

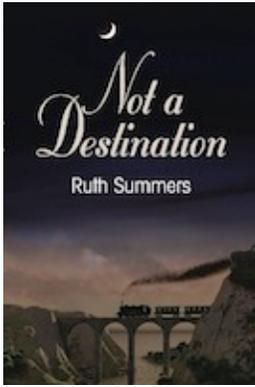


*Not a  
Destination*

Ruth Summers



The background of the cover features a steam locomotive pulling a train across a multi-arched stone viaduct. The train is silhouetted against a dramatic sunset sky with orange and purple clouds. A river flows beneath the viaduct, and the surrounding landscape is rocky and hilly.



*In 1957, Cathy Lang leaves Kentucky, hoping to work for Walt Disney. She takes along an abandoned dog she named Rebel, found at her first rest stop. Both were abused in the past but now happily head toward Route 66 and a new life. In Hollywood, plans change as Cathy runs from a man who promised to kill her. In her new job, the past catches up as Cathy's identity, and sanity, begin to crumble.*

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**Ruth Summers**

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ISBN 978-1-61434-221-2

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Published in the United States by Booklocker.com, Inc., Bangor, Maine.

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Printed in the United States of America on acid-free paper.

BookLocker.com, Inc.  
2011

First Edition

## CHAPTER SIX ROAD TRIP

Freedom!

Like Jeff, Cathy couldn't wait to get away from her father. So lost in his own grief, Jack was oblivious to hers; unable to connect with the fact that his daughter had lost her mother. And although she was aware of his suffering, any feelings of compassion for him had been deadened long ago.

In a mere three weeks after their mother's death, Cathy was present at her brother's marriage. A brother she barely knew. Jeff had gotten out of the house and away from their father after high school. Jack had been too upset to attend Jeff's wedding. Now the very thought of living alone with her dad was incomprehensible. He could no longer threaten her with the loss of her mother. Her mother was gone. There was nothing left to hold her to him. Cathy hated the sight of him; his physical presence became his personification. It was no longer what he did—but the way he looked. His ugliness could not be forgiven. Jack was eleven years older than Margaret and was now a man approaching sixty. To Cathy, he often felt more like a grandfather than a father. It didn't help that Jack had lost all of his teeth as a young man. Now and then Cathy would see him without his dentures—revolted by his shriveled, concave and wrinkled mouth. Worse, was seeing those huge body-less teeth resting their glass jar. She wished that she could pluck off, rend any part of herself that looked like him or reminded her of him. For Cathy, balding men with big noses would forever trigger hate.

Who *buys* those *greeting cards*? Cathy often wondered. Cards that can't say enough about how wonderful fathers are. Cards declaring one's incredible luck in having been sired by such a protective, understanding and loving father.

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Had he been the caring father she longed for...would she have sat on his lap as a girl, pretending to honk his big round nose and played with the few hairs left that circled his head? Loving the smell of his after-shave because it meant that he was near, and she was safe? Would she have married a gentle, sweet man that looked just like dad? Would she and her husband laugh in delight and love as they looked at their babies with little round noses? Or would she have chosen girls to love anyway?

No answer, just get away.

Her friends called her used 1952 Dodge ragtop a death trap. But Cathy knew that she and the car were invincible. This car could do no wrong. Even though she had it repaired over and over and had replaced almost everything on it except the knobs on the radio. It was forgiven over and over. This was the car that would transport her away from everything that hurt. It would take her to California, where anything goes. She would drive away from eastern conservatism and Kentucky bigotry. The signs that had read, "Colored drinking fountain," "Colored entrance..." The anger she felt seeing the hands of dark children wrapped around wire fences as they looked longingly into Coney Island watching white kids on rides. She hated the smirking jokes about Jews, Germans, and anybody who was different. In the 50's, it was too early to hate Mexicans. The only Mexican that anyone saw was at night, when a man inside the "tamale truck" came by. Drawn by its yellow, luscious and fragrant interior, white folks hurried around to buy hot tamales on rye bread.

