



**miniMAG**

*issue94*  
libations



## Crypsters in Chartreuse

Pixie Bruner

We deserve the hemlock cocktail, chartreuse like absinthe, nigh-fluorescent, want it served in an antique last survivor from a service for eight Waterford crystal snifter, or a repurposed octagonal goldfish bowl, with dry ice, paper parasols and tajin-dusted fruit kabob skewers on the goddamn glass rim.

In 1990, my prom photo rocked an emerald green and cobalt blue brocade Scarlett O'Hara ball gown with dyed to match painful kitten heels that contrasted with my accidental Robert Smith of The Cure hair style and scuffed white Reeboks I switched to.

Soon before 9/11, you made the NYC migratory writing life pilgrimage, lived in a 5 person apartment and you rocked a graphic tee (Damn, you were hot even then) before they were cool in an NYC bar photo.

Okay, so we dye our hair like Type O negative songs. You're prematurely white beneath it, it's still my natural color except for 20 or so snow white wires that stand out from my curls as if electrified. Sometimes it's "Enchanted Forest" green tinted, the whites turn metallic teal in my black curls.

You write Southern-fried Horror and neo-noir, I write a lot of poetry. I said enough there. Fucking crypsters.

On our first date, made for the same weekend as me replying to your message, because you scared me by being so attractive and possibly not real, I hesitated for Summer and through Autumn until December, I did everything "wrong" and like it was still the 1990's and last century. I wore all black and Crocs.

We both lied about our ages on the app, (you said you were 48, I claimed 42) and were relieved we were only a year and 4 months apart in age and were actually in our very early 50's.

I let you pick me up in your car (a Mitsubishi Eclipse old enough that it just

became legal to drink in America) at my house, got into your car, and let you drive. I paid for lunch. Then we came back to my apartment and binge-watched Sandman on Netflix. You have the graphic novels with stickers from The Strand bookstore still, where you once worked). A ten-hour first date. We still didn't wind up in bed.

Until the next date, the very next day, you made dinner and invited me over. We broke every modern dating rule ever. Hell yeah! It was Old Bay chicken. You now have more spices in the cabinet though. We shared the same international market blue and white oval plate at dinner standing at the breakfast bar counter because the seats are for the cats (10 months later, we still do exactly this each meal). I left when you left for work and slept over. I actually could sleep with you there too.

You were real. Goddamn amazing. But I wore Crocs, FFS! You had much longer prettier hair than me. We carry canvas bags to the store. Farmers Markets on weekends, three cats, such clichés we are! Your family even loves me (and I love them dearly in kind).

We deserve to drink hemlock. Cocktails glowing deadly and chartreuse. Fucking Crypsters.





# Rotten Chicken

K. R. Hartley

“We lounged! Oh, how we lounged! Didn’t we?” She draped herself over the chaise.

“And how! We lounged as if we might never get the chance again.”

“Oh!” She perked. “You know that sort of thing is just what I live for! Roger! Let’s run away to the Alps! Lounging is so wonderful in the Alps!”

Roger entered from a door with a martini. “I made a martini. Fran, would you like a martini?”

She spun and swung her legs off the chaise and stood. “I would unequivocally—and I say this with as much immediacy as I can possibly muster under these conditions—*adore* a martini.”

He sipped and hissed and smiled. “Bernard? Princess?”

Bernard leaned over his shoulder from his chair. “Roger, what was the name of that unordinary chap down at the quay who sold buckets of chum with the little bindles of ecstasy? Remember that his name was most curious? Quendelyn Q? Vermeer Haircut, or

something? My goodness don't you think that Fran's dish reminds you of that chap's petrol kiosk fare? We enjoyed it when we returned from the crabbing, if you could call it enjoyment. Remember? Funny chap in any case. Uncanny. My goodness that was an ecstatic trip. Quite literally, wasn't it? The waves were rather high that night. Not just the waves, mind you. The true wilding of our spirits we suffered that night. And much maligned of whatever sea gods ruled over our trap line. We did not respect the ocean that evening, no. We gave to raucous weeping on that sloop, I dare say, myself upon the bow and you astern. Much more than we bargained for on that one. And I dare say we were lucky to return in one piece."

"One piece of shit! We were nearly drowned! That was an awful crabbing!"

"And the record that night—"

"Brochelli, I believe. Or perhaps Kasparakarov."

"Yes! Kasparakarov!"

