

Bird's Nest

Graham Akhurst

At Nundah cemetery
full of German graves
I walk past stringybark trees
filled with the sweet song of magpies.

I grew up close on York Street,
recall
loitering,
dark heat of summer evenings,
friends from school
I no longer talk to.

We drank goon and smoked cigarettes.
We toppled over foreign names.
We roughhoused,
collecting history
in our cut and grazed knees.

At the foot of the cemetery,
a small body of water
collects ash
falling from the sky
like European snow.

Gravel crunches
under thick boots,
chaffed and worn,
that have walked troubled country.

I amble and watch
flecks of ash
settling
on black water
through holes
in my gas mask.

The magpie's song
turns to warbled chokes
and mosquitos swell
from the darkness
knowing my closeness.

They hunt my skin.

Struck
by traces of light,
the ash rests lightly
on a broken place.

I gently toe the flakes into piles.

I wish
to make a man from ash.
I displace my mask and gloves.
I attempt to form
man from sky.

But ash is not
pliable like snow.

I cough and choke with magpies
and blood throbs.

I continue my work
earnestly.
Yet ash is not pliable
like white snow.

This is no grey man,
built up from the land,
rather,
I've moulded
the ashen pile of a bird's nest,
and slowly
slowly
the edges
peel
away
in the hot breeze.

I wipe my hands.
They are black
with ash and time.

In the swirling
of light and ash and chokes and buzzing
I am struck
by a deep wish
of assembly
with my friends and childhood.