



## As the Poppies Bloomed: A Novel of Love in a Time of Fear

**Maral Boyadjian**

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*Cultural and historical details add depth to this love story set during the Armenian genocide.*

With her debut novel *As the Poppies Bloomed*, Maral Boyadjian tells the story of an Armenian family living in the waning years of the Ottoman Empire. Though the story initially focuses on a budding romance, the threat of war and genocide always hovers over the proceedings. Boyadjian weaves those elements together well, striking the right balance between the family conflicts and the larger geopolitical ones, producing an effective work of fiction with real history behind it.

The story takes place in the village of Salor and begins in 1913, just before the start of World War I and about two years before the Armenian genocide that was carried out by the Ottomans during the war. A teenage girl, Anno, is in love with Daron, but her father refuses to let her associate with him because of Daron's father's reputation. Meanwhile, Anno's father is the head of the village, while her older brother is a freedom fighter taking dangerous rides to learn more about the intentions of their Turkish and Kurdish neighbors, and recent massacres against Armenians are never far from the characters' minds.

Much of the novel foregrounds the relationship between Anno and Daron while depicting the normal lives of their families. Boyadjian does an excellent job with the details, expertly describing things like food, clothing, customs, and geography. The Salor villagers are shepherds, and the first signs of renewed trouble involve night attacks on their flocks. Readers familiar with the time and place in which the novel is set will know the seriousness of what the characters face, but so do those characters, who are carefully preparing for the war that dominates the last third of the book. They know there will be attacks against the Armenians, and that they have only a limited ability to fight back.

While *As the Poppies Bloomed* is fiction, Boyadjian based parts of the book on the stories of her own grandparents, survivors of the Armenian genocide. That comes through, both in the description and in the way the characters react to the ever-present dangers, and makes *As the Poppies Bloomed* a moving work.

JEFF FLEISCHER (Spring 2015)

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