

So This Is Love: Poems and Photographs by Valerie Hawkes Howat

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Valerie Hawkes Howat, Illustrator

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Sometimes it does a heart good to take a break from reading the newest celebrity book, or tomes intended to raise social consciousness, or even the latest thriller or romance by a favorite author. This delightful little eBook offers that opportunity.

A companion to the author's previously published *Intervals of Light*, this book (available in PDF format or on a computer-readable CD) blends the beauty of words and pictures to stir the emotions. The photographs, which were taken by the author, complement the poems in striking and sometimes subtle ways, although there is nothing subtle about the image of a bleak forest scene after an ice storm that accompanies the poem "After Quarrelling." The stark woodland scene with ice hanging from bare branches of trees beautifully illustrates the cold that enters a relationship after an unresolved dispute.

While most of the poems follow standard styles, there is some experimentation. "Balance Sheet" is written in a spreadsheet format, which is a bit disconcerting at first, but a clever way to take the traditional in a not-so-traditional direction. This collection may not be classical literature, but the sentiments are stirring and the imagery is vivid. "My world to you is a shard / Of a broken dream / A shiver of a rainbow / A sliver of the moon."

The author studied creative writing at Northeastern University and has won several awards for her poetry, among them the Grace Mansfield Award for Excellence in Poetry. She has been published in *Persona*, a college literary magazine, and the 1989 anthology of Prize Poems of the National Federation of State Poetry Societies, as winner of the Nevada Poetry Society Contest.

Her new book offers poems on the subject of love, which she wrote throughout her life. Howat acknowledges that love has many stages and forms, and that no single book can encompass them all. In these pages, one can find a tribute to lasting love in "Sustenance": "You will keep me breathing / When I cannot find the air," and the pain of lost love in "Amputation": "After we were through / I had you cut away / Not quite clean enough / The scar still twitches."

The photographs accompanying the poems provide beautiful contrasts, from the simple beauty of a flower to the broken and scarred trunk of a dogwood tree. These images, paired with great care with the words, have the capacity to touch anyone's heart.

MARYANN MILLER (August 18, 2009)

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