

Route 66— The Mother Road



Austin P. Torney

The Mother Road

“How about a road trip to Chicago, Passionista?” I asked. “To the depths of the heart, where all things seem and are, to live life and help soothe the dying into death, the last look that love remembers, the final farewell, us also driving amidst the autumn colors on country roads, seeing the burning bushes and colors galore, staying in the warm inns sometimes, ever westward, noting All Hallows Eve, then Obama’s victory party in Grant Park, Chicago, then Route 66, all the while our limbs healing, on through the balmy days of Indian summer, listening to great music, then noting youth and old-age, the first snowfall, Thanksgiving in a new land, of father and mother and brothers, us gone until December, or even beyond, the first step toward forever?”

“Take Me.”



We were soon driving along Rte. 66, America's Main street of the olden days, the road that once went from Illinois to California. Only sections of it remain. The crumbling ghosts of yesteryear yet called out and waved to us from another era. I stopped as the pavement turned to overgrown grass and weeds.





Route 66 begins in Chicago.



Old Corvette.

On the Road

She loves road trips; the autumn colors called,
So we were off on the ups and downs
She with taped ankle and myself with wrist,
The warriors running away from home.

The scene was of the turning leaves falling,
Unspoken poems reciting the paths flown,
Only now the scene painted with the words,
As music played poems sung to melodies.

Country roads, quaint inns, dilapidated barns;
What's this? A dance hall lighting the dark path?
We dance the song of evening bells rung
In a twilight zone in nowhere's middle.

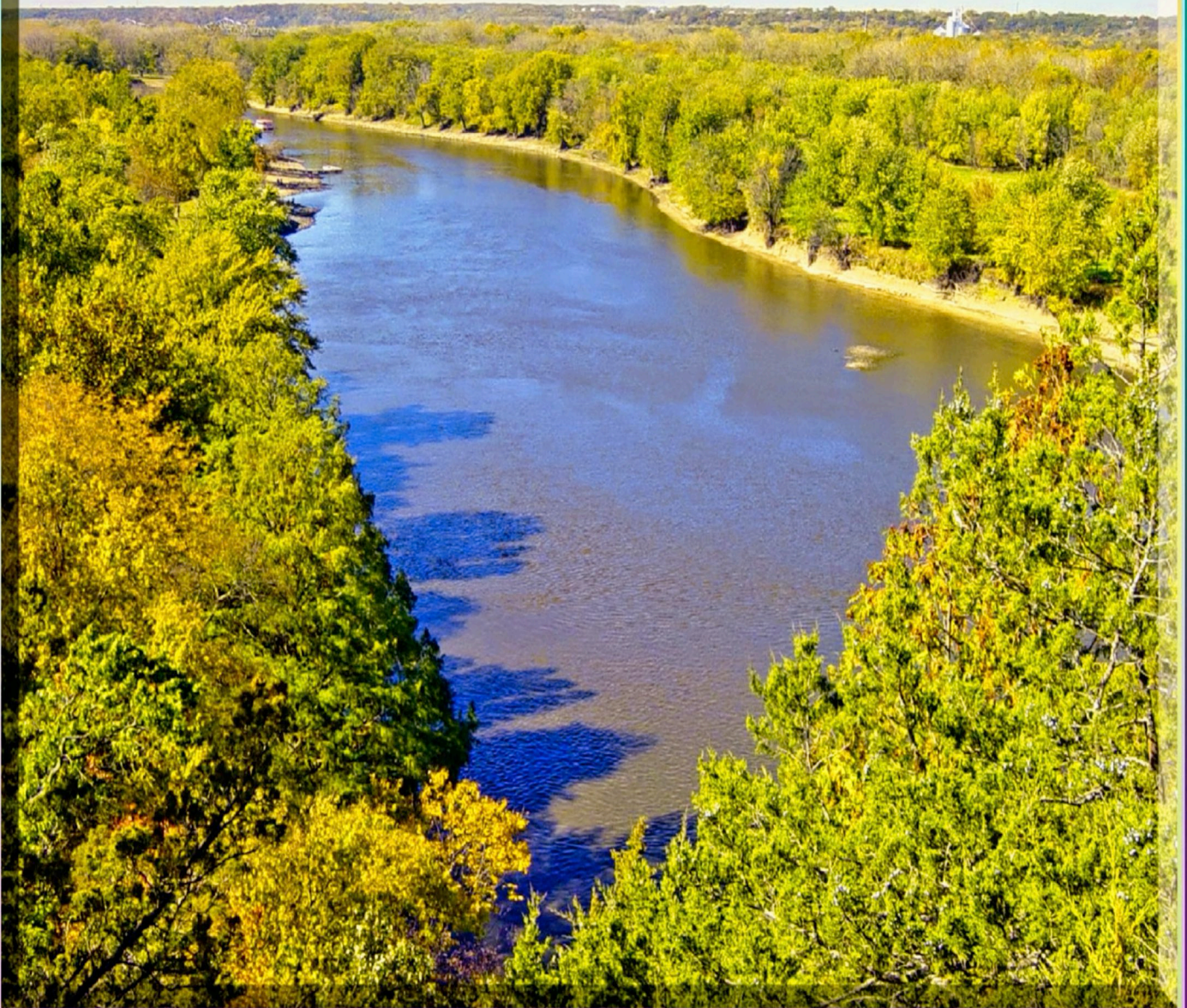
Classicists drone toward mechanical perfection;
Romanticists drown in emotion's affection;
Even worse, others alternate between extremes.
The way's not this or that, but joined in direction.



