

New Poetry: “Layla’s first buck” by Denise Jarrott



her father said it was his favorite thing about her, that she was a hunter, like he is.
she holds its head up for the picture. she wears an orange

hat. now the deer
unfolds from itself like the fortune telling paper folded and
labeled with
possible outcomes. the deer's eyes dark and its body flat. I
was not so calm

at death as she. she is twelve now. I remember when I was
twelve, when I began
to take notice of men, thought if I was pure enough they could
never
touch me, that I'd float away on quiet feet if they got too
close. I'd just go upward,
and utterly silent. some animals piss on themselves to deter

predators, I didn't brush my hair, I wore ugly underwear my
mother purchased
for me in plastic bulk, I focused my gaze upward with my heart
hot in my throat.

Layla, it is around this time you discover the existence of
horrible people,
men with gray lips with spit foaming at the edge of their
mouths,

the looks on the faces of girls you know that will feel like
acid, their laughter
will eat at you the same way acid does and they are casual
with it. You will begin to recognize the wedge-faced boys with
big teeth and a sour smell, like sweat and milk,
you will learn that everything you do feeds their hunger.

I wonder if you will want to be far away, just somewhere else
on the other side of the world, or perhaps in a forest where
you
wake in a tent or in a shelter of branches. I wonder if you
will

want to be in a city, in an all-white apartment of your own,
those

apartments that I know don't exist that look like the netsuke
one sees
now and again in museums, those little curls of bone. I wonder
if you will
want to wake in your blue bedroom with a glass of water next
to you, full of still

bubbles where the air got in. Layla, I will not tell you to
freeze yourself as you are, to preserve time for anyone to
spoon out your youth into a jar and graze against time with
your feet. You will grow, you will come to know your own
capabilities as some people come to know the positions of
stars, or how to speak another language.

It is not for me to whisper to you across this divide.

Photo Credit: Smithsonian Society