"I rather disdained that crabbing, Bernard. I'm ashamed that you brought it up." He stood and left the room.

"I quite enjoyed it. Brazen asunder, mainstay in the deep, loosed like some torpedo to hell."

Roger returned with another martini and placed it on an end table. "I actually made two, so you'll have to fight to the death over this one."

Fran came to him, her gown slipping from her neck. She wore a glass pendant. She touched it with her fingers. "Roger, do you like my necklace? I bought it today. Do you like it?" She pulled up the martini and tasted it and turned to Bernard. "And are you suggesting that my quiche is kiosk fare? I'll have you know that I resent that unqualified remark. I followed a rather uncommon and fortuitously requisitioned recipe for that quiche and I can guarantee with conviction that it isn't anything remotely similar to something you might just—*slosh* yourself upon at some kiosk. And by the way, aren't you rather vested in kiosks? How could you compare the two?"

"Obviously."

Roger stepped away and went to the chaise and sat. "Yes, I rather do like the necklace. I would have said something but I hesitated to."

"Let's play a game!" Princess moaned from the sofa.

Fran wafted her martini in the air as she spoke at him. "Bernard, how could you? You know I'm so very proud."

"I apologize, my lovely hummingbird. I was simply comparing the actual dish itself. The porcelain. Not the quiche, the porcelain."

Roger sipped. "I believe his name was Wrecks With an X, however the actual Wrecks word of the name was spelled with a CK. Odd, yes?"

Princess turned her head. "His name was Rex?"

"Wrecks With an X, however the actual Wrecks word of the name was spelled with a CK."

"Oh, curious! So his name was spelled improperly?"

"Hm? Improperly? No, darling, that *was* his name."

"Rex with an X?"

"No, darling. It was Wrecks With an X, however the actual Wrecks word of the name was spelled with a CK."

She paused and spoke slowly. "Rex with an X, but spelled wrong."

Roger shifted in his seat and folded his legs and put down his martini. "I'm going to clap my hands, then say the chap's full name, then clap my hands again." He clapped. "Wrecks With an X, however the actual Wrecks word of the name was spelled with a CK." He clapped once more and smiled and took up his martini.

"Rex with an X, however the actual Rex part of the name is spelled with a CK..."

"*Word*, not part, and *was*, not *is*. And I believe the word *With* was capitalized according to his birth certificate. Which I still have by the way."

"Which *with*?"

"With which what?"

"No, to which *with* were you referring?"

"To which what was I referring?"

"The word *with*."

Roger squinted and tilted his head. "To which *with* within what was I referring?"

"The spelling of the chap's name."

"Oh! No, only the first *With* was capitalized, I believe."

Fran drank and laughed. "Oh do fetch that. That would be a delightful piece of memorabilia."

"Heavens, no. I believe it's rather a crime to possess that document. It doesn't belong to me. Further to the point, the crabbing was terrible in any regard and I'd rather not continue to endure its memory. Let's change the subject."

Princess looked at her watch. "Far too early to change the subject. We haven't even eaten."

Bernard stood and began across the room. "Perhaps I'll play a record."

"Whatever you do, don't traumatize me with any Kasparakarov."

"Acknowledged." He stepped away.

"I'll be back." Roger stood and left.

The women lounged while the room smeared itself with a cool sage and an array of candles twinkled atop various furniture, desks, books on tables, a grand piano. A record struck up from nearby and Bernard returned with a grin on his face.

“Oh, I do love this one.” Fran finished her martini and put it down. “Bernard can you fetch me another?”

His grin soured. “Where’s Roger?”

“He’ll be back.”

“Oh, that’s a shame. The very beginning is the most traumatic part.”

“I do love this one. Quite so. Reminds me of being whirled about somehow.”

“We were, darling! We were quite literally whirled apart from the vessel at one point.”

Roger came through. “Worlds apart from what—oh, Bernard! Kasparakarov? You know how devastating this is for me!”

Princess lifted her finger. “Bernard, I thought your last name was *Von Platt*?”

He skipped away, giggling. “Okay, I won’t change it, but I shall dial down the amplitude.”

“Amplitude.”

“Pardon me.”

“I said *amplitude*.”

“No, I was excusing myself for the mistake.” He leaned into the player and touched it and returned. “*Von Trapp*.”

“I suppose you were rather requesting an excuse, yes?”

“Rather.”

“What were we worlds apart from?”

