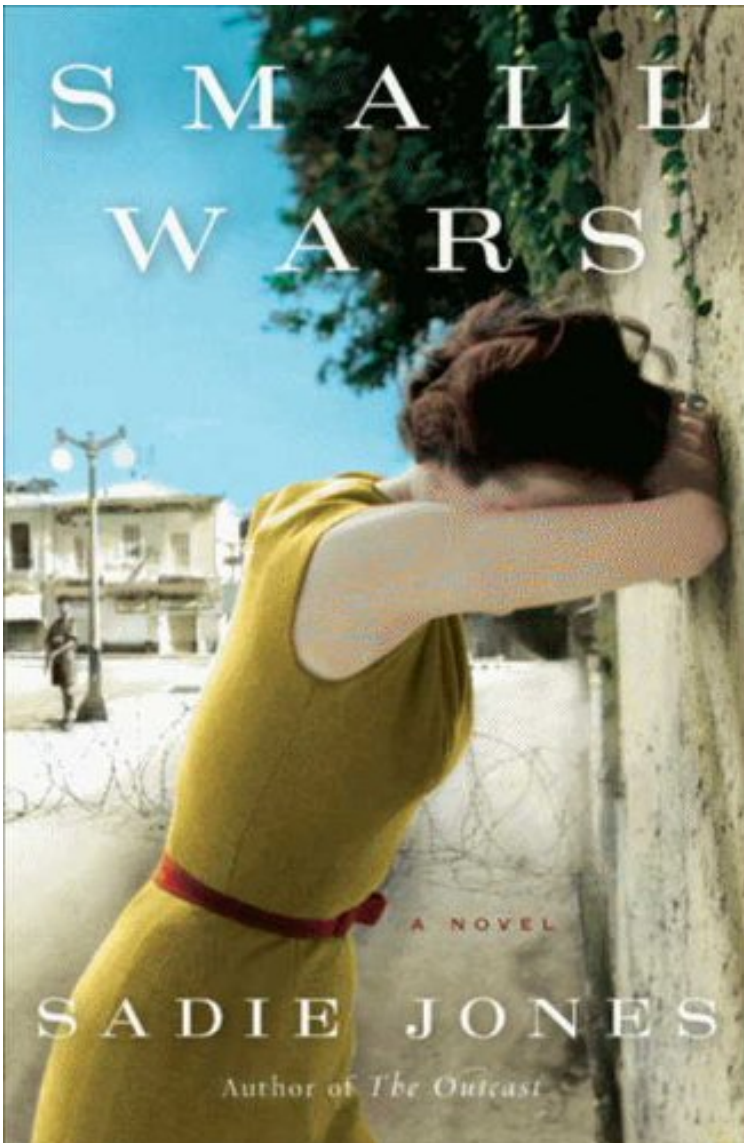


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Small Wars: A Novel



Par Sadie Jones
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ventes : #322251 dans eBooksPubli le:
2010-01-21Sorti le: 2010-02-
09Format: Ebook Kindle

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Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurSadie Jones has a long literary future ahead of her. Tracy Chevalier, author of Girl with the Pearl Earring Fresh off her triumphantly assured debut novel The Outcast, award-winning author Sadie Jones has again delivered a quiet masterpiece in Small Wars. Set on the colonial, war-torn island of Cyprus in 1956, Jones tells the story of a young soldier, Hal Treherne, and the effects of this small war on him, his wife Clara, and their family. Reminiscent of classic tales of love and war such as The English Patient and Atonement, Jones gripping novel also calls to mind the master works of Virginia Woolf and their portrayal of the quiet desperation of a marriage in crisis. Small Wars is at once a deeply emotional, meticulously researched work of historical fiction and a profound meditation on war-time atrocities