Skinny Bridge.



Not much left.

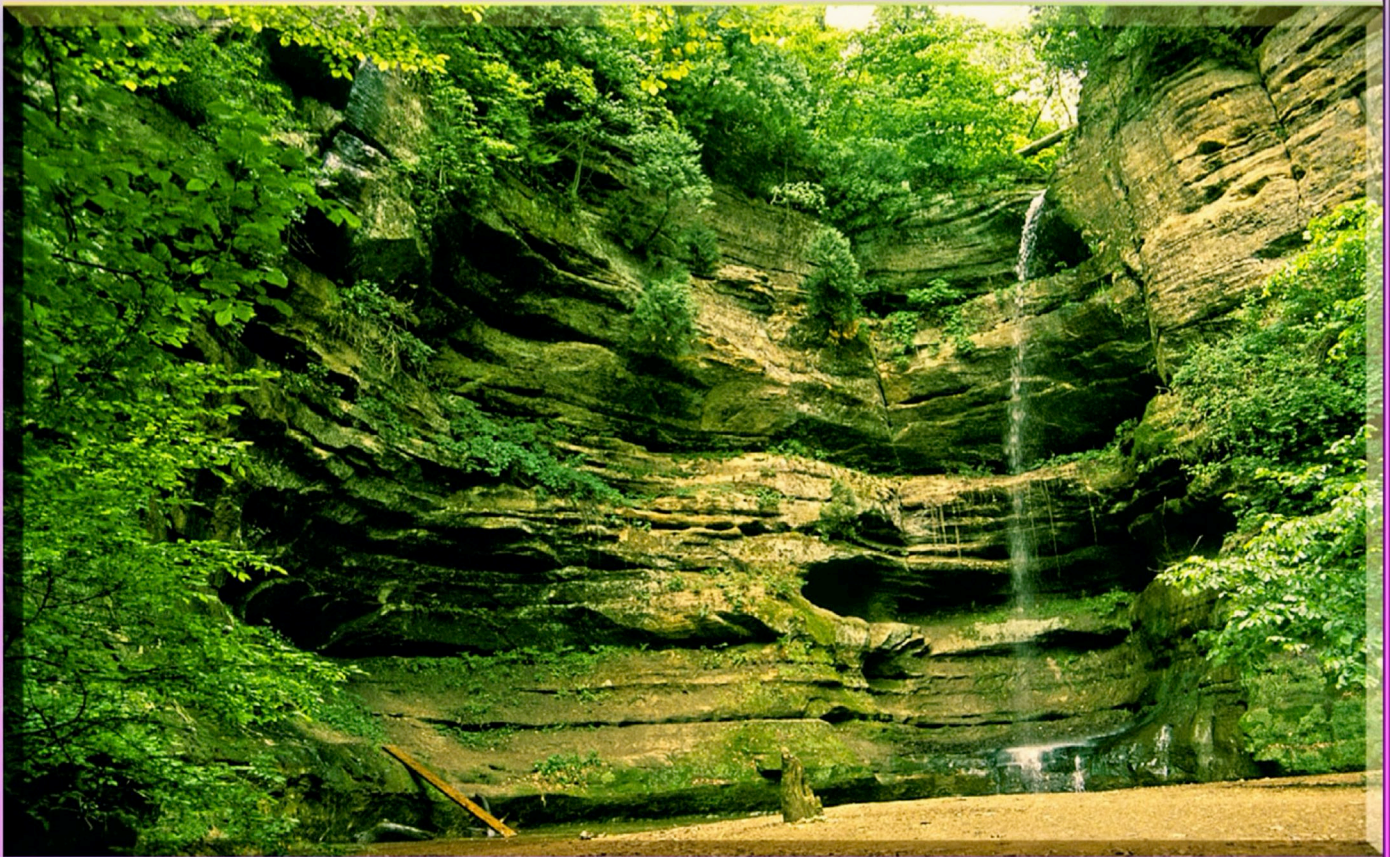


Illinois River.

In western Illinois, we walked the cliff-side trail to the rock that was starved, meaning that it was all alone. For some humans, being alone could mean that one was in bad company.



Looks like that TV show.



Rock Falls

Yet, I would hope that one alone would never be lonely since one would still be with their best loving friend. Today we were together alone and alone together, but one, too, as soul bridged to soul, standing on the rock of the Illinois river near the Iowa border.

When I was six, I sat on the edge of this cliff, my legs dangling, my mother holding on to me. It only took me 54 years to years to return here. There are 18 canyons formed by glacial meltwater and stream erosion.

