THE SLEEP OF APPLES
AMI SANDS BRODOFF
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REVIEW BY MAYA KHANKHOJE

The Sleep of Apples is a collection of linked stories by Montreal author Ami Sands Brodoff. It takes its name from "Gacela of the Dark Death," a ghazal or ode to love by Spanish poet Federico García Lorca, whose life was cut short at the beginning of the Spanish Civil War for loving freedom and loving men. This choice is not a coincidence; the author is well-acquainted with the marginalized who struggle to free themselves from a normative society that does not always understand them. Sands Brodoff does understand and, in fact, loves her characters.

The book opens with a story of loss, of Bubbe, a grandmother. This account then introduces the rest of the protagonists who belong to different generations and face different predicaments, but are also linked to each other by blood, friendship, love or simple human solidarity. The author skillfully describes a stable marriage that turns into a threesome, which, in turn, morphs into a gay couple, the product of whom is a child who, in turn … well, you get the picture. Other issues dealt with in this nuanced and humane book include surrogacy, suicide, drugs, gender re-assignation, climate change and euthanasia.

These portraits are drawn against the backdrop of a Montreal working-class district along the Lachine canal, with forays into the upper-class neighbourhood of Westmount. Important landmarks of the city provide a deeply-felt sense of place for the Jewish community, which forms a vital part of the characters' lives.

As a reviewer, I normally like to finish a book as quickly as I can and then write down my impressions while they are still fresh in my mind. In this case, I was forced to take long breaks because the characters were so compelling that I needed closure before moving on to the next one. Ami Sands Brodoff's writing is like a sea teeming with life. Dare to wade into it and you will discover, as the character Miri does, that your "heart is bursting, mind floating free."