committed both on and off the battlefield. ExtraitChapter OneThe army had rented them a house in Limassol, quite near to the harbour because married quarters on the base hadnt been sorted out for them yet.Hal knew the weather had been bad on the crossing from England even after Gibraltar and he pictured Clara and the girls laid up in their cabins all the way from Portsmouth. He hoped they hadnt been too sick; Clara wasnt a good sailor. He had enjoyed his own journey from Krefeld, flying in bumpy weather with the countries of Europe and wrinkled blue sea passing below, like a clay model you could stick flags in, and move imaginary armies from place to place.Hal had been promoted to major, and transferred from his battalion in Germany to this one, alone, not knowing anybody. Everything had been new to him. He had set about the business of leadership and his new rank with steadfast energy, and was rewarded by a smooth transition. Sleeping alone in that house for a month, as he had, he missed the company of barracks, and the isolation was grating.The Limassol house was narrow, in a cobbled street, with no outlook to speak of and barely a lock on the door. It made Hal uncomfortable to think of it, the unsettling lack of security, and that you couldnt see anything from the windows other than the crooked windows of other houses. If someone were to approach, or set a booby-trap, there'd be no stopping them. A few months before, in Famagusta, an EOKA terrorist had lobbed a bomb through the open window of a soldiers house as his wife was putting the children to bed. Hal knew his instinct his agony of responsibility must be tempered and that the Housing Officer was doing everything he could to get him married quarters at the garrison. But the other soldiers wife, in Famagusta, had lost half her arm in the explosion. Hal had spoken to the Housing Officer again that morning, reminding him, but beyond doing that he had no power: he must trust everything was being done that could be done. If he didnt have faith, he wouldnt manage, but with it, he could live with the knowledge of the other soldiers wife and still have his own come to be with him.He lay in the bed that was too big for him, but would be too small for them both when Clara came, and imagined her leaving England for Cyprus.

It had been a vicious winter all over Europe. Hal pictured a cold day at Portsmouth harbour, HMS Endeavour vast and cold too, and Clara waving to her mother.Hal was right. Clara had been sick on the voyage. Meg and Lottie hadnt seemed affected by the heaving boat at all, perhaps being small and low to the ground their bodies werent so disrupted, and shed had to run after them, bent over, up and down the slippery metal corridors of the Endeavour, what felt like all day, every day, for the whole journey. The twins were sixteen months and had discovered exercise, exploration and teasing their mother.Clara, whom Hal had taken to calling Pudding during her pregnancy in Krefeld, had lost all of her baby weight, and with being seasick all the time and no German or even English stodge to sustain her, now barely filled out her clothes at all. She hoped she wouldnt be too skinny for Hal. He loved her curves.When she wasnt chasing the girls up and down the Endeavour, or leaning over the metal bowl of the lavatory, she read to them. She read the new books she had bought for them in London, and she read the old books her mother had allowed her to take from the shelves of the nursery. She held the loose-spined books gently, reading to Meg and Lottie about fairies and trains and England, until all three fell asleep.The Endeavour made its slow floating entry into the deep east of the Mediterranean. They passed Greece, and the long reaches of Crete. The ancient seas slid away beneath them, the boat throbbed and heaved, the islands and the skies surrounded them. Now she stood in the drizzle, watching Cyprus coming towards her out of the mist.She had travelled out with an odd assortment of people: an Italian nightclub singer, a young teacher for the English school, who was a shy man barely out of school himself, and a Welsh businessman, with interests in Nicosia, who was very boastful; he liked to frighten them with stories of EOKAs terrorist atrocities, and make them feel as if they were entering a proper war zone, not just a long-held part of the Empire having a little trouble with a few insurgents. Its hardly the Blitz, is it? Clara said to the young teacher one night. It made her feel braver.Despite the recent war, she had never felt herself a foreigner in Germany: it had the northern European restraint and ragged bombed greyness of home, and she had felt unthreatened there, even as she missed her family. She thought her sense of belonging might actually spring from the war between them, that England and Germany were like two siblings, badly bruised, but forced to carry on in the same house and learn to get on. Cyprus, though, was another thing altogether. Part of the Empire it may have been, but the island was a virtual chip off the Middle East too, Byzantium, Turkey, Greece, all of these parts in crisis, under the British flag, and her husband charged with part of its protection; Clara couldnt help but feel nostalgia for the dull concrete barracks and modern flats of Krefeld, and Brunswick, that she had called home for the six years of her marriage.The group of civilians clustered together on the metal deck while all around them troops prepared to disembark and the Endeavours crew brought her into dock. Clara knew they were in the way; she was trying to get mittens onto the girls, but kept dropping them, dangling on their elastic. The soldiers were