Horses took us 8 miles out and back on a sunny autumn day. On the way back we spotted an old churchyard, a large one that yet yawns to receive the deceased, as it has for 300 years. Real cobwebs stretched across the archway...

Angel statues beckoned us in, but were really just there to carry forth the souls of the dead to the heavens...



No traffic.

A day of rest and doing nothing, then off again on the Mother road, Arizona Route 66, in a rental car, me and my faithful traveling companion. She had gotten some sun lately and her Italian complexion was of all glowing health warmed over with smiles to take us well along the miles... Oh, the blessed everlasting warmth; let us dive into the ocean of ecstasy and drink deep...

“Can you take me where I’ve never been?” she asked.

“I can do that.”

“Might the magic of our minds stay forever joined?”

“We can do that!”

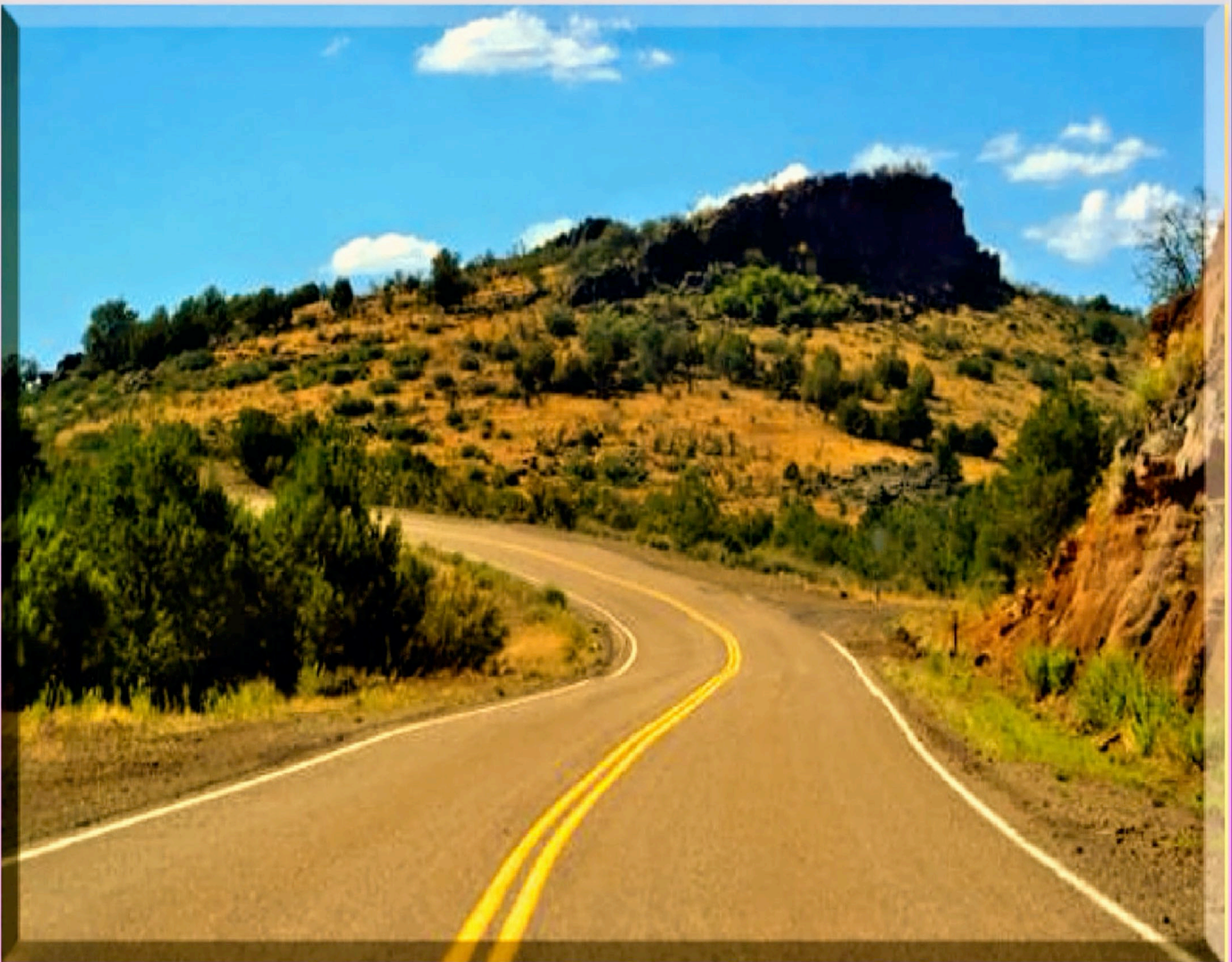
“Can you colorize my life?”

