

Wilderness House Literary Review 19/4

**The Last Bed,
Lee Varon
Finishing Line Press, 2024.**

Review by Jean Flanagan

Lee Varon's fourth poetry book, "The Last Bed" published by Finishing Line Press is a stunning and intimate portrayal of a mother who never gives up on her child with substance use disorder.

Varon shares heart-wrenching images of every step in her courageous battle to save her child. She is thrown into an unknown world we would never choose for our children.

In Varon's poetry, we feel the extremes of hope and despair that hit a family confronting the complexities of substance use disorder. Varon proceeds with sensitivity to reveal her story with no embellishments. She never loses her focus. Her poetry embraces love in the midst of agony, and light in the middle of the darkness. The poem "The Last Bed" is gripping. The tension in this poem builds and we are alongside Varon, praying with her, the last bed will go to her son:

*Through blood and splinters
I grip the edge.
of the last bed.*

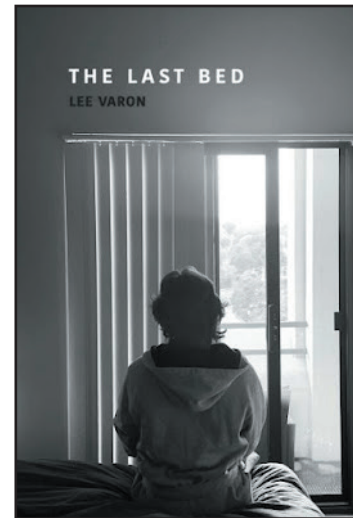
The book is divided into three sections "At the Soup Kitchen," "The Last Bed" and "Birds." Varon has volunteered in a soup kitchen for many years and has become acquainted with many of the guests who come in for meals. She has certainly helped others often living unseen on the most painful edges of our society. Her poetic view is authentic and, in the poem, "I Know Your Name" dedicated to Colleen, she writes:

*Your beauty is dissolving.
into night---
smack, snow
taking you.*

One of the most effective literary devices is Varon's use of birds to tell the story. Varon cleverly weaves in warblers, crows, peacocks, egrets and hummingbirds to name a few. For example, in the poem "Seagulls" she writes:

*High above gulls cry
holding to hope*

By using the different birds, she is able to balance the harsh realities of substance use disorder with the life of birds. This connects us to the vulnerable in nature, as well as to our own vulnerabilities.



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Lee Varon is a social worker as well as a writer. Her personal experiences are often reflected in her writing. She has shared with us both miracles and despair with a keen eye and honest emotion. Varon's book is available through Finishing Line Press (www.finishinglinepress.com). She is also the author of two children's books dealing with addiction : "My Brother is Not a Monster : A Story of Addiction and Recovery," and "A Kids Book About Overdose."