“I was saying we were whirled apart from the sloop during that fateful crabbing that you insist on reliving by asking about it.”

“I’ve come to terms with the crabbing. I’m no longer ashamed.” Roger pointed at his friend and sat on the sofa. “But I’ll still kill you dead.”

“I believe it!”

Roger produced an envelope and removed a slip of parchment and placed it between them onto a coffee table. “For your consideration.”

Fran walked to the table and took up the paper and inspected it. “Wrecks With an X, however the actual Wrecks word of the name was spelled with a CK. And it’s true, the *Wrecks* portion of the name *is* in fact spelled with a CK. And curiously enough, Wrecks begins with a W.” She gestured toward Princess. “And only the first *With* is

capitalized.”

Bernard laughed. “I assume the first *Wrecks* is capitalized. What about the second instance of the word?”

She looked closer. “There is only one *word* and it is not capitalized.”

“One word? You just mentioned that the first *With* was.”

“Yes, but none of the *words*, of which there is only one.”

“Is *With* not a word?”

“There is only one word and it’s referring to *Wrecks*.”

“Oh, I see. Fair enough. I was referring to the second instance of the word *Wrecks*, not the single *word* referring to the first.”

“That’s a rather private inquiry, by the way. Don’t you think?”

Bernard turned to Roger who turned to Fran who looked between them. Roger spoke. “It rather is.”

Bernard went wideeyed. “Really? Well! Pardon me.”

“I said *it rather is*.”

Fran stepped back and lifted her empty glass. “Do forgive him, Roger. And fetch me another, will you?” She brought the birth certificate to her face and studied it.

Roger scowled playfully at Bernard and put down his drink and stood and stepped to Fran and accepted the glassware and left. She crossed the room and draped herself once more over the chaise. The record flourished and settled and came to a soft waltz. Princess sighed loudly and lifted a leg and lowered it again. Roger returned with two martinis and handed them to both Bernard and Fran and sat again beside Princess.

“And the second *Wrecks* is spelled with a CK as well.” She squinted.

“That’s awfully private.”

“Oh. Rather. Excuse me.”

“You’re excused. So, the Alps. Quite comfortable lounging, have they?” Roger drank.

“Dramatically so!” She sipped and put down the document.

“Did you lounge while you were there?”

She threw herself, preserving her drink. “Oh! God! We lounged!”

“Careful hummingbird, you nearly fell off your chair.” Bernard tried his drink and winced and put it down. “Muhammad’s eye! That’s a stiff one!”

“I’m quite alright. It’s not my first time exalting the virtues of lounging in the Alps.”

“But have you ever done so while drinking such a stiff one? And perched precariously so?”

“Quite alright. Thank you.”

“I’ve not been.” Roger raised his drink and closed an eye and peered through the glass into the wavering light.

“You must.”

“I shall.”

“You must.”

He looked at her. “Yes, Fran, I shall.”

Princess sat up. “A game!”

“Okay!” Bernard adjusted himself and cleared his throat. “I am going to say a word, and I want you all to suggest it’s opposite. And I



shall choose my favorite opposites to the word and select a winner. The first word that we shall suggest opposite words for is: *Right*.”

Princess bounced and raised her hand. “Oh! I know! *Wrong!*”

“Left?” Roger raised an eyebrow and smirked.

Fran looked aside and returned. “Let’s go with—*tip*.”

“I dare say tip is my favorite among those!” They all raised their glasses and drank except for Princess who stood and walked out of the room.

“Great job, Fran. The next word is: Blue.”

Princess called to them from the kitchen. “Green!”

“I’d say it’s yellow.”

“Fools. He’s looking for the word *happy*.”

“Indeed I was. Fran wins again.”

“Oh, I get it now.”

“She takes the advantage by suggesting last.”

“I do not!” She frowned and scoffed.

“Next word: Breakfast.”

The three of them sat and stared at one another in silent consideration for several extended moments punctuated by the turning of a head, a finger to the chin. Princess entered with a martini and sat again and sipped and spoke. “Supper.”

Roger mulled a moment more. “Exercise?”

Bernard pointed at him. “Not bad.”

Fran raised her glass. "Starvation."

Bernard turned his head in thought and came back. He raised his glass to hers with a clink and nodded.

Roger shook his head. "Seriously?"

Fran and Bernard both took a sip and lowered their arms. He winced and placed his glass down and shrugged. "It was a good answer. You know I have a penchant for the overtly melodramatic."

