

A young male I've known for some time sits down at my table. He makes his living stealing books, usually books on philosophy, and selling them back to the bookstores. He is listening carefully to the Undines at the next table. I ask him if he can remember the name of the woman who killed herself in Hitler's flat in Berlin in 1931. I read somewhere she was the great love of his life. I never doubted he had one. The young male does not hear the question. Why am I always wringing my hands and talking about dying, he wants to know. I only wondered, I tell him, if she might not have changed history. I wonder a lot about things like that. When Stalin's wife shot herself, all Stalin said was, how could she do this to me, or words to that effect. Your history is not true, the young male says. Stalin had her killed. Everyone knows she said something he didn't like during a dinner party, and after he sent her to her room he sent along someone to shoot her.

The young sea nymph sitting closest to us turns to another woman at her table and says well she sure as hell wants to get laid this evening and the young male who steals philosophy books turns a little white and says she sounds awfully aggressive. I assure him she is only bored so he turns on her and makes what would once have been named a forward pass. A rose by any other name would smell.

It is a comfort to look in the mirror this morning and consider that, decadent as I am and weary as I have become, if I had had my way and managed to marry the great love of my seventeenth year, I would now be the wife, and doubtless the drunkard wife, of the President of the Junior Chamber of Commerce in a California beach town run by a den of Republicans.

God save us all from what we want.

1974 -- HISTORICAL FOOTNOTE: NEMESIS

I was born in 1933, the day Prohibition was repealed. It was a national holiday and nearly everyone got drunk. It was also the height of the Great Depression. I've always thought there is a distinct relationship between alcoholism and depression. A brain boiled in booze goes soft and the bottom falls out. Of course the Great Depression was the economic depression of the Thirties in which I was born, not the psychic depression of the seventies in which I live. Between that depression, the economic, and this, the psychic, there was W.W. II. Before that war, it was the money that mattered. After that, it was the mind that gave

us trouble. I've been worming into the period of W.W. II during the last few years and writing poems about Dresden and Dunkirk and Hiroshima and Knossos in Crete and Nebraska and the Nile River and Calvary and Buchenwald and Britain. In Britain there was Winston Churchill and he demanded an unconditional surrender and so the war went on. Those were the years of my nymph-hood: the period between the age of dolls and the age of despair. I did not understand that the loss of my personal innocence was a national or world phenomena as well. Oh, not that corruption and evil were anything new; only that it was happening to more people at the same time than ever before. Never before had so many suffered so much for so little, they say. Never before had there been so much collective guilt. That sort of thing. No one in particular was to blame. Not me, I don't think. Not Truman, or the scientists or the Nazis or anyone people knew about. They didn't know what the bomb would do until they tried it out. I felt the same way about the things that were happening in my life. I wanted to do it my way just to see what would happen. I did, and later on I told the story any way it suited me. I made it up, the way history is made up. If history is the collective prejudices of the ruling class at any given time, then my story is the private lie I present to the world.

Why is it then, that the world and I have come back to a sense of sin? Not that we admit it. Still I wonder why so many of us act like flagellites, beating each other to death with explanations and protestations, always pleading innocent to crimes we didn't commit. Men have tried to master the earth and each other, and they've tried to save the earth and help each other. We can't leave anything the hell alone. The ancient people warned us. The artists warned us. We eat of the tree and we die.

-- Jennifer Stone

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DON'T I WISH THEY DID

on a student paper discussing goodbye, columbus
i read, "wealth and obesity have always
gone hand in hand."