

## Ambiguous Mirrors

Knowing only your earth-gripped body can accept this  
wreath of questions, I call the Cemetery Trust.

I clutch, for the first time, the date you died, a grid position.  
The gates are held open by sleepless weeds,

their shadows unseen, locked inside by the sun.  
It's hot. Removing another layer, I sift

the crunch of dry earth for sympathy in the sound,  
for some hint at how I'll feel when finally face-to-stone,

though I know every echo is open to interpretation.  
When I reach your section, I find

it barren, abandoned by flowers and rain.  
So many unmarked plots in this desert, no oasis.

The gardeners drive past, trailing boredom  
and dust. I walk the aisles until I become

just one more sigh in a crowd of upper-case names.  
Grief is not a hand but an absence –

it flies in the breeze echoing in the curves of my ears  
and reveals as much of what the grave knows

as the magpie eyeing me from its perch  
on another mute monument.

~

In the shadow of the Ring Road overpass,  
I wait at the bank of the trickling creek

for your image to appear, your arms  
to reach out and around me. Apart from death,

movement is the only constant. Ducks glide  
past rubbish – this is the consolation.

My thoughts balloon and pull my body along –  
I walk until my heels are raw,

yet you're no closer. You don't keep  
the appointments I make, you slip in

through fissures between thoughts that collapse  
as I catch myself in shop windows and see

your nose, your hairline, your spine –  
how it twists and pulls like a river after rain.

My dead father, the roaring trucks overhead  
couldn't care less, and the neck of the youngest

swan is strong enough to break a human arm  
or heart. Cyclists in lycra swoop

quietly past. I want the texture of feathers  
to speak to this skin, to calm and smother my fear

I will never be held. If you were still alive,  
we might have argued over the merits of cricket,

why I resigned from the public service,  
or whether what I like to listen to is music.

Here, the continual quiet speech of life  
floats through the air as seed. The sky breaks

with explosions of wings, the slow translations  
of clouds, ambiguous mirrors.

~

At last, thirty-three years since your hallucinations,  
heart failure, the hospital closing its arms around you,

Mum interrupts her busyness to talk with me.  
We both face dam beds cobwebbed with cracks,

cows craning through fences for rare green grass.  
Swollen clouds hang in the air – my questions,

her pauses. Words come in spots  
like soft nails of rain. The drought earth gasps,

but perhaps Mum was right – there isn't much  
she can tell me. Cockatoos screech

through yellow feathers to reach dripping trees.  
She shows me a photo, which carries the blur

and dust of any lens. Sense memories  
I've wanted so much erupt in my skull.

In a black suit and tie, salesman-like, you sit  
solid on the porch, cigarette scent on your breath.

My brother is wriggle-restless, ready for play.  
I rest on your lap, gazing away, my child-face

vague and adrift as if already swimming  
within this thirsty search for someone to join me

in this skin. Are you in here? Your big hands  
and slim fingers close around us like unsaid things.

You are looking into the camera, into her I guess.  
In this shot, I can't see the unnerving curve

of your back, but I know. You didn't talk about it,  
your body a vault that ran out of air. Later,

different times brushing against each other,  
a thunder in my head, I trace the lake slowly,

your voice over my shoulder, my bones resounding.  
Your mother was born in the century before last.

You just got on with it. Why can't I?  
A moorhen senses my feet crush the grass,

signs himself against the sky, trailing  
the long red legs he inherited.

## Ambiguous Mirrors

a poem by Andy Jackson

~

*published as '9/10/1973, M3'  
in 'Among the regulars' (papertiger media, 2010)*