"One more."

"Okay, one more. Let's see. How about: Dandelion."

"Daisy."

"Dahlia."

Fran searched herself before she put up a finger. "*Rotten chicken.*"

Bernard raised an eyebrow. "I'm sorry, Fran. That makes no sense. I suppose in this case I'll have to settle for *dahlia*. Which I will say is a victory for you in a literal sense only, Roger."

"A win is a win is a win!"

"Shame. You'll figure it out during your next shower. I guarantee." Fran finished her martini and put it down and hissed and let out a little shout. "Wow! May I have another?"

Roger stood and left the room and returned with a glass bottle and put it on the coffee table and sat. "Big Ben."

"Is this gin?" Fran took up the bottle.

"That's Big Ben."

"Am I expected to drink this?"

"No, Fran, you're expected to *fuck* it. Of course! Drink the damn gin! Who are you, Sister Mary Margaret?"

She uncorked the bottle and swung it over her head and guzzled it, one second, two seconds, three seconds long. She came back and made a noise and shook her head and stoppered the bottle and replaced it onto the table. They all spread their eyes at her in disbelief. "What?" She coughed and smiled.

"That was disgusting."

"Actually, Roger. I feel rather *gusted*."

"My suggestion to fuck the gin was made in jest."

She turned to Bernard and touched her pendant. "Do you like my necklace? I bought it today."

He tilted his head and shrugged. "Not especially."

She turned to Roger. "It's not the same. You know, there are only two ingredients. It's not very difficult to do."

He stood and left and returned with a green bottle and offered it to her and sat.

She accepted the bottle and opened it and sipped it and replaced it before she took up the gin and opened it and drank it as well and put it down. She let out a loud breath. "Yes. Much better."

Bernard leaned back. "My darling, you may not be a nun, but it doesn't mean you have to act like some liquored sow."

Her mouth dropped and her eyes grew wide.

"We haven't even eaten."

Her face returned to normal and she took another sip of each bottle and coughed and spoke. "Are you going to shoot him or not?"

Roger gestured. "We had tentatively agreed to duel after dinner, however I suppose we could duel sooner. Bernard?"

He lifted his glass. "To my drunken sow of a wife." He drank.

Roger turned to him. "We've been having an affair if it makes you feel any better."

"Let's wait until after dinner."

"As you wish." Roger stood and gathered the parchment and placed it back into the envelope and wagged it in his hand. "Rather a crime to possess this, I'm sure. Doesn't even belong to me." He left the room.

"So you fell clean off the boat?"

"Clean off. And not just once. I'm telling you, it was marvelous. Surprised that I never mentioned it before."

Fran sampled the bottles again and squealed and reclined. Roger returned holding a pistol in each hand and placed them both down onto the table and left again. The record stopped. He returned. Bernard gestured at the weapons and spoke.

"I said that I preferred to wait until after we've eaten to duel."

"Well. Now, that's just the thing, see. I'm not so certain that we should duel at all. I might sooner prefer to kill you in cold blood."

"Whatever for, old friend?"

"Call it a stroke of inspiration." Roger smiled.

"Well! I never!"

"Would you mind very much acquiescing such a notion?"

"I should say not!" Bernard stood.

"You mean say *so*." Roger sat. "No cause for offense."

"Why have you brought two guns if your intention was to dispatch me in dishonor?"

"It wasn't my intention, Bernard, calm yourself. I merely suggested the murder. If you'd prefer to duel, I acknowledge and accept your decision."

"Then why two guns?"

"I just told you. So that we can duel."

“Oh.” Bernard blinked. “Right. Well, if I’m to die, I might as well not procrastinate.” He took up a pistol and left the room and Roger did the same and followed. After a moment, their voices could be heard arguing, angry curses. Noise quickly ensued from another room, a struggle, a broken glass, pots and pans, before the loud crack of pistolfire, a single shot. Both men returned to the room and replaced their pistols onto the table and sat. Bernard’s chest was red with blood and shining wet. His hair was slicked to the side and sweat formed on his brow. “Well. I’m shot.”

“Rather.”

“Good aim.”

Fran drank the gin, then the vermouth, and then the gin again. She spat on the floor and hissed and came back. “Bernard. You’ve really went and been shot? Just now?”

“I’m afraid so, hummingbird. Roger may have murdered me while we were in the drawing room.”

