

# Poetry Porch: Poetry

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## Maraschino Cherries

By Helen Heineman

*With apologies to Thomas Lux*

In our refrigerator, always  
there was a jar of Maraschino Cherries  
with a backup bottle  
on the pantry shelf.  
We lived in New York  
So we drank Manhattans,  
that agate-colored cocktail  
with a preserved cherry at the bottom.  
Whenever guests arrived,  
that was my father's welcome:  
"I'll just mix some Manhattans."  
But you never got more than one,  
at most a refill when your long-stemmed glass  
was half empty. One Maraschino cherry,  
that delicious bite at last.

My husband came from a teetotaling  
Midwestern family. His mother banned  
alcohol from her home, though his brothers  
stored six-packs on the back porch,  
during Indiana summers,  
often the only cool spot in the house.

When my husband first courted me,  
my father greeted him in the usual way,  
but after he took a single sip,  
I saw him pour it into a potted plant,  
which meant he got a refill right away,  
though what he did with that and the cherry  
I have no idea to this day.

Now, we live in Boston, where bartenders  
are vaguely hostile to Manhattans.  
You have to give instructions:

“Three vermouth to one whiskey, on the sweet side,  
straight up, with the dirty rocks on the side.”  
You have to ask for extra cherries,  
loving that extra sweetness,  
that ruby lit from within by neon red.

My father, who served me my first one  
when I was sixteen, knew it was more than color.  
a bitter sweetness as the cherry succumbs  
to your final bite.