

# New Poetry by Denise Jarrott



Rembrandt's Susanna and the Elders, pen and brown ink,  
1650-1652

*manhunt*

will I always be poor

always a slowing of small

pittings where roots were

milkweed

meadowsweet

rue or

pink lilies on a backdrop dark, blooming

rather against than next to

themselves vibrating

against the black soil deep as a hole

in the ground and quick to wither, water

swell into a dawn dark, then day

the horizon a series of holes and oaks

the field dressed as deer

as viper

as garden

as the sun red as fish mouths in Iowa  
in summer while here I keep my eye to the scope  
to the fourth county over  
to the fielded to the fallow now  
I can scale up a wall now  
I am pressing my hair against the sap of a tree I have learned  
now  
I will not be free will I always be with Iowa where I was  
exposed grass flat land grazed like a comb through my wet hair  
my six years  
body folded  
up in the towel  
of okoboji  
where I learned  
to fear my god  
given ability  
to see snakes  
dark ropes  
in the dark  
soil the darkness from  
which the honey-gold  
the sweet

corn springs tall  
springs bright springs  
sweet  
water  
no, I am not  
a farmer's daughter  
though my grandmother  
was my grandmother  
gold and black teeth she  
was the child of a farmer  
she ate nothing but corn she  
thinks not of herself  
no I am not my father's  
daughter spring-  
loaded the metal somehow  
always cold is this  
supposed to make me  
feel safe colt  
number to give me peace the kind  
I could  
rest in if I  
wanted to I wanted

to my father

points a smith

and wesson a remington

at a shape

at a man

at an outline

of a boyfriend

of a starling, of a squirrel

the only way to feel safe is to sleep

with death between your knees between your teeth

with death under

the bed as if in the yellow light of farmhouses

you'd win you'd know

what to do you'd hold

death against their heads you'd keep

death hidden in a closet in a chest

you'd keep it near you'd keep us all

alive

I learned no poisonous snakes live in Iowa no lions no sharks  
just men

made of leather lubricated laughter killdeer

nested in the rocks at the water

plant was I not always

looking

to be approached by a colt by

a steer, not looking to see a streak of orange move across my  
line

of vision not looking

to meet god in a grove,

in a field in a cave by a river

Io a white bull with clover

in my fist as defense fed

held out circled in looking out

at a pocked horizon at a land I loved only because it was  
wounded from whose hand I fed on meat so red it made me cramp  
my body seized like a fist

I swum out to the middle of the lake I played

a game I spent

my money in another place I placed

a bet my body made

of golden tickets of air heavy as water isn't there

a place where a body is supposed to end isn't there

someone I'm supposed to find

a soft wavering, a shimmering

a minnow, a mouth

a how and a why, a wren,

a winnowing, a face,  
I could wipe, hair I could brush  
I could feed it food and the food would go away  
alive even when I wasn't looking

## AUTOMATA

My new job is to exchange one thing for another,  
My new job is to install veils between the wealthier members  
of the audience and my compatriots. My new job is to balance  
a camel on the head of a pin, my new job is to make it dance,  
and isn't it the dance that connects me to the world? Aren't I  
lucky  
to be here at all, squashing cockroaches that rain down from  
the ceiling,  
aren't I lucky to support my whole family with my brain in  
it's numb  
skull? My new job affords me and my family a vacation at the  
lake two hours  
north of the lake on which we live. My new job is to fill my  
mouth with clear  
goo and call it a hot meal. My new job is working toothpaste  
to the end of the tube  
and not leave any toothpaste behind. My new job is to become a  
screen, bright white,  
for everyone to yell at, my job is to be a white sheet to  
throw tomatoes at. My new job  
involves a lot of interface with the public. My new job is to  
make sure my hatred  
doesn't leak out of the holes in my face. My new job is better  
than no job.  
My new job is dabbing drool off of a wall of stuffed animals.  
My new job is cleaning  
up blood and cum and spit and shit and snot. When my new job

is over (for today),  
my compatriots and I go out for wine we spill  
wine all over each other, we spill blood. We go home and pat  
our stomachs which for today are full. We go home but do not  
squeeze our hands goodbye. I am in a cab and I hate myself for  
it,  
I pull my smock over my face so that I cannot see the numbers  
tick and glow,  
my new job is beating its fists against my brain. I think I'm  
growing a new worry  
stone in my body, I think my body is full of piss but I do not  
want to move.  
I might piss in the street before I get home, get in bed  
alone. How much does this cost, how much?

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## **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**