“Drawing room? That was the billiards. Why on earth would there be darts in the drawing room?”

“That’s actually a secret lockbox disguised as a dart board.” He clutched his chest and hiccuped and put his hand down again. “I’ve seen you open it.”

“A safe? You’re implying that a drawing room is an appropriate place for a safe?”

“Not at all, which is why you chose it.”

Roger took up his drink and finished it before he tossed the chalice behind him. “Touché.” It hit the floor in a smash and he reached across the table and took up Bernard’s martini and finished it and did the same. Princess stood up to gooseneck the damage and sat again. Fran addressed her.

“Should one of us murder the other as well?”

“I’d rather not.” She shook her head. “It’s still early but perhaps it is a good time to change the subject.”

Bernard slumped onto his side and coughed and some blood issued from his nose and he mumbled something.

Fran leaned forward. “What was that? I didn’t quite catch what you said.”

“Rotten chicken.” He curled his hand and put his thumb up and let it down again. She and Roger exchanged glares and Princess took up her glass and sipped and put it down.

“Well? Should we go through?”

“I suppose we should, it’s become rather boring, hasn’t it?”

“Well—”

“Well?”

“What is it then, quiche?”

“Not just any quiche. Rather important quiche.”

“Okay then.” Roger stood. “Are you coming, old friend?”

Bernard fell to the floor, his shoulders and back slick with blood. He trudged and groaned and drew his arms up onto the table and put up a knee, then another, and stood, bent and bracing against the wood. He stumbled and steadied himself.

“That’s the spirit.”

Bernard slowly stepped across the room and out, followed by the others, the tail party picking up the bottles and blowing out the candles. Fran spoke as they moved, admiring the snowy meadow from the large bay window and nodding in approval.

“I do say, your estate is rather beautiful this time of season, wouldn’t you agree?”

“Naturally.”





## Necromancer Explains His Kitchen

Terry Trowbridge

Every chef enjoys a smidgen of necromancy,  
turning dead things into food.

Some occultists make a mistake, and claim  
that cooking herbs are illusory fae glamour.  
Others, that cooking is the elemental spells of fire,  
at least, the human spells are, with bread  
modeled after lava flows, dried fruit harnessing the Sun.  
No doubt there are kernels of truth in both.

Every cookbook is a grimoire, though.  
Generations of herbalist records transform death  
into delicious, disassembly into dishes,  
bookmarked with family fingerprints and splotches.

Apprentices best remember that an oven is no catacomb  
and a laid table is not laid to rest. Beware:  
of the echoes of ghosts that can haunt your placemat,  
clang your dishes, appear in your kitchen steam,  
summoned by nothing more than a coincidental aroma  
or potent memory of tastes.

If an old wizened witch finds themselves easily haunted,  
set an extra place on the windowsill or porch step.  
If dinner parties are too easy to summon  
and the guests too stubborn to go home with exorcisms,  
then do not fail to leave a party invitation on gravestones  
on the deceased's birthdays, so that they can instead  
reply with regrets on the wind, so never feel left out.



# God Help the Woman

Sam Ceisler

“God help that woman,” Kaleigh heard one man whisper as she made her way towards the patio gates.

“What kind of man starts a fight at a kombuchery?” another man murmured.

“What kind of man starts a fight at a kombuchery and loses so handily?” a louder man replied. She cried as she stepped out onto the sidewalk, where her boyfriend, Andrew, crouched face down on his hands and knees, spitting up blood.

She bent down, sobbing, and grabbed Andrew by the shoulder to try to get him off the pavement. She tugged at his clothes as he slurred his way through more threats, but no one was listening. When she finally got him standing again, he swayed to the left, overcorrected, and fell hard to the other side, sprawling out like a starfish and further scraping his already bloodied hands.

The kombuchery customers watched and shook their heads. “A man like that has no place in Portland, Maine,” they seemed to be saying, “And a woman like that, who would date a man like that, has

no place at all.” Kaleigh got Andrew to his feet once again and started dragging him along down the hill, step after drunken step.

They walked along as Andrew mumbled to himself about “Those Fucking Bastards,” and Kaleigh softly cried. As per usual, he failed to ask if she was alright, and as per usual, she decided this would be the last straw. She would walk Andrew back to his apartment, find her things, and then be gone, never to be seen again. The sky above remained starless and black, and the blinking billboard above the Chapman Building read: “12:42 a.m. / 57 degrees.” It was an uncharacteristically cold night for mid-May, but there was nothing out of the ordinary about the way things had gone.