National Service ones, noisy, desperate to be on land. Clara and the other civilians had kept apart from them on the voyage and it was disconcerting to be surrounded now. The Italian singer, who had put on a sort of safari suit with a cinched waist for their arrival, held one of Megs hands, and Clara, with Lottie on her hip, held the other. Rain stung her eyes. The arms of the small harbour were around them now as they drew closer. Clara could see the houses of the town all along the straight front and the waves hitting the sea wall and splashing up. She could see the fishing boats and navy craft bobbing and bumping together on their moorings. She saw black cars and Land Rovers and soldiers, and behind them the jumble of plaster and stone buildings, warehouses, storehouses and the big metal mooring posts, which were mushroom-shaped with giant thick ropes tightly wound around them. She saw soldiers and Cypriots milling about, knotted in groups, waiting. She held onto her childrens small hands tightly. She saw Hal. He had seen her first and was smiling, with his eyes squinting against the wind. He raised his hand. Now there was just the waiting for the big slow ship to close the distance between them. The front door stuck. Weve had a lot of thunderstorms, said Hal. The girls peered past their mothers legs into the darkness of the house. Well gosh, its not awfully Mediterranean, is it? said Clara. Not today. Corporal Kirby, Hals batman, began to bring the cases in from the Land Rover. Clara was forced into the kitchen; she and the girls pressed themselves against the wall as Hal and Kirby lifted the biggest trunk and took it upstairs. Clara took off her hat. There was a stove, a small table, a sink and a food safe with a front that opened downwards to make a shelf. The brown louvred shutters were closed on the window at the front, and at the back of the house there was a door with a curtain over it. The little girls silently watched Clara go to it and push the curtain aside. It slid awkwardly on the plastic-covered wire. The neighbouring houses backed onto a small courtyard where there was a washing bowl for clothes on the tiles, and a tree in a pot that was dead. She turned back to the room. The girls were pale and top-heavy in their buttoned-up coats. Your things are wet, arent they? said Clara, and took off their woollen hats. Shall we go and see what Daddys up to? In the front bedroom, Hal and Corporal Kirby were trying to find space for the trunks and smaller cases. Hal turned to Clara as she came in. He looked serious and embarrassed. What a lovely house! she said, and he smiled at her. Thats fine, Kirby. Leave it, will you. Right, sir. They heard his boots down the stairs, and the door, and then the Land Rover starting up. Meg and Lottie stared at their parents. Hows it been? said Clara. Not bad at all. Better than Krefeld? Well, not half so luxurious, as you can see. We dont mind. Dont you? Of course not. Well make the best of it. Clara went to him slowly. She put her face against his shoulder and the girls came over too, and rested their hands on their parents legs. Hal put his head down and felt Claras smooth hair against his cheek. A month was too long, he said. He put his arms round them all as the sound of motorbikes and Cypriot voices and the banging shutters of other houses came up from the street. From the Hardcover edition. Revue de presse "Jones is fabulous at this, offering titbits of danger and discord while keeping a cool, matter of fact tone for the big horrors... This is, at heart, a moving love story" (Sunday Times) "Jones's first novel, *The Outcast*, winner of the Costa First Novel Award, was a very hard act to follow. Her second, however, is even better... Jones's research is impeccable, and her emotional intelligence outstanding" (Kate Saunders *The Times*) "In this exciting novel that resonates with contemporary parallels, Jones is unusual among women writers in focusing as much on the thrills and terrors of frontline action as its psychological fall out...it's a movie waiting to happen" (Emma Hagestadt *Independent*) "Ambitious...uncannily good at the evocation of charged moments" (*Guardian*) "Here Jones's talent really shows... In an excellent encounter with a military psychiatrist, the dialogue breaks like dry twigs" (Stephanie Cross *Times Literary Supplement*)