

Selection from

***All of Us*, by Elisabeth Frost**

Marie Alexander Poetry Series, No. 15
published by White Pine Press, 2011

Founded in 1996 by Robert Alexander, the Marie Alexander Poetry Series is dedicated to promoting the appreciation, enjoyment, and understanding of American prose poetry. An imprint of White Pine Press since 2001, the Series publishes one to two books annually. It is our mission to publish the very best contemporary prose poetry and to carry the rich tradition of this hybrid form on into the 21st century.

Grace Court

You may swallow your parents too soon
—Julia Kristeva

It's never too soon to think of the world without them, and now you've done it. The quiet has set in after the last mouthful. The house is yours. No safety rail at the cellar stairs, the icebox packed with a week's worth of food—popsicles, bologna, Hi-C. The TV on its cart. You finish your meal at the Formica table in a stillness so complete you hear the house start to talk in a low-pitched language you hadn't noticed before. You move to the dining room, its wood paneling and the Schrank. At the head of the table, where you scribbled your name in crayon, you hear the sounds of settling from the black-tiled bathroom where they washed their big bodies in the spray. There's nothing to do now but listen—not to the piano, certainly not to the doorbell, not even to the maidenhair fern on the windowsill that might not have figured it out, but to the hardwood floor, the painted stucco, the green shutters with slices of half moons, none of them accusing, just knowing it all, waiting for you now, for something to happen. At this quiet instant, in the stare of the dust left to itself in corners of the kitchen, as you think about a taxi taking you all the way to Great Adventure, they appear in your vision, shadowy in the vestibule, sprinkling their fine layer of knowledge over the furniture. And in their sight—which you thought you were out of for good—you begin to add the sums of what you've lost.

This Body, Which Has Always Claimed to Be You

The specialists have been called. You're faring so badly that they interrupt your dreams and attach metal nodes to the flat of your wrist in an attempt to regulate a heart that jumps and starts. It's a loose cannon, this organ out for itself. They're trying to get inside your pulse, take the best measure of you. And you know what they're up to because you've tried to keep your chest still, holding in what should be in, out what should be out, for as long as possible, but your breath refuses to follow the rhythm of breathing, the beating inside you moves further and further to the outskirts, and your own body approves. They're complaining about the symptoms persisting unusually long. What they don't see is that there's nothing to do about it because this body, which has always claimed to be you, now claims this is exactly where you belong.

Fruit

Over dinner we talk about what we wouldn't eat as kids—garlic, olives, but also mashed potatoes & peas (one refused spaghetti until her twenties), while at the other end they're talking about fetishes, *furries* who dress in animal outfits, those people who get off watching the elderly do it; what about the porn shop we stumbled into (says another), the pink door with a hand sticking its cigarette out into the street; & then all at once we're discussing the forked penises of snakes, the long penises of horses, the cork-screw penises of pigs, kinds & forms of penetration that might make even bestiality comprehensible; so under the circumstances it's natural she mentions her boyfriend who as a child refused to eat fruit or talk to girls but who found girls eating fruit irresistible; who has grown to a man who loves not only devouring fruit but also *watching* it, how its bodies are quite like our own, a sleek lime, an ample orange, especially (she says) he loves to have a beautiful pear on hand during sex beside them on the bed, how he holds it & then gives it to her to smell too, maybe both taking a bite; & how one time she took some fruit to class to show her drawing students the variegated skins, what a challenge to a painter to capture the shifting light; & as she was holding up a grapefruit, turning it in her hands (the dimpled rind, the indentation of the navel, the top a little flatter than the sides), just then she noticed the bite marks, the imprint of his teeth on the waxy surface (& then she remembered that night, she did indeed); how then & there, lecturing to her class, she started to laugh.

Like a House Vowing to Say Its Good Nights

I take hold of his wrist. I place his hand against my cheek, at an angle between us. Across the alley, answering machines play to absent listeners. Coffee stains on the wall and the lamp turned off on the three-legged table. The hand is a parenthesis, a private thing, it holds in what it knows, and there's no way to tell about it. Lying here we're absorbed in a story written before we were born in which, right up till the end, the hero is one step behind the woman he's forever trying to catch. He wants to hold her. On TV, Fred Astaire and Cyd Charisse glide by, a rerun for days like this. They circle without touching, lean away and toward each other, meeting just once at the center. She bends over the arm he offers, they hold the pose. A gesture like that—his arm holding her up—trying to bring things to rest. But they're unsure what to do next. They stand unmoving, waiting for something, like a house vowing to say its good nights only when the lights click off and the pines at the edge of the yard come into view at last.