

## The Road to Nowhere

Macy Gray haunts her letterbox. The edges of dawn are crisp with frost and the smell of love lost lingers in the air. She exhales deeply through her studded nose, the only blight on her striking complexion. She could make you jealous. Almost. Her mid-riff protrudes alarmingly, a brazen stronghold of new life.

She looks slightly feral in the half light, her eyes darting from her pale, spidery hands to the letterbox. Open it, she tells herself. Instead she rocks to and fro, observing the coming of a new day in her green silk kimono. She smells fermented apples, and something catches in her throat as she remembers that last summer day, and the shaft of sunlight across his face. Two tears make train tracks across her cheeks.

She opens the lid, splattered with peeled paint, but feels the disappointment before she knows it's true.

Maybe another day.

Her shuffling gait leads her all the way to the front door, and she instinctively reaches for the fridge. Macaroni cheese and cold coffee it is.

She wants to drown herself in the coffee cup.

She saunters aimlessly through the city, her long, black, threadbare coat flapping behind her like a flock of angry seagulls. She reaches the double doors leading to nowhere at the visitors centre.

Where is nowhere?

She ponders this question while a weathered man flanked by a mangy dog approaches her. The man smiles crookedly at her, showing off his half empty mouth. He picks a delicate scrap of fabric from his pocket and hands it to her, brushing his fingers with hers. "For you, pretty gal, to take on the road to nowhere, ae?" She smiles dubiously but pockets it all the same, watching the man and his faithful companion disappear from sight.

She plucks the pieces of her heart from the concrete pavement and presses on. Unconscientiously she carries her feet to the Cathedral. She's never been there before. The heavy door slams shut behind her and she shivers in this new world she has entered. She strides up the aisle as if it was her wedding day.

Oh, how she wishes it was.

The eagle lectern eyes her beadily, as if to ask her why she's even here. You don't believe in God, it says. She wants to scream and sob, but she stands, steadily, and caresses her stomach. She closes her eyes and listens to the silence.

When she is outside again, the sharpness of the day blinds her. She stumbles on, again going where her feet are willing to take her. She finds herself before the art gallery. The sculpture is glinting in the sunlight, clean and polished. So different from her.

She used to want to be like that.

At last she knows where to go. She reaches the entrance to the Botanic Gardens, but hesitates. You have to, she tells herself. She fingers the scrap of fabric in her pocket, and recites a well practised mantra in her head. I can't deal with this right now, Macy, I have to go. I need to be alone.

She steps over the threshold.

Last summer rushes back to meet her in flashes of green and winding paths. She seats herself at the peacock fountain and watches a blackbird bathe itself in a bird bath of broken mosaic. She doesn't know how long she has stayed there, staring hard at the memories, when she hears a dog yapping. "Quiet, Rolf", the man growls. He sits down beside her and she recognises him from earlier. "You all right, wee gal?"

She doesn't answer.

The frayed man takes her tiny hand in his, and squeezes it softly. She smiles at this, and the warmth stays in her eyes long after the sun has disappeared.

The road to nowhere may lead to somewhere after all.