

Liquid sapphires tumble into my martini glass. My saliva is hot against my tongue as I reach for it, sticky like candy left to melt on the dash of a car.

Cheers! Fellow patrons in matching goose-grey jumpsuits raise their glasses in salute. Their eyes, dirty like olives, remind me that here in this place, everyone is always half empty. I tip the glass forward, tongue stretching for the promised warmth.

The soothing facets disappear before they reach my mouth. The martini stem turns glacier-cool beneath my fingers, scorching me with its cruel authority. I jerk back and find myself surrounded by hundreds of stems, boxed off from the world by unending absolut rows of steel stemware.

I stumble back, reaching for the reassurance of another glass. Life seen from the bottom of the tumbler is a more glamorous portrait than even Renoir or Picasso could imitate.

But there is no glass, only the perpetual mockery of goose-grey jumpsuits and steel stemware. There is no escape, no southern comfort to be found in the depths of a bottle. I'm trapped, forced to wander in the haunted footsteps of long-dead Captains and their fruitless searches for crowns of royal worth.