# 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 merrymakers 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.