

The New Criterion

Poems November 2022

Whole, some

by Erica McAlpine

Like a piece of lemon sole,
Aunt Clara was deboned.
A man had come, she owned,
scooped her up whole,

and pulled out every line
that held her straight.
We found her, as on a plate,
claiming she was fine,

still retaining her shape,
decorated with parsley.
We would scarcely
know she'd had a scrape

but for moving her —
then it was a case
of lifting all at once, at pace,
or else disproving her

form completely.
We got the feeling
she liked it some, this being freewheeling.
She would stay discreetly

this way, thank
you very much.
You can look, but don't touch.
Our hearts sank

to think of what he stole
from her and what she was forsaking.
But she was good at faking
being whole.

Erica McAlpine's most recent book is *The Poet's Mistake* (Princeton University Press). She teaches literature at Oxford University.

This article originally appeared in The New Criterion, Volume 41 Number 3 , on page 35

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