

JOHN KINSELLA

*The Sands of Dyarlgaroo*

*for Trevor Jamieson and Noel Nannup*

1. CONCEPTION

We don't like to ask, but I'd guess it was  
in the house bought for the purpose. Bateman  
Road, just up from Bateman's Farm—a colonising  
place. A bike-ride from the paperbarks, the thin white  
riverbeach, the grey jetties, seagulls cormorants pelicans.  
Sharks were seen that far up. Sharks in the *Canning*,  
as I first heard it named—in the womb, listening.  
Speedboats would come and introduce me to irony,  
the violence of the outdoors, waves wearing  
away at the river's walls. The city starting  
to close in around, the plentiful made sparse—  
river prawns netted at night, lights singing  
tanned waters, then gone. There were masses  
of blue manna crabs and mulloway and the river  
thronged with fertility. I was conceived  
with limestone foundations between flesh  
and black sand. Edging to grey, white  
by the river's edge lit up by the close moon.  
When the seed bit the egg and I cried out.  
The river's business. It's the river we ask.

2. BIRTH

I was born in the South Perth Hospital  
not far from where Dyarlgaroo and Derbal Yarrigan  
diverge. I was born where the rivers branch.  
I was taken home to the banks of the "tributary."  
The water flowed down from the hills, down from forests  
and farmlands. I was taken up to the watershed  
before I could talk or walk—early, it was my in-between  
place. As soon as I was old enough, I was carried  
up to the wheat. Up through jarrah into wandoo.

I went up from water and sand to stone and clay,  
up from pelicans and bream to parrots and echidnas.  
But I was born at the fork of those rivers, where black sand  
meets white sand, where blind snakes and sandgropers  
burrow their way and water rats range across meeting-places  
and bloodworms work the mud, the summer sun glinting.

### 3. UMBILICAL CORD

I imagine my cord was stolen not far  
from where the “Canning” and “Swan” rivers diverge, branch.  
Taken to the incinerator. My first cremation, my ash,  
my mother’s ash, floating high into the atmosphere  
then drifting down on riverfoam, on lawns  
of half-dead buffalo grass, on Bristle clay roofing tiles,  
on black sand, on yellow sand, on the white sand  
of riverbeaches edged by paperbarks with blisters  
ready to burst with watery sap, with goodness.

### 4. FIRST STEPS

I lifted and stepped quickly before falling  
a few blocks from Dyarlgaroo, a measure of houses  
where tracks had waded through banksias and marris,  
a short walk from where the river bends to continue up to the hills,  
a moment from where a spur leads off to a cul-de-sac,  
a semi-dead-end, where a creek feeds Dyarlgaroo through reeds.  
The snakes were there. That’s where they moor boats  
away from the weather and build houses to the water.  
Bamboo. Bateman’s Farm. The history it enforces.  
Up on my feet, I walked the Axminster carpet,  
then out onto lawn, then into the black sand  
which covered my steps. I observed  
the ant lion, and later the lacewing,  
plentiful about the river—down through banksias,  
marris, onto the white sand, into the salty water,  
onto the mud flats, the fresh creek water running over,  
mingling, diluting. The reeds hid clutches of duck eggs.

The sand hid me. I planned where I'd go. Where  
the sea water joined the hill's water, the creek water.  
Where salt and fresh waters meet. Where salt water  
would meet salt water when I was older.  
And I was sad for all that my birthing hid.