

Town Crier: Poems**Sarah Matthes**

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Filled with reminders of human fragility, but still exalting life in vigorous tones, Sarah Matthes's debut poetry collection, *Town Crier*, is a momentous introduction to a sensitive voice.

Dedicated to a friend and fellow poet who passed from cancer, the text is marked by the internal pivots required of someone reckoning with a beloved's departure. Matthes dreams of an afterlife that is perhaps "just another planet. // Maybe it's close. // Maybe I can see it from here." Though her pain remains pellucid, she arrives at her friend's *yahrzeit* by accident, and begins to live again without realizing it:

*Then one day a whole day goes by.
You're not in the tree. You're not even
in the bird.*

Whether concerned with this loss or other topics, Matthes's poems are variously playful, mythical, mournful, and dreamy; many are combinations of these. Some reflect on missed connections, or on the unavoidable pull of memories. Cabinets of curiosity are constructed:

*I wanted to make a museum
comprised entirely of relics
from my most beloved friends.*

*I wanted to put strange fuzz
under glass and keep it
forever strange and fuzzy.*

Golems are a recurrent symbol: of resurrection, of protection—of life brought into being either through sheer force of will, or because a reconfiguration is imagined necessary: "Sometimes women like me are called golems, too. / Not human until another human beats inside us." "613 Mitzvot" tracks a Tinder connection gone wrong because of an outpouring of Kabbalistic thoughts; "Coda" challenges tidy rabbinical explanations of human origins. But even when borrowing from extant folklore or practices, Matthes finds a way to make what could be dismissed as familiar all her own.

Town Crier is a daring and surprising debut poetry collection.

MICHELLE ANNE SCHINGLER (March / April 2021)

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