“I can do that.”

Where to? No one knew. The universe was in an indeterminate state. Had this all been written at the beginning of time? Nothing mattered.



We were on the road again, on or just usually near the old Route 66, for in Arizona there had been many more realignments than elsewhere. From a distance, we saw the bridge over the railroad (the Sunshine overpass) that was now on private property, got out and picnicked on the grass, baking in the loving heat, shimmering and floating away on the rising waves.



A ghost town, Oatman, appeared and vanished... just like a ghost should. Clark Gable and Carol Lombard spent their honeymoon here after getting married in Kingman. Some of Rte. 66 was completely undrivable, having been consumed by the Painted Desert. We used a special map to dig it up again in places, a ribbon of legend, where, long ago, people drove it the 30's from the Dust Bowl to California to find work in Steinbeck's 'Grapes of Wrath'.



Luckily the road had been completely paved before the beginning of World War II, for it became a life line.

Near a rest area we observed the former Meteor Crater Observatory, now in ruins. When it was open one could see a meteor crater with a telescope from there. Meteors probably hit and made craters all over the Earth, the remains disappearing into the mud except in places like Arizona.

The Almighty was nowhere to be seen, as usual, but the surface of Mars was at hand, being these craters and all of the slowly weathering remains of the bombardments by Zeus and friends, who were perhaps trying to end the world, either for some odd reason or trying to get even.

These craters would pale in comparison to the Grand Canyon. And this lovely dry heat would give way to the deadly heat waves of the hellish desert, but, not yet, nor give me chastity, not ever, for St. Augustine can have it all to himself.

A small zoo followed after a mountain lions sign (you should have seen those animals moving together), and later the Red Rock Secret Mountain Wilderness [not so secret any more] and the Navajo Army Depot (Yes, they had an army).





Would you believe that London Bridge is now in Arizona? I kid you not. Somehow it got here! I am not crazy and I am not on drugs!



Time and new roads passed the old places by...



Where gas was once 10 cents a gallon.



Our wigwam motel on the first night.





A parade of old cars from yesteryear.





Apache mission in New Mexico.





The stars were clear and sharp
In the night sky beyond the dry desert air—
They pulsed,
transferring their energy to us.



Empty



A fine gift



A mystical happening...





Smoky-foggy place—
Perhaps this is the altar of Hell.
Down, down; we guide thee;
We are beside thee.



This tree was really scared...
and so it turned to stone.

Lo and behold, the Grand Canyon Cav-
erns: a 21 story elevator descent, always
56 degrees F., formed million of yeas ago,
discovered in 1927.

