

ROAD TO NOWHERE

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THE WHIPBIRDS ARE NOT yet awake, as you swing the saddlebags over the pillion seat—her seat. A scrub turkey—ugly as the shit in your head that is caving your chest in—struts past as if it owns the place.

Hands fumble through the foreplay of helmet and gloves, your whole body crying out for caffeine. You straddle the bike, turn the key and open the choke. A bloated kelpie regards you from its makeshift bed on the veranda. It shows no interest in the scrub turkey, which prods at the leaf-litter with impunity, instead eyeing you with resignation. You jab the starter, as a thousand fuck-yous form a queue in your throat. The bike responds with an electrified fart, and the dog raises its snout with vague interest.

A wild vision flashes into your mind—you're chasing the dog, swinging the enraged turkey, which you have hold of by the legs like a club, while it flaps and squawks and shits itself in a frenzy of fear and bewilderment.

You don't have the energy.

Instead, you ease the bike off the stand and push it to where the driveway slopes away from your past.

You have one shot at a bump start.

There'll be no second chances; no turning back if the motor fires. You'll stay or leave on the whim of a pulse of electricity and the coordination of hands and feet—without trust in fate, or your powers of reasoning.

Cockatoo laughter echoes through the valley and into your mind. The dog resumes normal service by falling asleep. The scrub turkey, having reaffirmed ownership of the garden, continues on its way.

Swamp gums splinter the gloom like arteries to the sky. You pull in the clutch and gather your thoughts. At the bottom of the hill your timing is perfect; the motor fires and you trundle across the bridge. Words follow in your wake; words often repeated and never forgotten.

Words sharper than shards of glass that crunched underfoot; words more finely aimed than myriad missed punches and ornamental missiles.

Words, just words.

Words pursued you inexorably, were your constant companions. People, places, situations, you could escape from. Words belonged to you for life. Like herpes. Passed from one to another by intimate contact between ambiguous partners.

Finally, you reach the bitumen, accelerate into the waking day. Accusations, insinuations, trail in a wake of horsepower induced self-preservation.

It's the last thing on your mind as the first corner rushes upon you.
Death and uncertainty; life and its certainties.

Only, that isn't how it really happened, but how you'd like to remember it. There was no epiphany unearthed through the flowering of a new day—what a load of shit. No, she told you to fuck off, so you did, in that moment of frustration and anger and resignation, with the shadows of afternoon reaching out their fingers of blame. You tore along roads that were once old friends, now enemies to be left in the wake of that moment's white-hot clarity. You rode faster and faster, for the truth pursued you through every twist and turn.

You stopped when your brain could no longer keep up with the beam of light breaking the night—somewhere little more than a pit stop on a road to nowhere.

In the morning, you did it again. You rode and rode, until the landscape transformed from rainforest and mountains to a flat horizon dotted with stunted shrubs and Spinifex. You rode back to

the beginning of the end; a five-day commute across the top end, to witness the passing of one life into another.

Only, it didn't happen like that either.

You still ride. You ride and ride and ride. Your destination is around the next bend, always out of reach.

You are running to stand still, but soon it will be over. One day, you'll wake to the whip-cracks of finality and go back to sleep. You'll rise to a day free from the weight of expectation. You'll let things play out as they will, let cause have no effect and effect need no cause. When she tells you to fuck off, you won't say a word. You'll squat on the veranda with a beer, watch the shadows grow longer, listen for the sound of a motorcycle up on the range.

Someone else free from conformity, free from the responsibility of another's needs, free from grasping at something as ephemeral as happiness.

You'll raise a silent toast to the sound of the past and the future.

Perhaps it's you up there, a grin plastered ear-to-ear as you live only for the next bend in the road.

Perhaps it's you, but in another life.