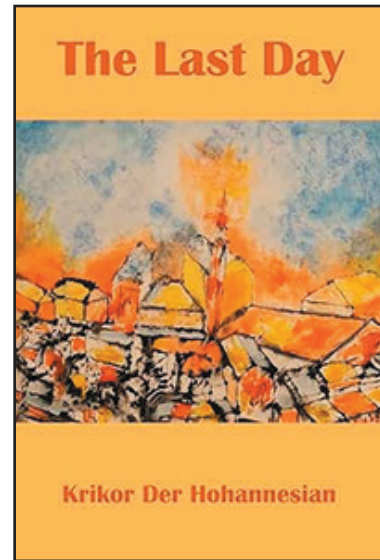


**'The Last Day' by Krikor Hohannesian**

*Review by Lee Varon*

Der Hohannesian's latest (and last) book, published by Cervena Barva Press, is a tribute to the human spirit.

Many of the poems in this moving collection refer to the Armenian genocide. The poet reminds us, "the 'Armenian Question,' is more than a question. Der Hohannesian, himself an Armenian American, calls it what it is – "hated's euphemism." The poet makes it clear that those who suffered through this terrible time are still with us: "it is their blood/ that courses the deltas of our veins," and "...blood carries memories downstream."



These memories sometimes come quite close to home, as when, "They killed a Turkish consul in Union

Square." These dark memories are always with the poet. Even years from the initial massacres, when the perpetrators are hunted down all over the world – Vienna, Paris, Somerville – the poet admits he feels "a frisson/ of satisfaction, an ephemeral vengeance."

I often write about dark subjects and I always wonder if such subjects will invariably depress the reader. De Hohannesian offers insight into this question.

In these meticulously crafted poems full of gorgeous imagery, this gifted poet brings us a book that speaks to our shared humanity and offers a way to deal with darkness through the transcendent beauty of art itself.

Many of the poems in the collection are about loss and death – whether of the poet's family members as in *Saying Goodbye* a moving poem about the death of the poet's father: "He, the artist, who graced me/ with a love of the aesthetic. Whatever/ his failings, this was no small thing."

Or a small animal's life suddenly cut off by a bird of prey: "Of a sudden serrated wings slice/ the night air on a glide path, / a graceful swoop toward dawn's promise/ some creature, unwitting, living its last night."

There is the slower, unrelenting loss caused by illness as in *Shrinkage* which speaks of a friend brought low by Parkinson's disease. And there is sudden loss as in *The Day Approaching*, which describes a friend's sudden terminal prognosis: "As sudden as a summer squall/ the prognosis eclipses the sun, / a cloud of surety/ that your days/ will never again be the same. // "Of a sudden, life is rudely finite..."

Even the demise of those he barely knows, touch the poet deeply – a workman who suddenly falls to his death while sandblasting brick on a church: "I stare up, watch the swallows and wrens." We feel the suddenness of this event in such lyrical lines as: "the bells toll three, the birds/ whoosh off the plangent peal."

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In the face of sickness, old age, and death, the poet's wry humor perseveres. In *Small Deaths* he writes, "...I watch the insults/ pile up and give them names, / like 'Arthur' for arthritis, 'Nolan' / for no language as I search/ for a lost word, 'Stenny' for stenosis/ when my legs don't work quite right. / All this we might call aging, / these losses one by one, / or we might call them small deaths."

Still, despite these losses the poet, imagining next year's crocuses, vows "I shall dig holes for plantings nonetheless."

In the final poem, *To the Author of My Epitaph*, I feel as if the poet speaks directly to us asking the question, we all grapple with: "How long does the spirit linger/ like dust motes dancing/in cones of sunlight/ before it is all forgotten?"

Although these ultimate questions remain, we are fortunate that we have poets like Der Hohannessian to illuminate us as we navigate life's mysteries.

Lee Varon is a social worker and writer. Her children's book: "My Brother is Not a Monster: A Story of Addiction and Recovery" was published in 2021. She is co-editor of "Spare Change News Poems: An Anthology by Homeless People and Those Touched by Homelessness."