

The Size of Our Bed

POETRY BY

Jacqueline Derner Tchakalian

Publication Date: September 15, 2015

The Size of Our Bed explores a widow's letters to a dead husband, ancestry, marriage, illness and death, recovery, and the bloody spine of war—always war.

The Size of Our Bed

Poetry by Jacqueline Derner
Tchakalian

ISBN 978-1-59709-997-4

Binding: Tradepaper

Size: 6 x 9; Pages: 128

Price: US \$17.95

Pub Date: September 15, 2015



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Following the arc of a woman's life, *The Size of Our Bed* begins with the title of its last poem, "Letter to a Dead Husband about the Size of Our Bed." The remaining poems traverse their past, the narrator's future.

Divided into sections from childhood and family, marriage, illness and death, recovery, acceptance and strength—contrasted with war—*The Size of Our Bed* offers poetry that is generous yet unflinching, personal, sometimes ironic and intense, yet resound with a reverence for both the joys and betrayals of life. These are poems of hard won wisdom and insight. They are emotionally introspective, even transformative.

Not all questions are answered.

Praise for *The Size of Our Bed*

"Jacqueline Tchakalian's *The Size of Our Bed* is powered by the pain of loss, but leavened by careful craft and a heart that, in being true to itself, cannot be permanently cast down. I celebrate how these poems rise from the ashes of grief, triumphant and full of life."

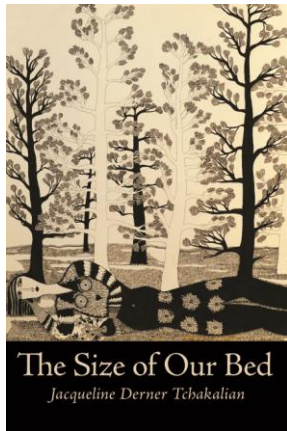
—Charles Harper Webb

"At the center of this collection is a cycle of observations and moving reflections on the illness and death of a longtime spouse, and the mix of tenderness and regret, grieving and recovery, will resonate with all those who've remained by the side of someone at the end of life. These are soft-spoken poems, but relentless in their honesty and in their quest to understand—to the extent such things can be understood—the mysteries of the body, in its flourishing and in its decline."

—Suzanne Lummis

Biographical Note

Trained as a visual artist, Jacqueline Derner Tchakalian discovered writing poetry later in life, at which time she quit painting for ten years. Her poems have appeared in *Eclipse*, *So to Speak*, *California Quarterly*, *West/Word 4*, and other publications. She was a finalist in the 2010 Tennessee Williams Literary Festival Poetry Contest and the 2007 Conflux Press Artists Book Contest. She currently lives in Woodland Hills, CA.



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From *The Size of Our Bed*

Orgasms after Life

Women. What if our orgasms, like our eggs,
were stored inside us at birth for future use?
A lifetime's supply in ribbon-tied boxes,
or racked in a cluster like billiard balls,

different colors for different intensities,
a fluorescent rose on each that detects
false meanings such as *Oh baby, I love you*
when it's only your mouth he covets.

They might line up like prepubescent girls
waiting their turn to jump rope, giggles
and adherence to rules a cradle for their
barely contained eagerness.

We could divide them ahead of time
according to whim or commitment,
barter for a cute print dress, heels so high
toes turn numb, bouquets of chrysanthemums,

or shield them in burkas of modesty until
their perfume overpowers our control and we
climb out a window, meet a boy on a motorcycle,
hug him with all our strength.

Later, like our eggs, we could harvest them
for placement in others who don't have any,
pass on skills, achievements—a pearl a day
nestled in pink tissue, bone-colored purse.

We could take them with us when we die,
tucked for easy retrieval behind an ear,
between breasts, in an earthen jar—an emollient
to limber joints, tender time's withdrawal,

remind us of our earlier life.