After an agonizingly long and strained farewell breakfast with her father, Cathy was off! Her maps and AAA "TripTics" lay close by her side. She hooted and hollered and blew her horn as she passed through the intersection that had played in her daydreams while she sat in school. She was on the road! The top was down, the radio up, and beer cans flew over her shoulder.

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In addition to her clothes, the car was packed with all of the things she considered a necessity:

A piece of driftwood she had found by the river  
Her old panda bear doll  
Books, books, books  
A Brownie "Hawkeye" camera  
Black and white film  
A huge philodendron  
Hi fi record player and radio  
78 and 45 records  
A James Dean poster  
Her portfolio  
Sketchpads, paints and brushes  
Drawing board and easel  
Linens, blankets and a pillow  
Two each of knives, forks and spoons  
Two pots, one skillet/ can opener  
Two plates, two bowls  
Guitar and bongo drums

She'd also bought her very own Coleman cooler and filled it with lunchmeat, bread, mustard, candy bars, sodas, beer and a "church key." A bag of chips sat on her lap. She had no real fear of traveling across country by herself, youth and excitement diminished it. As yet, no one had experienced "car jacking," and gangs only existed in movies, or in the really poor districts she didn't plan to visit. Once in awhile she'd hear on the news that there was a "maniac on the loose," but she hadn't heard of any maniacs recently.

At her first rest stop in Kentucky, she sat at an old picnic table that had been cut with hearts and the names of people who xx'ed each other. She could hardly sit still, much less eat; she was too happy and excited. Then suddenly, Cathy yelped and jumped up from the table, bumping her knee. Her Coke spilled over her sandwich. Something cold and wet had

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touched her ankle! As she jerked her leg back, she saw that it was a furry, black and dusty little dog. He was barely past his puppyhood. She was briefly afraid, but his joyful brown eyes, his tail thumping on the table leg told her there was nothing to fear. He raced all around her and jumped up and down on her lap. She looked around, but it was obvious she was the only one there. Someone had abandoned him. She wondered how any one could do that, leave an animal alone to starve, on the outside chance that someone would happen along and take him. *Well, I guess I'm the outside chance.*

Cathy picked up the panting and trembling little dog and put her face next to his, rocked him and made him a sandwich. "Hey! How would you like to go to California?" He shook with excitement. Cathy took that as a yes. They both needed a new home and a new life. They were perfect for each other. And in that they were now heading south, she decided to name him, "Rebel."

Cathy and Rebel were heading for Route 66, "The Mother Road." A road that would play a part in America's history and nostalgia as well as in Cathy's life.

She realized she would have to buy new windshield wipers as they crossed over the Mississippi River in a light drizzle. (It would've taken a hurricane for Cathy to put up the top.) Rebel had mist on the top his head and eyelashes, his face raised to the sky as he snapped at the drops. Cathy leaned over the steering wheel, bug-eyed, trying to see through the fog. "Is this bridge ever going to end?!" But finally, Rebel heard her shouting, "We're in the West! Rebel, we're in the West!" As Cathy yelled, Rebel began barking and wagging his tail, not knowing what the party was about, but he knew they were having fun.

Sneaking Rebel into motels would become a routine challenge. They spent their first night in a ticky-tacky motel in a rundown part of St. Louis. She parked the car behind their cabin and covered it with a tarp. Locking the car rarely seemed necessary. She struggled to walk—trying to balance her

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overnight bag and cooler with Rebel squirming under her coat. While crossing the narrow porch to the cabin she walked on her toes in an effort to avoid crunching any of the hundreds of June bugs laying there, and opened the door gingerly to avoid the wall of them stuck to the screen. She hoped they would be gone by daylight.

After a shower with a complimentary sliver of Cashmere Bouquet, she climbed between the thin and yellowed sheets onto a lumpy mattress. Rebel hopped up beside her. The disinfectant in the sheets had a Cloroxey smell that for a moment brought Jennifer to mind. And then she thought of Marilyn. How great it would be to share this now rainy night making love. The rain had picked up and clattered on the old putty-smearred window. She hoped they might hear a train whistle sometime in the night. The candle she'd lit strobed hypnotic patterns around the room. As she drank a few beers, a spell of reverie was cast. Her gray, sleep-dewed eyes watched as the smoke from her cigarette drifted towards the ceiling to create another layer of tar on the knotty pine. She smiled as she looked at the amateurish paintings around her bed. Someone had colored a series of paint-by-number Parisian street scenes. She wondered who... the owner's wife or daughter? But whoever it was probably knew the same need that she had, to put what she felt on paper or canvas.

