

“The Woman Who Had Two Navels” (Nick Joaquin) Summary

The story begins with Connie Escobar, daughter of a politician and a famous beauty, visiting Pepe Monson, a horse doctor, in Hong Kong for a consultation because she has TWO NAVELS. She wanted him to remove her other navel through a surgical operation because if she will be going to give birth, where would the other umbilical cord be connected? In addition, she does not want to become a freak when she has to undress for her husband. She said she is 30 years old and has just been married hours ago. Then, she told Pepe about a story from her childhood. When she was a child, she thought that everybody has two navels but when she discovered her doll, Minnie, has only one, she threw it into the pond. Then she told Pepe that her mother is also in Hong Kong. Pepe talked to Senora Concha Vidal and discovered from her that Connie was lying – that she is not 30 years old, only 18; that she was not married a morning just before she came to consult him, but a year ago; that she has only ONE navel. Senora de Vidal also told Pepe that she forced Connie to marry Macho Escobar because Connie was upset about the rumor that her father, Manolo Vidal, spends the public fund to send his children to school. Because Connie was just forced to marry to a man she really does not love, Senora Concha told Pepe that Connie was chasing a bandleader named Paco Texeira, that’s why she is now in Hong Kong. She and Macho followed Connie in Hong Kong they can bring her back to the Philippines. Macho’s reason in taking her back is to avoid humiliation for her politician father by creating a scandal because it is election times in the Philippines. Pepe told Senora de Vidal that Paco is married to Mary and that he and Paco are gradeschool friends. After talking to Senora de Vidal, Pepe went to the Texeira’s.

Pepe learned from his conversation with the Texeiras that Paco had been to Manila playing with his band. From Manila, Paco had sent letters to Mary about Senora de Vidal. Senora de Vidal and Paco had a good time together and they were interested in each other’s countries – Hong Kong and Philippines. One day, when Paco was waiting for Senora Concha in her house, he found Connie and from that moment on he started wanting Connie. Connie had watched Paco perform in the clubs until one night, there were people fighting and someone had got shot. Because Connie was shocked, Paco comforted her. Until some weeks, Paco drove Connie to his hotel, knowing that Connie also liked him. He was about to rape Connie, not knowing her background. They only had a savage fight like wild beasts. After 2 days, Paco went back to Hong Kong. Pepe states that both Connie and Senora de Vidal have an evil hold on him and he knows that he will go running to them when they call him. But he does not call it love. Pepe also realized both his father and Paco have a similar traumatized look after they came back from the Philippines. Pepe’s father could not answer most of Paco’s questions since he came back to Hong Kong from Manila. All he said while he is in his room was “Dust and crabs.. dust and crabs.. dust and crabs..”.

Meanwhile, in the art shop of Rita Lopez and Helen Silva, Rita received a call from Pepe. Rita is Pepe’s wife and Helen is a friend. Pepe called Rita to invite her for a dinner with Paco and Mary to a club in Tovarich. In Tovarich, they met Pete Alfonso, a bandleader who is seeking a pianist and a singer. Paco applied and got hired. The next important thing that happened was that Pepe found Connie Escobar naked inside the club and talked to her for he knows Connie needs him, with a promise to Rita that he would just do it with a couple of minutes. After a short talk with Connie, Pepe went back to Rita and told her and the rest of the group to go home without him so he can help Connie in her problem, which made Rita get angry.

Connie had driven her car so fast that made Pepe to cry “stop!” Then Connie told Pepe why she was driving so fast because she feels like she’s running away. She related it to a story where she ran away from school, not because of her father whipping her – a lie told by Concha to Pepe, but because she was ashamed that her

father was an abortionist. Then Pepe advised Connie to ask advise to her brother, Tony, at the convent, but Connie instead wanted to go in her hotel. However, when Connie went to her room in the hotel, she rushed back to Pepe telling him that Macho, her husband, is inside and she does not want to see him. She told Pepe that Macho has other girls and one of them is her mother, Concha de Vidal. Paco learned from her that she found out the love letters of Macho and her mother. Because of this, Pepe helped Connie to go away from her hotel by letting her sleep in Rita's place, which made Rita even angrier. Connie asked Pepe to tell Macho that she was sick and does not want to see him, which Pepe agreed to do. Macho, however, stopped Pepe when he was leaving his room and told Pepe the story of their marriage and that he knew Connie knew of his past affair with her mother because of the letters, but he insisted it was over and done with. Macho also mentioned that his father died and he has to take care of their hacienda. When Pepe went home, just before daylight when Rita awoke, they did not find Connie in the sofa. She was gone.

It was a Chinese New Year in Hong Kong and Paco Monson and his band were performing in Tovarich. In the convent of St. Andrew, Connie, as per Pepe's advice, sought help from Father Tony Monson about the explanation of her two navels. She says she is grateful and horrified at the same time of her state. Father Tony did not believe her and advised her to see an older priest instead so she would realize that she's only delusional. However, she went away without consulting Father Prior. Meanwhile, Senora de Vidal, visited St. Rita's Shop and fortunately saw Father Tony there. She told him that all Connie was saying are lies, but Father Tony, when asked if he finds the problem silly, replied that it was serious. Finally, she told him about the reason why she married Macho off to Connie. It was because she hated Connie for preventing her from running off with Macho for she has a responsibility to Connie who was still a child. Moreover, she told Father Tony that Connie really thinks that all the time Connie still loved her, she was already planning to destroy her daughter, but this was urgently stopped by Father Monson.