She fine-tuned her plan as they trudged towards Downtown from East Bayside. She’d send a breakup text after he fell asleep, and maybe only tend to his wounds a little bit, and then go. Still, how many times had she made those resolutions before— resolutions to be done with Andrew and all the deadbeats like him?

How many times before had she bailed on those dreams?

Prior to their trip to the kombuchery, Kaleigh had asked Andrew to take her out for dinner and drinks. He agreed to come along for dinner, but only partook in drinks, and dashed outside for a smoke and a phone call at the end of the meal, leaving Kaleigh to foot the bill for one salad, one plate of penne pasta, one margarita, and four gin and tonics.

So, tonight would be different. Tonight would be different. She’d finally make the change and take the leap, and as they climbed the stairs to Andrew’s apartment she thought, “This will be the last time we stumble up these creaking stairs,” and it sounded like *déjà vu*.

Andrew led ahead, pulling himself with the railing, stomping and undoubtedly waking up every man, woman, child, dog, cat and fish in the building. He probably woke up Ms. Reagan’s bunny rabbit in 2B too, which was a shame because Kaleigh knew all about Ms. Reagan’s rabbit, and she knew he needed his sleep.

Most mornings after Kaleigh stayed over at Andrew’s, she’d step onto the townhouse porch to kick herself, slowly drinking a cup of tepid coffee and barely tasting her menthol lite cigarette. Some of those days she’d catch Ms. Reagan bringing the garbage down, and then Ms. Reagan would stop and talk all about her rabbit. The rabbit filled the space after Ms. Reagan’s dear husband had died, and then Ms. Reagan would always say, “You look tired, Dear,” before heading back inside.

And Kaleigh was tired, each and every time. Tonight she was too as she breathed deep and closed her eyes, just for a moment, while Andrew opened the door and dropped his keys on the carpet and made straight ahead for the bed. He didn’t even have the power, or the

desire—or maybe it was the sobriety—to clean his wounds, or shirk his clothes, or brush his teeth like a grown up. Plus, passed out on his face like that, Kaleigh got worried he might throw up and choke. She'd seen him spew more than a few times in their few months together. And, even after all the disgusting, hypermasculine, pitiful and pointless amateur fights she'd been forced to watch and break up and clean up after, she winced seeing those fresh blood stains on those dirty sheets as she turned that Andrew onto his side.

Then, she turned around to leave, and saw the keys on the floor. So, she wouldn't be able to leave and then lock up after. Of course though, she'd faced that problem before. And of course though, there were those damn creaking stairs to think about, and poor Ms. Reagan's rabbit. And what couldn't be done in the morning— and poor bleeding Andrew— and of course she'd faced this problem before.

Kaleigh locked the door from the inside and curled up on the corner of the bed.



## Empty Glass

Michele Rule

*(with a nod to Dickens)*

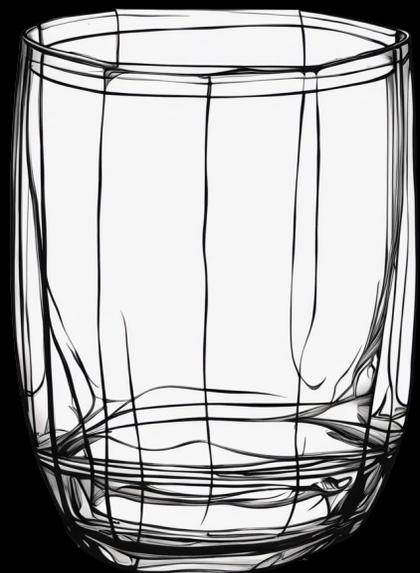
It was Christmas Eve  
when he came in late  
face pale, slight slur to his speech  
going on about the ghost  
in the bottom of his whiskey glass  
and I hoped this would be the night

Restless sleep and crying out  
dismayed by the visions  
from the ghost of Christmas past  
the happy youth and slow downward turn  
bottle after bottle

The Christmas present  
not presents  
but the images of lives  
carried with him on a trajectory  
of hidden flasks  
of late night bars  
of sitting alone in one corner  
the merriment of the season  
out of reach

The Christmas future  
just one for the road  
and then  
and then  
the sobbing and pleading  
and I hoped he would wake a changed man

But he didn't





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