

# Cultural Daily

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## Ellen LaFleche: Three Poems

Ellen LaFleche · Wednesday, May 31st, 2017

Ellen LaFleche won the Ruth Stone Poetry Prize, the Joe Gouveia Outermost Poetry Prize, the Tor House Poetry Prize, the Philbrick Poetry Award, and the New Millennium Prize (shared with Jim Glenn Thatcher). Her chapbooks are: *Ovarian* (Dallas Poets Community Press), *Workers' Rites* (The Providence Athenaeum), and *Beatrice* (Tiger's Eye Press). She is assistant judge of the North Street Book Prize at [Winningwriters.com](http://Winningwriters.com)

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### Mirror, Mirror

*The nuns are not allowed to look at their own image*

Still,  
Sister Beatrice craves reflection.

Alone in her cell  
she probes her face  
with the slow, sculptural skill  
of a woman born without vision.

Her fingers trace the bladed  
cheekbones, the small brown moles  
expressive as punctuation marks  
at the end of her mouth.

One in the morning.  
Beatrice sneaks into the convent  
kitchen. There's no chrome  
toaster to tempt the sisters,  
not a sliver of silvered glass.

No stainless soupspoons  
with their inverted gazing bowls.

But there's a ceiling fan.

Sister looks upward, as if seeking sweet heaven. The metal blades, slowly slicing air, show shimmering flickers of Beatrice.

She sees her nose, its humped topography, the sudden twist just below the bridge.

The strands of hair pushing out of her veil like the night-seeking roots of a moon-flower plant.

Beatrice's mouth is too lush for a nun's mouth, but there it is, quick pink kisses on the whirring fan blades.

Beatrice stares into faint blue eyes, the pupils widening like ecstatic cervixes.

So, this. This is what Sister Veronica sees when she looks at Beatrice.

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## Forbidden Fruit

*Sister Beatrice fantasizes her own death*

How Sister Veronica will open the sick-room blinds, and Beatrice will watch the moon in full fury shaking off its blue-black burka of clouds.

How the night air will smell like smoldering oak leaves just before they burst into smoke.

How fever's rank heat will gather under Sister Beatrice's veil, and Veronica

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will break the convent  
rule by lifting it  
tenderly off her head – a kind  
of triumphant uncrowning.

How death will hold  
Sister Beatrice in layers of breathless  
bliss, folding and unfolding  
around her soul  
like the floral origami  
of a contracting uterus.

How Veronica will catch  
the last spill of breath  
in her cupped hands. No wash  
cloth, just a slab of weeping soap  
sluicing down Sister's limbs,  
the serpent curve of her spine

How Beatrice will taste  
Eden's blueness between her teeth –  
that cool forbidden juice  
just beneath  
the apple's sunburned scalp.

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## Bliss

*Sister Beatrice tries to finds small pleasures in every room in the convent*

In bed,  
sinking into a water-dream,  
Sister Beatrice feels soft  
ecstatic cramping. It begins  
in the mauve folds of her cervix,  
pushes dreamy blood-heat  
down her mustached thighs.  
Sister wakes to fragrant red petals –  
a romance of roses  
on her rough brown sheet.

In the kitchen,  
swaying to the heavy metal  
beat of cleaver blades,  
Beatrice takes in the smell of hen-bones  
being severed. Chicken broth simmers,  
a scrim of oily gold in the pot's

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copper canyon. Beatrice savors the faint scent of garlic on Sister Veronica's palms.

In the chapel,  
fisting sleep from her eyes,  
Beatrice sees vivid  
splotches of color.  
The sisters chant. The Angelus  
bell lifts its iron skirt to the clapper.  
Blobs float behind Beatrice's lids –  
dark blue souls  
moving toward enlightenment.

In the garden,  
kneeling with the horse-headed  
mantis, Beatrice hears the green creak  
of its segmented neck. Its eye bulges  
like a crystal witching ball.  
Beatrice gazes her future –  
Sister Veronica's veiled silhouette  
moving through the peony bed.

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