

Poems

Phoebe Wang

PSA

It's hard to imagine the world could be
so far gone when everyone in the neighborhood's doing their best

to keep their highland terrier from ruining someone's
freshly painted exterior. Someone's sacrificing

his Saturday to deadheading spent perennials,
getting down on his hands and knees. His white hydrangeas

nod their approval. They still think highly of themselves,
while boxes kneel on the sidewalk and proffer old issues

of *Canadian Living*, *Cottage Life* and *Farmers' Almanac*;
beside washed-out wide-mouthed quart jars ideal

for those one-dish weekday meals that are poured, reheated,
and served. Some woman yanks aside her kid the moment

before his pink lemonade popsicle sticks
to someone's vintage messenger, the one with the treasured

patina money can't buy. Wild salmon's half-off,
home-grown freestone peaches are now available

by the flat, basket or bushel, and the man ahead in line
has remembered, thank God,

to toss his reusable shopping bags into the trunk.
"Don't let mommy see you do that," as his daughter finds

a stage atop the paving stones. She'd like to be
the entertainment, not the entertained. Forecasters predict

another El Nino, and conditions this winter will be
near-normal, or below-normal, depending on

who you ask. Sorry to bring it up.

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There's no public alerts in effect at this time,

no cause for alarm. The satellites have our back,
and someone takes a break from writing his screenplay

long enough to look out the 3rd floor window
to watch a guy sorting through the bounty

of DVDs free for the taking. Everyone's looking forward
to another season of that serial drama

full of fantasy elements and bloodletting. The lady next door warns,
"Prepare for the worst." Her husband says, "there's nothing

much worth watching." His buddy agrees. "Remind me
to cancel my subscription."

Visiting Relatives

You always say we never go anywhere
 so let me take you on a journey, a spiritual
 journey of sorts—since I know you're constantly searching
 for ways to improve yourself. You won't need
 to bring anything, or pack anything.
 I've already bought the necessary gifts, fruits in season, etc.
 and even though no one will expect anything of you
 I'll teach you the proper greetings
 on the way there, carried like bits of lint or dust
 across the packed nucleus of the city and out the other side
 where the butt-end of shipping centers
 flaunt their dark mouths. We'll disembark
 at the wind-kicked end of the line
 and you'll bemoan that eyesore of a mall
 and immortalize the graffiti tags legible
 even through windows befuddled as a lake bottom.
 I'll try to translate the neon characters
 in the restaurant signs, which mostly contain
 lucky numbers and lucky animals, as if referencing
 good fortune would send it showering from clammed-up skies.
 I feel I should warn you that when we arrive
 at the desert rose coloured house with its Legoland
 trees and oversized garage I might disappear
 upstairs to help my cousin with his geography essay
 and you won't know whether the big leather sofa
 is for sitting on for just for display
 since everyone's in the other living room
 snacking on something in small bowls
 even though in 20 minutes we'll be piling into cars
 and heading to one of those cavernous restaurants
 where the cups are heavier or smoother or harder to hold
 than the ones you're used to, and the waiters don't ask
 after your meal but glide up like robot vacuum cleaners
 and when someone asks me about my job or my parents
 I'll shout my answer for the benefit
 of the old people wearing hearing aids like misshaped pearls
 and my voice will drop and become richer
 when I talk in a dialect that neither of us learned
 in schools but that I've picked up
 the way a net picks up by-catch when it's dragged
 along tattered coral beds. Of course I'll do my best
 to explain everything
 in advance because once we get there

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my mouth will be full of tiny bones and slivers
of something aromatic that I don't know the name of
and won't get to taste again for however long
it'll take us to get here the next time.

Phoebe Wang is the author of *Occasional Emergencies*, a chapbook which was published by Toronto's Odourless Press in 2013. Her poems and reviews have also appeared in *Arc Poetry*, *Canadian Literature*, *CV2*, *Descant*, *Grain*, *Malahat Review*, *Ricepaper Magazine* and *Diaspora Dialogues' TOK 6: Writing the New Toronto* anthology. She is currently completing a book of poetry titled *Admission Requirements*. She was the 2015 winner of Prism International Poetry contest.