Rebel's head shared her pillow. He would occasionally sigh and snore, and smack his mouth, probably dreaming about a treat she had given him earlier. She didn't mind his doggy smell, he would get a bath in California. It all seemed so nice. Tomorrow she would make coffee in the little pot on the motel stove and pour it into her thermos. Two doughnuts she'd bought earlier waited in an oily bag on the cigarette-branded dresser. Fresh ice cubes would go into her cooler, and she would be on her way again to California. Every turn of the wheel would take her farther away from reminders of hospitals, her father's rage and the ubiquitous fear of death. This was her world now. She snuffed out her cigarette and drank the last sip

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of beer. As she rested her chin on the top of Rebel's head, each was soothed by the other's breathing, as they drifted off to the sound of rain.

For early morning  
Pep and bounce  
A brand new product  
We announce,  
BURMA SHAVE LOTION.

Like every other traveler in the fifties, Cathy looked forward to seeing the next series of Burma Shave signs. Back on the road under an intensely blue sky, the early sunlight sifted through the translucent leaves of fall: green, brown, yellow and gold tumbled onto the fields of pumpkins and haystacks in Missouri and Arkansas.

Later, Cathy howled as the western colors of sand—pink—turquoise and beige—began to appear. The more she saw manifestations of the west, the farther behind were memories of the east. With the wind on her face and Rebel's ears flying, she sped along the two or four lane highways that eventually narrowed, slowing her into city limits.

She knew she'd rather die than live in any of the small towns they passed through, yet she found each one fascinating. They were often similar in ways: America, USA. Flags flew from courthouses, schools and homes. As she cruised alongside the neat rows of houses it was easy to imagine a soldier returning home with a pack on his back, walking on the sidewalks he'd once roller skated on, now raised by the roots of old trees.

There were many churches, mostly Baptist; their signs welcomed her to each town, as well as the signs of local Elks, Moose, Rotaries' and Optimist. Public parks were alive with kids and the ringing sound of metal chains clanging on swing posts. There was always a dime store, at least one movie theater and diners promising "GOOD EATS AND LIVE BAIT."

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Invariably, a few locals sat around on the wooden porch of markets. Yet each village would change in flavor and architecture as she continued west. It was like traveling through the unblemished pages of a Christian calendar.

It has a tingle  
And a tang  
That starts the day off  
With a bang  
BURMA SHAVE.

Somewhere in Arkansas, the accelerator pedal fell off. She drove holding its wire between the toes of her bare feet until she could get to a gas station. Enthralled with the name, she spent one night in a motel named "Ebony." *What a beautiful name*, she thought...*ebony, like the night*. The next morning as several people regarded her, she discovered she was the only white guest there. She worried that they might have noticed her Kentucky plates and resented her being there.

Everything was exciting: going through tunnels and honking her horn, driving over every kind of bridge: some incredibly long, others a mere hop. Her favorites were the arched country bridges made of iron or steel, painted orange or green. A few had an open metal surface that made a "*wonga-wonga-wonga*" sound (and Rebel bark) as they drove over. She felt safe when she saw truckers on the road. When they passed in the night, their friendly smiles, waves, and flashing lights made her feel secure. They were always there to help.

There were motor courts in every style and shape. A preponderance named "Oasis." Her favorites were the ones that looked like Wigwams. But inside they looked the same as all the others. In Kansas she picked a sunflower as tall as her, but Rebel made short work of it. Most of all she loved the mountains, the sculpted rock formations and out-cropping. She'd thought all mountains looked the same, but discovered each states' mountains to be unique. It was almost impossible

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to get lost on the road. You simply stayed on Route 66 and let all of the wonderful names of towns unfold: Amarillo, Santa Fe, Albuquerque, Winslow, Flagstaff...

