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Forget About Sleep, Miriam Levine,
NYQ Books,
The New York Quarterly Foundation, Inc.,
P.O. Box 470, Beacon, NY 12508, 95 pages,
www.nyq.org.

Book Review by Sarah Stern

Miriam Levine's sixth book of poetry, *Forget About Sleep*, is a beautiful meditation on what it is to live a full and deeply-felt life. Her poems reinforce her keen observations about this broken world, and yet she finds the light in unexpected places. My favorite poems, and there are many, in *Forget About Sleep*, show us these moments we might miss because we are too busy with things that grab our precious attention. I love Levine's celebration of sensuality—her own and the world at large—her wonder of friends and family, and her exploration of her own mortality and by extension our own. She invites us to explore and we are happy to accompany her.

In "Ben's Rendezvous," one of Levine's opening poems, the subject, "wandered from home,/ though forbidden. "I was/ seven and small for my age./ It was twilight. It was spring," setting the tone for the whole collection. This poet not only ardently observes, but almost becomes the things themselves, as by the end of this poem:

"The light above the bar was pink,/ and the people in command/ of their swaying bodies. I/ swayed too, drunk on kisses,/ my fingers caught on/ the skirt of my dress held/ by sashes tied at the back."

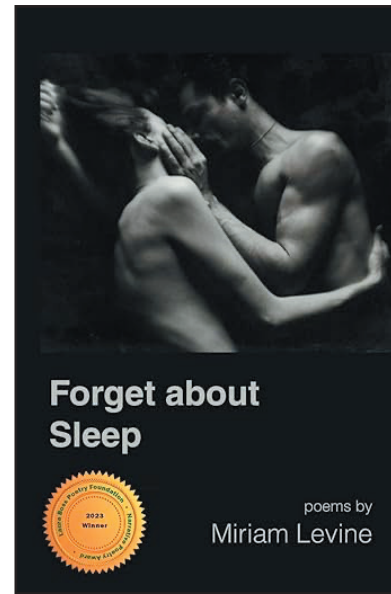
Levine continues to wander and take in the world not shying away from the cruelty and haphazardness of it all. As in the title poem, *Forget about Sleep*. "Mim, why would/ you ever want to leave the earth?"

We would not, if only for pleasure. At the end of "Diamond Head," we get it. "We bit/ and sucked. I lived in you, eely tongue. It/ kills me, your scent, a mix of salty musk and bourbon./ If we had forgotten would we have to go on and on?"

In many of the poems, like the little girl who ran from home, early on in the collection, the speaker is traveling, and with that, we get the world anew, as in "Small Hotels."

"These seaside hotels with women's names/ take the surf's roar without answering back./ The Patricia, The Barbara, the Julia:/ I'd try them in turn, one for each year, south/ for the season at last at the Julia./ The elevator would have room for only / me and one suitcase. The windows could be/ opened. There'd be no wake-up call."

Levine asks in her poems what it would be like to be humble in a world that demands we shout about ourselves all day long. In the second



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stanza of "You Ask Yourself," "You think it may be time to leave your old self,/ not like the Carmelites who take a vow of silence,/ a new name and pray day and night for the world,/ but something like them, someone who speaks less."

Winner of the 2023 Laura Boss Poetry Foundation Narrative Poetry Award, *Forget About Sleep*, tells a story, but it's one of many surprising threads. Fun to come across Susan Sontag and Jean Rhys in "Lighten Up." Levine addresses the self. "Go ahead, Mim, be frivolous, spend/ an hour choosing a dress." In fact, you'll spend more than an hour with *Forget About Sleep*, and you'll be all the richer for it.

Sarah Stern is the author of *We Have Been Lucky in the Midst of Misfortune, But Today Is Different*, and *Another Word for Love*. Recipient of two Pushcart Prize nominations, Stern is also five-time winner of the Bronx Council on the Arts' BRIO Award for Poetry. More at www.sarahstern.me