

Lemony snickers on Route 66

by Mathew Paust

My first drama on that transcontinental passage, where one of its eastern feeders skirted our house. The grandmotherly lady stopped on the sidewalk to be friendly and let me pick some lemon drops from her bag. I ran home in horror after she'd walked out of sight, and dropped the light yellow, lightly sugared candies on the kitchen counter in front of my mother. Do NOT take candy from strangers, had been the lesson well learned. My mother laughed. She knew the lady. I could eat the candy. Lemon drops have given me a special tingle ever since.

Years later. Lemonade stand on the tree border. Me the proprietor, startled when the huge red slatted cattle truck pulled squealing to the curb and the little cowboy hopped out and walked over. He wore the hat, the flannel shirt, the jeans and the boots and had the bow-legged walk. Deeply tanned, but up close he seemed much younger than Gene Autry, the one I always became when we played cowboys and Indians. He placed a dime on the little table and I poured him an ice cold glass of the drink my mother had made with real lemons. He drank it fast.

The cowboy was friendly. Chatted up a storm. Went back to his cab and returned with a whip and demonstrated to me and my helper Mikey how to make it *crack*. Gave us a quarter tip and drank another glass. On his way to California, he said. Worked on a ranch. Promised to stop again on his return trip

We stared wistfully as his truck grumbled back to life and roared onto the highway headed west. Never saw him again.

