

John Kinsella

VOICES FROM A REGION OF EXTRACTION

Miner

Old Tin Lizzie
was the first car
in Kookynie – the fella
owed me money and wanted me
to take it in payment,
the kids pestering
and me understanding
the most of all they wanted
to be the first kids in town,
for a little while at least.

I told them we couldn't
afford to run it...

Miner's Wife

From Perth to Woorooloo
the train wheezed and rasped,
clanked and jostled.

The sanitorium opened
on one side to allow
fresh air, protected
by no more than blinds
during storm weather,
which the men who couldn't
garden contemplated
opening and closing.

The chill morning air
would bite like razors
into their collapsing chests.
This was the open-air treatment.
The children, arms laden
with flowers grown in rich soil,
played at their feet,
and they harboured no bitterness.

Miner

Despite a dozen hotels
I would continue past all, straight
to the coffee palace with its wood
and whitewashed hessians walls.

I was happiest when working the Cosmopolitan,
it being in the middle of the town
and not much travelling.

And the war stripped the district
clean to the bone,
and the few mines left open
worked frantically.

Miner's Wife

I mean, he had to tell them himself
really, didn't he?

From Woorooloo to Perth
the train clanked and jostled,
wheezed and rasped
in tireless travel...

Miner

She tells me the eldest
is working as a seamstress
and can no longer visit
on weekends.

I get them to bring me
the newspapers...I read
year after year
of the continuing boom.

They came once, the photographers
from the newspaper – the city newspaper –
and had us all sitting there: bleached, dry,
though liquid faced.

Miner's Wife

And then I caught the boy
floating in the red creek
in an old rainwater tank,
though I left him to it,
it not having rained
for months.

And I said that if my church isn't good enough,
then I'll be damned if I'll go into hers.

And I left water
on the verandah
for the wanderers
of the desert
and respected
the spirits.

Miner

Once lost in the desert
it becomes the fullest memory.

Where those who weary
of their clothes
scream for cover
in the hours before sunrise.

The red desert,
where every particle
howls...

Afghans came in the end.
On camels...with their clocks,
boxes, and scented furniture.
They gave me water.
The town was almost dry.

Miner's Wife

His lips were blue.
I've barely room for this.
And to find a place for it
in this household of a brain
I've been left with after
years of shuffling our lives.
Ah, his feet so cold
his eyes glazed and receding,
his lips...cornflowers.