Later that night, Concha was remembering the time when she was fifteen, when she first met her first husband, Esteban Borrromeo – a handsome boy, a good painter, an activist. She married him but was widowed by his death. And then she met the abortionist, Dr. Manolo Vidal, after seeking help because she got pregnant by an effete writer and does not want to embarrass her father. After the abortion, she turned to religion with equal passion she displayed with earlier love affairs. But before she committed herself to God, Manolo Vidal came back into her life to court her, and later married her. On the other hand, The Monson brothers found Connie in their apartment and relayed the information that Macho wants to start from scratch with Connie wherever she might want to go as long as they are together. She insists that the knowledge of her two navels will scare him away. The Monson brothers think that she is using the delusion of having two navels in order to feel unique and disengage from her problematic life including an excuse for not confronting Macho about being her mother's former lover. She wants to be safe so she retreats from a fully lived life. The Monson brothers want her to reengage in her life in order to live a full, free, responsible life of her own choosing. Then, she wants the Monson brothers to confirm or refute her two navel delusion once and for all by stripping and letting them see for themselves whether or not she has two navels. Father Tony left Pepe to refute her two navel delusion which Pepe hesitantly complied to.

When Pepe discovered that Connie really had only one navel, her delusional world broke apart. Connie proceeded to do what he wanted to do – TO RUN AWAY – first toward the monastery. On her way, she remembered her bitter past and saw hallucinations of her family's destruction.

The flashbacks started when Connie was 5 years old. She went to a carnival and wanted her doll, Minnie, to see Biliken, the carnival god. Because the young Connie is such a spoiled brat, she wanted to have Biliken at home even going to the extent that she threw Minnie away and have to lie that it was stolen from her just to convince her mother to get Biliken for her. When she was 11, Connie was able to possess Biliken since Mr. Vidal considers Biliken to represent happy memories during the beginning of WWII before the war destroyed this joyous past. This was also the time when her mother had become so cold to her after returning home from Hong Kong. Her mother had left Manila without an explanation, the same with Macho Escobar, her mother's friend. With her mother's coldness, Connie converted her attention to Biliken idol which was kept in the orchard so that she can have a friend to be together with. When she became 14 years old, Connie was evacuated because the war was coming to Manila. At 15 years old, after the war, Connie and her family returned to their ruined house. She found Biliken in the orchard and was horrified seeing Biliken having two black holes at her stomach, making it look like two navels. Seeing the horrifying Biliken, Connie realized that her childhood was nothing as she thought it was – that it never was happy. She sees her past as horrible when she associated it with the love affair of Macho and her mother in the past that made her to be like that horrible monster. After her honeymoon with Macho, Connie discovered the love letters, which made her to seek Biliken, though she did not know how she had got there when she came.

In the final chapter, Kikay Valero, since she knows all the Filipinos in town, had the obligation to report to Concha about Connie's death and to comfort Tony for his father's sudden demise. Macho, showing his love for Connie, looked for her body during a storm. Concha, on the other hand, hides in the shadows of her room but did not mourn for her daughter for she does not consider herself guilty of her death. The Monson brothers think the real reason that Concha refuses to feel guilt is because she wants to continue to live with a semblance of normality by continuing to dress up as though nothing has happened. Meanwhile, Tony felt guilty over Connie's death because he had pushed her to seek the truth. He quitted his priesthood so he could not destroy other Connie's. Rita, on the contrary, grew mad at Father Tony's decision of quitting as a priest just because of Connie's death. She even grew angrier when she found out that Connie is not dead and has eloped with Paco because she knows Mary will be suffering too if she knows about it. This revelation was written by Connie in her letter to Pepe before she went off with Paco.

In the final moments before her car flew off the cliff, Connie was able to escape and this escape made her desire of a life well-lived. By throwing her mother's handbag, she also threw the influence her mother has over her. Instead of going to the monastery, as advised by Father Tony himself, Connie went to celebrate the living in the city, and when she did not know where she would go, Connie ended up in the Monson's apartment. There, she met Dr. Monson and asked forgiveness for betraying the past. Dr. Monson also asked forgiveness for not living in the present. After this reconciliation of the past, Connie felt saved and free, while Dr. Monson died in this encounter with a smile on his face because he has already reconciled with the present. After her visit with Dr. Monson, Connie bumped into Paco and fell to his embrace. He recognized that Connie was the haunted girl he feared and had fought with but now he sees Connie's face as Mary's and remembers Mary's face as the one haunted. They decided to go to Macao and then leave their partners behind. While Rita objected to this, Father Tony believes Connie did the right thing. Another soul must sacrifice for one soul to be free. She chose Paco to leave her delusion caused by Macho and Concha's love affair. She needs to do the wrong thing to save herself. She can find redemption through sinning, for "without sin there can be no repentance---and, therefore, no upheaval for transfiguration or growth of the spirit." Pepe told Tony that they helped Connie have a courage to live though they do not yet know the outcome of her new found freedom will be the key to her salvation or damnation.

At the end, Macho shot Concha then himself and they both died.