

I Swear Somewhere This Works: Selected Poems 2013-2023

Trista Mateer

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Trista Mateer's decade-spanning, poignant poetry collection *I Swear Somewhere This Works* gathers inspiring, emotive memories, as of old flames.

Mateer first shared her poems on Tumblr; here, some are reproduced as screenshots of those original posts. There are short, pithy entries, but also poems that linger and that utilize spacing and line breaks to pause and breathe. Some invoke fairy tales, others the enigmatic Thistle Witch; all reveal some of Mateer's heart.

The poems' topics range from heartbreak to travel, with honest inclusion of taboo subjects like masturbation and self-harm. Mateer's queerness also has a significant presence: she writes about falling in love with different women and about experiencing homophobia and biphobia from those around her. "I Swear Somewhere This Works" squeezes an entire love story into seven compact lines:

*In a parallel universe or another world
or a different life,
we sit across from each other
at the kitchen table
and go over
the grocery
list.*

This relentless search for meaning and for a loving relationship with staying power characterizes many of the book's other poems too. They mull over regrets for what was done and said—and for what was not done and not said. Some moments are introspective and judgmental to the point of self-flagellation—primed to go viral. This directness sometimes has a harshening effect. More welcoming are the lines that evoke yearning and that seek the validation of love. Still other entries are a balm, affirming that love is real, even if it is fickle.

Recurring themes appear as though they are compelled to do so: courting the moon, eating oranges off a lover's body, alternate realities where a failed relationship survived, and road trips. There are universal insights about the ephemeral nature of joy, and there are wrenching revelations that are specific to Mateer's lived experiences. A woman who is not straight, she writes about having been abused but also celebrates her ability to still get up to write and to fight the next day.

Poetic devices such as rhyme and alliteration are few. Still, the sheer rawness and vulnerability of each poem confers a prayerful attitude. Reckoning with overripe peaches takes on significance when juxtaposed to failure and heartbreak, so that even the simplest metaphors become coy nods to additional meaning.

I Swear Somewhere This Works is a digital-age poetry collection that speaks to timeless themes and desires: love,

loss, and the cycles of introspection that accompany a life preserved in words.

JEANA JORGENSEN (August 24, 2023)

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