff. It's close to midday when we stagger up to the summit. Drizzle keeps everyone away. My strange friend pulls a sword shaped branch from a mountain crack and hands it over to me.

He stomps onto the footprint to empty of it of rain, then tells me his massive feet are too big but reckons mine should be the perfect fit. I wear size 9 runners. Mt foot slots in ! Under Mervyn's instructions I raise the branch and pierce the sky. I am the King of the Mountain. Gum trees bow as the north wind howls up through the foothills to almost blow us off the rock. A fingernail moon disappears into the blue eucalyptus haze of the forest below. A butcher bird protests in the shadows somewhere against the fierceness of the change. The desert wind prunes dead branches then tosses them over us we struggled down the mountain. We whoop and laugh at the approach of the mountainous grey clouds. Sun transforms into a red flare to guide us all the way back to our homes.

Hate Sunday nights...can't sleep. Bullies pick on the lovers of life. They wait every lunchtime behind the shelter sheds. There's little a parental figure will do. Listen to the radio, dance in the stone circles of your dreams. Recall the beaming faces, shining eyes, bare feet, the gold haired Queen, her flowing red gown and crescent moon smile. Remember the flower scent of her breath as she kisses then sways her limbs to the otherworldly music. Love the way her brown eyes glaze as she cries up to the milk spray stars of summer love.

Wayne and I are surrounded by the baying and spitting heathens. There's a shudder then pain as a knuckle crashes into my cheek. Wayne cries as blood splatters onto his round cracked glasses. A black walnut bruise hangs from my face. My head rings as I pummelled by the scumbags. Wayne collapses into foetal position onto the asphalt. He's so pale and tiny, squeaky voice, pudding bowl haircut, smashed national health glasses, long grey knickerbockers, straight off the boat from Britain. Sexton the chief bully, straddles Wayne's chest, sinks his knees on my mate's crucified arms and bellows to him to give up. Wayne's face is the colour of beetroot. Mervyn appears from nowhere and shouts for me to get back onto my feet. I hear a cracking sound as my fist lands just below Sexton's eye. Stunned he slides off my mate's twig like body. Mervyn picks me up by the arms and swings my body in circles around him. As the sun turns to scarlet the barbarians are kicked back into the sea.

Mother tends my wounds, I recall her aurora white curtains swaying above the night sky.  
She returns to the clouds taking my outstretched hands with her.

**Bio**

**Mark** is of Irish ancestry. As a child he grew up listening to stories; either in the form of tall tales told by his extended family or the lyrics of his favorite songs on the radio. He started writing poetry when he was seventeen. He has traveled to Ireland twice and during one of these visits was married to Kimberly in a Registry Office in Dublin. Mark has been writing Short Stories and Novels for a number of years. He took family leave for three years to look after his son Thomas. He now works as a Conciliator with Consumer Affairs.

EPISTEME