

weakest. Boofa's Mum adored her like she adored all of God's gentle creatures. The Cleary's garage was full of finches which they bred but didn't have the nous to sell off. Connor's sister Rowena was friends with Kathleen Cleary for a while, but they then had a bad fall out. When Connor's Mum and Rowena went over the road to front Boofa's Mum, Lex, and Kathleen about it, Kathleen stuck out her tongue behind her mother's back. Lex Cleary was a tall horse of a woman, with dark frizzy hair and dark skin. Charlie Leary was a stubby little fella who drove a truckload of vegetables at four o'clock in the morning to the Vic Market every day, except Sunday. Charlie and Lex were big smokers; they had a tea plate of water on the dinner table to throw their cigarette butts into. All the adults of Jordanville seemed to be smokers back then. Connor remembers some of his teacher's smoking in class, one old teacher used to puff away on a pipe. Charlie and Lex were also partial to stout and laughed a lot. Connor enjoyed their company, and besides Mr. Cleary used to make mean banana fritters. Sometimes Lex used to drag Connor down onto the nature strip and smother the boy in kisses.

The Back Paddock dwelt behind the Leary's back fence. Everytime the boys got the chance they explored to what seemed to their little boy eyes was a vast wilderness. The Back Paddock was where the neighbourhood gathered every Guy Fawkes Night to make huge bonfires. The crowd cheered when they threw the effigy of Guy on top, made of rags, he reminded Connor of a mummy. Unfortunately some people used the paddock as a dump too. Connor never forgot the pink rotting flesh of a litter of newly born murdered kittens. Sometimes the grass was long and Boofa and Connor played like they were in the jungles of the Amazon and pretended to kill each other with poison darts. They'd play Cowboys and Indians with the local kids. Boofa used to love being an Indian warrior and scalping the six shooting Marshall Connor. One Christmas Connor was given a black machine gun as a present at his Dad's work party. He pretended he was a digger killing the Japanese in New Guinea, while Boofa in his plastic US Marine hat threw plastic grenades at the enemy. After watching a movie about Our Lady of Fatima, Rowena and Julie Cleary sat in their deck chairs in the middle of the Back Paddock awaiting the arrival of Mother Mary. Boofa and Connor lay on their backs to watch the sun stream through the golden

clouds. Connor was amazed when Margaret told her son he'd just seen the face of god. But despite this revelation, he thought didn't like this god who watched everything you did.

When they were building a gymnasium in the back paddock, Margaret gave a direct order to Connor not to go there while the work was being done. The boys stood on Boofa's back fence and watched the bulldozers and diggers plow up the land to make pyramids of dirt. After the workmen packed up and left, the pyramids beckoned. Connor and Boofa jumped over the fence. Boofa laid on one side of the pyramid, Connor the other, and the boys dug tunnels and laughed when their hands linked up. Trouble was their laughter attracted Rowena and Julie. They shook their yellow ribbon heads as they saw the boys dig along the row of pyramids.

When a dirty Connor ran into the driveway his sister was waiting for him below the willow tree. She was armed with his black machine gun with which she proceeded to hit him over the head with and order him to lay down on the front lawn and wait for Margaret. It felt like an eternity until his mother came home. Her blue eyes flared and forehead reddened when Rowena told her the news. Connor was ordered inside and given a sound thrashing by his banshee-like mother. Nothing happened to Boofa, one of the Cleary's favourite sayings was, "You can't wrap kids up in cotton wool." About a fortnight later

Charlie and Lex laughed as they watched Boofa and Connor ridestunt like on their bikes up and down the pyramids of the Back Paddock chanting, " Hail Mary full of grease, the lard is with thee!"

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.

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