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Overland

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Overland *by Paula Jones*

From the coastal flats
the men scour the scarp
lying like the granite spine
of an ancient, sleeping creature.
Under the hot and heavy sun
they trudge upwards, onwards
as the hard-shouldered hills
push them back.

They come to hunt
the towering timbers
of Swan River mahogany,
to carve a track through
the dull, green scrub
cutting at their trousers
and grabbing at their boots.

The twelve men camp
by a slow-running creek,
suck the sweet honey
from long-necked wildflowers
and tip their feet
into the clear water.

Over the next steep rise
they hear the call of natives
hunting the *kungurru*
along the creek's edge.
The men fire a warning shot
into the soaring canopy,
sending black cockatoos
screeching from the gums.

The slow-moving men
scrawl letters to pale sweethearts
as they swat at mosquitoes
that halo around their heads.

Their boots carry them upwards
over coffee rocks and gravelly slips.
Time forgets them
but the tracks on the land
like a trail of scars.