

We walked back to the town. I pulled my hat down over my face and held it on with a hand on top, but even so the sun seemed to radiate up from the red earth and bore into my wrong-coloured skin. I thought of Len's freckled hands and Heather's pink-eyed paleness. What were we doing here? Everything about us was wrong. My dress was too short, my legs too long and pale, my ignorance too palpable.

In the letters I wrote back to my friends in Australia, I talked of our travels with manufactured vivacity. I joked about our disastrous visit to Len and Heather's, but I didn't mention the boy who had taken us up into the hills. There was no way to write about him that was funny or manageable, no way of pulling the words comfortably around myself. When we got back to Moresby Klara told everyone she was very disappointed in Lae. We'd hardly seen anything at all.



**Bill Cotter**

## ALL THAT REMAINS

Sap is a grey coalescence of fibre and pus, an obscenity oozing slowly down  
Its side. On the clear-cut top, wombat droppings  
Piled together like rotten fruit. Its crown  
Once held the sun in check and by  
Its leather base, light, dark, warm and cool could turn  
The brown earth green and jewels could sprout from moss and fern.

Where canes of blackberries, rusty as chain mail,  
Now crept and the eager, brown backed ants come bristling  
In lines, its raw-boned branches once confronted wind and hail  
And it rode across the aeons, uncomplaining.  
But now, of the tree, little remains,

Just this stump on its patch of tight-lipped earth and those condemning stains.

