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With One Eye Open

Polly Frost
Rapture House (May 14, 2010)
Unknown $10.19 (164pp)
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With One Eye Open is a snug collection of humor—one part rant, satire, parody and spoof; one part tongue-in-cheek social commentary; one part cautionary caricature. Polly Frost, whose humor has been published in *The New Yorker*, serves up a little something for most funny bones.

Over twenty-five pieces, Frost explores both contemporary and evergreen topics, from Facebook foibles to sex, dating to post-recession fundraising, internet marketing to the angst of urban life. The author's fun with form and structure keeps the reader guessing what will unfold next. Included are pieces written as quasi-sincere letters, ridiculous scripts, intentionally awful instructions, cringe-worthy website copy, artless advertisements, and terrible text messages.

Frost swings wildly but often on-target at a slew of modern conundrums. These include how increased electronic contact keeps humans from interacting, the irony of purchasing authentic local hand-crafted items via Internet, and the college student-professor gap. This last manifests as a tirade against the unfairness of having to write a term paper alone, instead of crowd-sourcing it via social networks.

In *The Final Paper You Want Me to Write*, the student jabs at her staid prof: "I remember one class you were yakking about how great writers do their work alone and how wrestling with their thoughts was such a key part of their process. I was live-Tweeting your rant and you'll be interested to know the consensus of my peeps was that all the co-called great writers drank waaaaay too much. Why? Because they were sitting around alone crafting their work. Frankly, Dr. Pettit, I don't think you should be encouraging us to do too much solitary drinking."

In *Theater Gifts*, Frost riffs on fundraising appeals from progressively more desperate but culturally hip alternative stage companies. *Friends in Paradise* finds an appreciative houseguest of villa-owning friends depressed by their ungrateful entitled complaints. "They drive you in their pastel convertible along gorgeous, clear avenues giving you a tour of their perfect small city. 'The traffic here has gotten so bad!' they say, as you pass the first other car."

Frost is at her best with shorter set pieces, which fortunately make up the bulk of the collection. Two short fiction pieces in the middle of the book, funny and well-crafted in their own off-kilter way, are slightly out of tune with the rest of the book. For the other 140 pages, the wit is edgy, bright, and head-noddingly on point.
LISA ROMEO (August 26, 2010)

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