

The South Wind

Adele Ne Jame

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Distilling the bittersweet, capturing what it means to be creatures in love with a fleeting world of wonders—this is the specialty of poets. Adele Ne Jame’s poems are lovely examples of the art.

In this beautiful collection, Ne Jame moves among loved ones and landscapes as disparate as New Jersey, Hawaii, and Lebanon. Her continuous awareness of the overlapping realms of life and death is what gives this book its emotional heft. Blasted by war, by infidelity, by age and its discouragements, families, cities, and cultures live on, claiming happiness where they can.

Lebanon—torn apart by war multiple times in Ne Jame’s lifetime—gets special attention here, from the poems and also from a lengthy afterword by Hayan Charara. It is a landscape perfectly suited to Ne Jame’s work, attentive as it is to both the presence and the absence of the dead. This is poetry of place that makes one wonder: what did place teach the poet, and what does the poet’s eye illuminate in the place?

What a pity there are so few poems here: only fifteen, but each beautifully wrought. Ne Jame’s imagery is lush, her control spot on, and her clear, reverent voice will leave the reader breathless. These poems are solidly rooted in the world but always aware of other worlds: the past, the wild realm of angels—“the roar on the other side of silence”—and of what we are continuously making of our lives.

Adele Ne Jame teaches at Hawaii Pacific University. She is the recipient of several prizes, including a National Endowment for the Arts fellowship, and has published three previous collections, including *Field Work*. Her poems have been anthologized in collections of Arab American poetry.

Both seasoned readers and those new to poetry will enjoy this book: these are accessible poems with great emotional rewards, and the Afterword provides helpful context. The range of topics—elegies, an outdoor concert, a bombed statue, a rain forest cabin, even the possibility of love—are united by a lingering, elegant tone. These poems are like the “blasted roses / in the rock gardens that are gathered by / villagers and distilled into perfumed / water to wash the bodies of the dead.”

Ne Jame believes “nothing can save us from / what hourly we are making or unmaking.” Here there is no escape, and perhaps no mercy, either. But there is abundant beauty, and a will to live fully. As she writes: “like the fields of / the wild red anemone, we are waving / our songs in the air before night falls.”

TERESA SCOLLON (September / October 2011)

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