

## Mametz Wood\* by Owen Sheers

For years afterwards the farmers found them -  
the wasted young, turning up under their plough blades  
as they tended the land back into itself.

A chit of bone, the china plate of a shoulder blade,  
the relic of a finger, the blown  
and broken bird's egg of a skull,

all mimicked now in flint, breaking blue in white  
across this field where they were told to walk, not run,  
towards the wood and its nesting machine guns.

And even now the earth stands sentinel,  
reaching back into itself for reminders of what happened  
like a wound working a foreign body to the surface of the skin.

This morning, twenty men buried in one long grave,  
a broken mosaic of bone linked arm in arm,  
their skeletons paused mid dance-macabre

in boots that outlasted them,  
their socketed heads tilted back at an angle  
and their jaws, those that have them, dropped open.

As if the notes they had sung  
have only now, with this unearthing,  
slipped from their absent tongues.

\*A battle ground during the first world war

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