

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

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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 soup spoons
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.

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

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.

Bliss

Sister Beatrice tries to find 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

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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