

MURRAY

By Mark Cornell

I like to float on my back in the river and stare right into the sun. There are all sorts of suns you know. There's the oven sun, hogging the yellow sky. There's the dragon sun, puffing out giant brown heads of smoke. Then there's the ghost sun, drifting behind sad, grey clouds.

I can feel the earth flying through space when I'm on my back. It soars like a stone flicked from a huge slingshot. I see beelines, when I half close my eyes. My river's full of beelines. They hang down from the tops of the trees like big steel cobwebs.

Dragonflies use my belly as a helicopter pad. Sometimes when I'm hungry, I keep my eyes above the surface and suck in water from the fresh river. I let the dragonflies fly in circles around me, then spit them out of the sky and eat them. They sort of taste like crunchy peanut butter.

When I was little I carved my neck with blade marks to make gills. It didn't work though, my neck stung when I stuck it into the water and tried to breathe through my red gills. I sank like a rock to the bottom of the water. I love it deep down; there's no sunlight, no noise, and no people with their silly talk. I hate the gasbags who keep saying they feel sorry for me because I couldn't breathe when I was born.

I know how to hold my breath forever, so I can explore the dark caves water and wrestle with the slimy, swaying reeds. I meet my best friends in the riverbed in summer. They sink down from the top of the river like golden blobs of sunlight. They've got long yellow hair. They have tea parties at midday, to celebrate the cool currents coming down from the mountains. My friends make flutes and drumsticks from bones that lie at the

bottom of the river. I love to dance and sway to their music! They play songs that sort of sound like watery church bells. Sometimes a giant Cod floats by to brush my hair. When I come back home, I know I've been away forever because Mum's gown more wrinkles.

I like to put hooks on the end of a rope and tug at them with my mouth. One day, a rude old fisherman sprung me and asked me what I was doing completely starkers in the river, with a hook in my mouth and tugging away at a rope? I said I wanted to know what it felt like to be a fish when it was caught at the end of a line.

I like to lie at the side of the river, flap my arms, do somersaults and see what it felt like to drown in oxygen. I float up to the sky when I'm dying. I can see the whole river. It looks like a white ribbon when it's born in the snowy mountains. It grows brown and fat when it meets the sea, like a belly of a snake that's eaten a calf. I turn silver when I float above the earth. No matter how high I fly, I'm safe, because I'm attached to the river by a long silver cord that comes out of my bellybutton.

I go to the local tip, get bits of clothes and junk, take them home and Mum helps me make dress up fish costumes. My Mum takes photos of me in different costumes. See look, there's me as a Rainbow Trout, a Redfin and an eel. My best picture is me posing as proud as punch with a big beaming smile. I've got my goggles on, and I'm puffing my cheeks out like a Murray Cod.

My dress ups are becoming more and more fancy. I can cover up every bit of my body now with my new skin. Mum's really good these days at making fins. I'm good at

ing huge fish mouths. I use everything from the tip, bits of old tyres, plastic rubbish bins, plastic milk bottles for floaters, old leather belts and rope to hold things together, vacuum cleaner pipes

for breathing, bottle top lids for scales, you name it and I'll use it. Mum with her head down, spends ages on the sewing machine. I sometimes hear her all night when I try to go to sleep.

Jesus I hate the magpies ! They dive-bomb me sometimes. They scare the daylight out of me, when they swoop and rip out bits of my body with their beaks and claws. Every chance I get, I slide up the gum trees and wreck their nests. I hate the way magpies shriek. Birds are the enemy you know!

My last costume was the best. Mum and I spent days on it. Mum made most of it out of rubber. I'd put on my costume, crawl up to the mirror, and then send it back to the sewing machine, until it fitted perfectly like a diving suit. Mum made fins that stuck out of the side of my new body. My legs squeezed into a big tail. I didn't have arms or legs anymore. Mum put a great big rubber fins on my back. I loved to lie on my tummy and watch it as I made it flap from one side of my body to the other. My new fish skin was all grey.

I spent forever in the river, bubbling along brown valleys, then zooming between rocks and logs with my new body. I ignored the stones tossed at me by the savage kids. I had more important things to do; I was hunting yabbies. Then I thought I heard thunder, but it was the loud laugh of one of the idiot kids as he heaved a huge rock right on top of my head. I didn't mind though, I felt like I was dreaming. I started to suck water through my gills. I felt so warm. I drifted towards the shades. I saw the whole river again. *So warm!* Everything gushed out of my head. I'd finally become a fish at last!

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 favourite 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.