

Rebecca Weigold

Message in a bottle

New York City sidewalks swell in summer a torrent of people who pay the street vendors to pull *Pure Life* from their icy coolers. Men and women swill bottled chemicals unaware their reproductive systems will dry up within years and they will flood the fertility clinics. In Brooklyn, blue and white caps spring open, acorns sprouting bottles into plastic heaps the size of a fifty year

Ailanthus. There's Deet and Primadone in the tap water. The carp and sunfish in the Passaic are tainted with Agent Orange. Worn-out washing machines, obsolete computers, and used tires flank the banks of the Ohio. Empty Sherwin-Williams cans cover the earth. Lake Michigan is a dirty sponge of e.coli and the microfibers of laundered fleece.

In Atlanta, groves of broken-down buses, Datsuns and Desotos rust away in mangled tree limbs. Aluminum is the kudzu consuming the southern landscape. Kansas farmers roll up their fields into styrofoam bales. Migratory birds halt their flights to feast on the landfills. Texans dump their ashtrays into the roadside wildflowers: the

bluebonnets and Indian Blankets. Lady Bird weeps. Though California traffic lurches forward by inches LA sits miles away shrouded in its fumes and guttural noise. The beaches are scrapyards of oiled and burnt flesh. Cigarette butts and urban runoff churn in the sand. Empty bottles tumble ashore on the Pacific's blue and white swells, announcing the beginning of a thousand-year anarchy.

The wine we make with which we're made drunk

We harvest our differences like zinfandel grapes,
plucking ripe clusters of opinion
preparing for crushing.
We examine their skins. For this wine
the mold is what we want, the sour taste,
the bite of disagreement.
Changing a mind makes a good batch.
One can muster accolades, win awards.

Though grapes are not what we press
its juices flow the same depth of red
as our angry cheeks and bitter tongues.
Every topic is a bottle to be retrieved
from the cellar, opened and poured:
Climate change. Same-sex marriage. Abortion.
Democrat or Republican? Left or Right?
Foreign or Domestic? Mac or PC?

We raise our glasses to begin
and end by shattering them in the fireplace.
We open our mouths too much
stuttering our positions, slurring insults,
shutting our mouths in defiance.
Vinegary words coil like tendrils,
suspended on toxic vines.
We turn away from one another,

swirling refined poison on our tongues,
swallowing opulent judgments.
Drinking with the husband, the wife, the neighbor
proves unfruitful so we turn to our phones,
our laptops, our Kindles, and ferment the
pleasant chatter of friends and strangers,
pressing still until our marriages, our friendships
are the pulp that remains on the treading floor.

When you get home from work

At seven a.m. I am stirred awake
by the turn of a key in the front door.
I hear then smell rain
and the room is awash with light.
I rub my eyes.
Even your shirt looks whiter than
it did last night when you
sipped the coffee,
picked up the briefcase,
kissed me goodbye.
You slip in next to me and I nestle
my breasts into your back,
touch your hair with sleepy fingers.
Bach's *Arioso* comforts both of us
like your just-laundered cotton tee-shirt.
The fringe of the night brushes lightly
against our lashes
as a passing car tears the wet morning
from the street, slings it
to the steps like
a paperboy delivering the Post.
I whisper my never-ending love for you
as together we drift away under
our gently unfolding umbrella of sleep.