

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?