His face was smooth  
And cold as ice  
And oh! Louise!  
He smelled so nice  
BURMA SHAVE.

Unable to afford eating in restaurants, she'd stop only now and then for a burger or a hot dog. For dinner, there was a trip to a market for a few cans of soup or stew and dog food. Roadside stands provided fruits and vegetables. A can of Sterno would warm her meal if the motel had no stove, and tepid tea was steeped in hot water from a faucet. She would need every penny of her five hundred dollar stash when she got to L.A., even though gas was twenty-seven cents a gallon and motels cost two or four dollars a night. But Cathy found it hard to resist a souvenir stand. She'd already bought a collar and leash for Rebel in a little dime store in Saint Louis, a jar of blueberry jam in the Ozarks, two t-shirts, a tiny cedar chest in Oklahoma City, and a jade bracelet in New Mexico.

She bought a piece of petrified wood in Arizona only to discover that farther down the road, it lay all over the ground for free. She had her first enchilada in Tucumcari, and began to hear words and songs in Spanish on the radio. She was now, world traveler indeed. The only Latin she had even seen was Ricardo Montalban in movies with Esther Williams, or the Mexican sidekicks of cowboys. Water bags hung all over her car as she drove across the Texas Panhandle. While washing her windshield, a nice old man at a Texaco station cautioned her to not stop on a vacant desert road because of "vapor lock." It could be especially serious when you needed to go to the bathroom, and had to wait a half an hour or so for the engine to cool. She took the signs that said, "Last Chance for Gas"

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seriously, remembering the occasional pictures she'd seen in her geography books of forlorn steer-heads bleaching in the desert.

On curves ahead  
Remember Sonny  
That rabbit's foot,  
Didn't save the bunny  
BURMA SHAVE

She decided to drive across the Mojave at night. The slight thought of danger only made it seem more of an adventure. A sage scented breeze was still warm as the little blue Dodge made its way across the desert. The red and blue dashboard lights, and yellow glow from the radio dial made the car seem romantic. She fantasized about what it would be like to have a girl that she loved sitting on the bench seat next to her. Gliding silently along the solitary road she traveled through a dreamscape as yuccas in silhouette cast long moon shadows on the white sand, becoming sentries there to protect her. After Needles (named for the sharp and pointy mountains around the town), she saw her first palm tree in Barstow.

She held her breath while pushing her stomach muscles and grunting, trying to help the Dodge up the perpendicular grade. Like a roller coaster straining toward its first drop, the Dodge finally breached the top of the San Bernardino Mountain.

"Shiiiiit!" Cathy yelled.

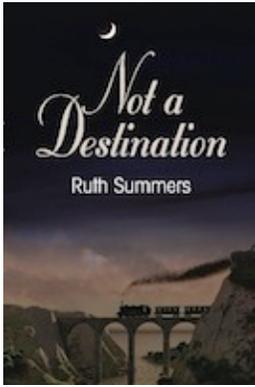
Rebel sat up briefly and then laid his head back down on Cathy's lap. "Oh my God! Oh my God!" Her jaw fell open. She pulled the car over and stopped. Below was an endless panorama of lights. The lights of San Bernadino and Los Angeles beyond, stretched on forever. She'd gazed at the lights of Cincinnati atop Eden Park while necking with boys in cars, (lights that now seemed only a sprinkling), but this!! "How can I

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do this? Look at all that. How does anyone find their way around?”

As Cathy plunged down and down, and down and down into her new life, mesmerized by the lights, she wondered: *Who are they...the people who are dreaming now? Where are they in those lights? My future boss, my landlady, my friends, my new dry cleaner...my lover?! They don't know I'm coming into their lives!*

Someday I'll ask them, “What were you doing the night of September 27, 1957?”



*In 1957, Cathy Lang leaves Kentucky, hoping to work for Walt Disney. She takes along an abandoned dog she named Rebel, found at her first rest stop. Both were abused in the past but now happily head toward Route 66 and a new life. In Hollywood, plans change as Cathy runs from a man who promised to kill her. In her new job, the past catches up as Cathy's identity, and sanity, begin to crumble.*

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