

THREE POEMS



Jane Yeh

DOUBLE WEDDING, 1628

*Anne of Austria, sister of Philip IV, to Louis XIII of France;
Isabella of Bourbon, sister of Louis XIII, to Philip IV of Spain*

We are laced taut
As an archer's bow strung with catgut, a lean

& deadly spring to the touch. At each breath
Our stomachs press whalebone, seven bent fingers

Stiff as our own ribs & wrapped in linen, leaving
The fine print of their weave on our skin. We are wired

For great things & small movements, hooped
To glide like gigantic orchids, full-

Blown, slow-footed, & deliberate
In error. Afterwards we will bear the strange marks

Of another house, gold arms on a gold collar,
But for now *no other jewels hang about our necks*

Than these: pearls knotted with string, clasped
With velvet & fitted just long enough

To choke us. This day will slip from us
Shedding marquissette, point d'esprit, zibelline, trailing

Taffeta & broché behind it; it will leave us bare-
Handed & desperate to remember what we were

Before it, & it will take everything we have
To recollect what we wore when we walked

The length of the nave without stopping, how we kept
Our eyes straight & unturning until it was over.

BLUE CHINA

My signs all point to a singular disposition. How shatteringly
unpleasant
It is to be born under Sèvres, some doddering holdover
From the *ancien régime*. Weaknesses: vainglory, powder. Those
additionally
Half-cusped in Lenox are said to be ill-suited

For industry, desirous of stately homes, & fickle in the extreme.
To be avoided:
Balconies, timepieces. In the Great Fire
Of 1666, glazing reversed itself & ran down the window-panes
Until every piece of bottle-bottomed glass

Fell out: a dripping Restoration. The curlicues of iron
remained
Red-hot & glowing in their frames, a line of crowns
Across the façade of each building. That night clocks rang out
in succession
To wake the city where every new chiming-in

Meant another block had gone up, & the spreading pattern of
bells
Was a map of the movement of the burning constellation
As it spilled through the streets, westward & processional. It
was seven thousand
Eight hundred & twenty-two o'clock when it ended.

My descent can be traced to a flawed set of plate—Delft in
retrograde,
Wedgwood rising—a most unfortunate condition. Inclined
towards:
Misplacement of items, a high degree of fury. At the collapse of
the Brighton Pavilion
In 1809, the varnish on the underside of the roof

Gave way first, cracking along fault-lines in a series of thin
smiles
Until they covered the ceiling. The painted
Cupids & French roses began missing pieces
At spots that marked where the weakening wood

Was liable to gap. The spars went down like ribbons on their
heads,
Feathered & curling into splinters under pressure,
Unseating sixteen dozen white candles from their chandeliers
so that
The flames rose up above the ring of columns

To make another roof: a blinding coronation.
My ruling planet is on course for an unsettling destination,
Mid-orbital & revolving—certain of collision.
The wobble in Dresden predicts a trial by fire.

Every day it gets harder to live up to it.

CORRESPONDENCE

I've gotten nothing for weeks. You might think of me

As dated in a blue housecoat, buttoning & unbuttoning,
Waiting you out: I have my ways

Of keeping time. When your letter comes, dogs will bark
Up & down the street. The tomatoes in the garden

Will explode like fireworks. Each day the mailman passes
In a reverie, illiterate, another cobweb

Grows across the door. Picture me
Going bald one hair at a time, combing & curling, burning

My hand on the iron once every hour: I like to
Keep myself busy. When I hear from you, *aurora*

Borealis will sweep across the sky. Every lottery ticket in my
drawer
Will win. Even the mailman will know the letters

Of your name. If you bothered to notice, you would see me
Turning to gold rather slowly, bone

By bone, the way teeth come
Loose from the gums, the way animals go

Extinct, in geological time.