

THE CHIEF BUSINESS OF AMERICANS

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Hopper One

In *The Bootleggers*, three men in black
rain slickers power their white skiff
toward a figure standing in front
of a gabled house, almost lost.

They might well be my uncles,
evading the Coast Guard
in quiet Jersey inlets.

The one sketched in on shore
the sky blank above him
could be my father,
his whiskey trucks.

Invocation Intoxication

In oak barrels, hops and yeast brew.
Answer the door for merry-makers
rushing to get sozzled, booze flowing
from kegs, in bathtubs, in basement jugs,
in stills—
poteen, bathtub gin,
moonshine, apple jack, mountain dew,
sacramental wine—

Blue skies smiling at me
bottles emptied, thrown on garbage heaps from
nightclubs, saloons and speakeasies,
gin mills, whoopee parlors;
the new generation of moneymakers roaring
their twenties.

*It's here at last! Now for a new era of clean thinking and
clean living. The Anti-Saloon League wishes every man,
woman and child a Happy Dry Year, and a share of the
fruits of prosperity that are bound to come with National
Prohibition.*

On our side of the Hudson
across from the big time
racketeers, past the Hoovervilles
beneath the Pulaski Skyway,
on bays and inlets of the Jersey shore
the Prohibition high seas operation
transported cases
of Haig & Haig, Piper Heidsieck, Booth's Gin
from England, France, Scotland
to St. Etienne, Canada, and on
to just beyond
the twelve mile limit off Sandy Hook
the New Jersey *Rum Runway*
where men transferred
them from fast skiffs to a fleet
of World War I Mack Bulldogs.
Nothing but blue skies do I see
in my Intoxication,
the cocktail and I are born.

Here's Looking at You

Martinis, Orange Blossoms, Rob Roys,
Bacardis, Gimlets, Black Russians,
Old Fashioneds, Bloody Marys
mixed with
Jazz Age inventions—
pony jiggers, strainers, shakers, trimmers.
Down the hatch!
revelers said, raising
their drinks high
Here's mud in your eye!
after giving a password to my father
whose liquor they drank
(Sipping liquor in teacups
to look law-abiding)
—*Joe sent me*—
through a basement
door slot—
To a long life and a merry one
sometimes *Prosit*, remnant
of the beer halls. An occasional
L' Chaim
or just plain *Cheers*
America's heart
raised on imported booze.

Racketeer Wife

“yes, we have no bananas
we have no bananas today”

*This is your mother
on the front stoop of 9 Keer.
We had to make her bundle up
in the raccoon coat
and pull the cloche
over her ears. I wrapped
the afghan around her legs.*

*We told her not to marry him,
but she wouldn't listen,
mad for him. She had everything,
a cook, nanny for you kids, chauffeur,
three cars, a mink, trips to London, Paris.*

*What good was it, living with a man
with no morals who beat up
his own brother-in-law?*

*After your father died, your mother
let herself get run down.
We had to fatten her up
with eggnogs, cream soup.*

*We didn't think she'd grieve like that.
She had to wait for him, all hours.
While he could do anything he wanted to.
At the end she was afraid of him.*

*Maybe that's why she went out
in that terrible rainstorm.
She wasn't thinking straight,
a widow with two kids.
Just a couple of days
and her temperature reached 105.*

*You look just like her. Thin.
And with those high cheekbones
we all envied.*

Hopper Two

In his *Tables for Ladies*, a waitress
leans over a row of grapefruit near
a blackboard with specials. The cashier
leans an elbow on the glass
cigar counter. Stiff as mannequins,
a couple stare across their table
as my parents might have. Maybe
he'll buy a cigar, bite off the end,
light it, flirt with the cashier
while she makes change.

CAROLE STONE'S most recent book of poetry is *Traveling with the Dead*, Backwaters Press, 2007. Other books include *Lime and Salt*, Carriage House Press and five poetry chapbooks. A chapbook, *Paris Etudes*, is forthcoming from Finishing Line Press, 2008. English Professor Emerita, Montclair State University, she received Fellowships to Hawthornden Castle International Writers Retreat, Scotland, Chateau de Lavigny, Switzerland, the Rothermere Institute of American Studies, Oxford University, England, and three Fellowships from The New Jersey State Council on the Arts.

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