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"Do you know because I tell you so
or do you know do you know."

-- Gertrude Stein

Evening in the coffeehouse. Once more I am sitting here reading my notebook in which I have written that thing he said; there are only two kinds of women in the world he said; the loved and the unloved. I make a note in the margin: Bob Benchley once said there are only two sorts of people in the world; those who divide people into two groups and those who don't.

Young women come into the cafe; Undines, sea nymphs, swimming through the smoke, floating down onto chairs as if settling on coral stools, the sand sinking down around them, marfire shining in their hair. I do not listen to their voices.

At the table in the window sits a young woman named Echo. She is a Maenad, seduced by Pan. He sits grinning at her with Saturnalian glee. She's been his to command ever since her heart broke during that fatal affair with Narcissus. It helps me to use names for things. It's why I went to school. The names of the myths help distance the pain. On bad days I call myself Cassandra. It's harmless.

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