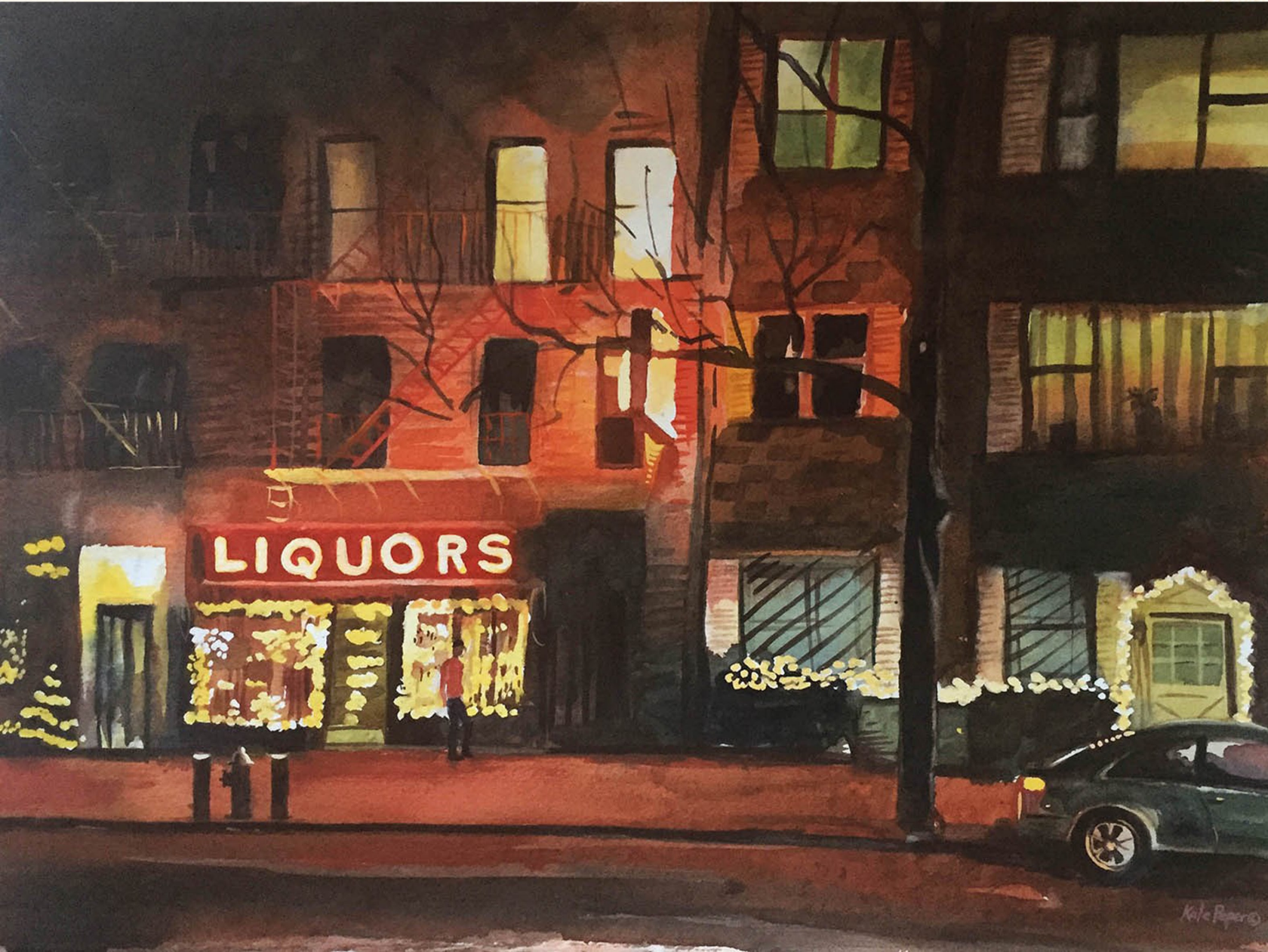


Cheer

by Sean Kelbley



The kid outside the liquor store is one of mine:
5th period, sits halfway back. Laughs at my puns,
but I should cross the street and scare him off.
How much of 17 is trying to stand convincingly

in places you're not old enough to be? He shifts
his weight, configures spine and mouth and brow
inexpertly. Experiments with where to put his arms
and stick his thumbs. I want to see if anybody

buys it. Or, I want to see the father of the kid come out,
the way my father, once a year for years, came smiling/
laughing out, and hear him joke about the "Naughty List,"
and watch him hoist a fifth of gin one-handed overhead

like it's the only gift worth getting. Then I want the kid
to disappear. Maybe he's old enough to drink with mom
and dad—Singapore Slings, before they tumble like a happy
pillow family down the street to Spanish Midnight Mass—

except, remembering the drink has got a funny name,
he'll giggle through the *Homilía*. I want him gone, but that
will happen soon enough. Like drinks and Mass with only
dad, and after that, just drinks with dad, and after that,

inheritance—a crate of dusty bottles: bitters, kirsch,
Grand Marnier. One Christmas Eve, a man will tell himself
there's time, there still is time to cross the street and go
inside before they lock up shop. To grab some cheer,

before it's just the glow of ornaments he's known for
30 years. Before it's just the light that shines through
other peoples' windows, when they're home.

Image: "Open All Night" by Kate Peper. "Cheer" was written by Sean Kelbley for *Rattle's* Ekphrastic Challenge, January 2020, and selected as the Editor's Choice.