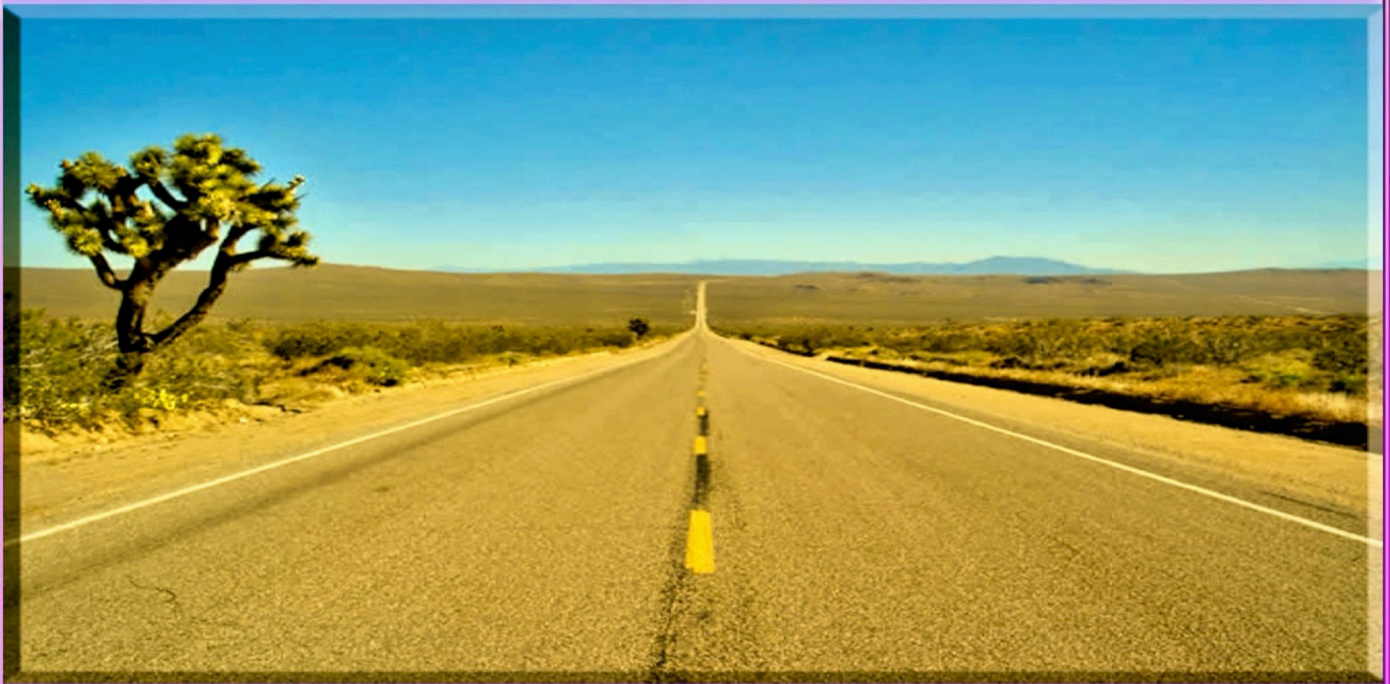
Vegas calls...



There were about 75 or more versions of these Burma Shave sign all over the country when I was a child.



Rock.



The Mother Road lives on.



At the Shore

Where I am now, the sea
Is neither blue nor green,
But a color in between.

The deep dark hole
Of cold is not here,
Just the warmth aglow.

The ego is neither
Gone nor overblown,
But in equipoise, the known.

The calming waves roll,
Amounting here their toll
From the other side of the world.

I'm on holiday, on vacation
From my retirement...

Where might I be?

I am beside her,
Astride the duality
Of the yin and the yang.

There is no talk here of One,
Nor that nothing can move,
For all is moving life about.

So you know maybe where?
There is brightness all about
These shifting sands of time,
A heart warm beside mine.

No talk of me nor thee
Behind the veil of naught,
Just eternity's parenthesis.

The birds came down
From the sky
To pick the table dry
As the ghosts of Pacific
Walk the waves,
The captains of old,
For so it said,
As we read,
While laying in bed.

The wind on through
The curtains flew,
As I wrote some poems anew.

The turquoise sea is now left far behind, but is ever awash in memory's realm. The love-birds fly United over the turning Earth. The shadows pass below, and then the clouds surround, until we break through, into heaven.





