



## If Today Be Sweet

*Thrity Umrigar*

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Tehmina Sethna's beloved husband has died this past year and she is visiting her son, Sorab, in his suburban Ohio home. Now Tehmina is being asked to choose between her old, familiar life in India and a new one in Ohio with her son, his American wife, and their child. She must decide whether to leave the comforting landscape of her native India for the strange rituals of life in a new country.

This is a journey Tehmina, a middle-aged Parsi woman, must travel alone.

The Parsis were let into India almost a millennium ago because of their promise to "sweeten" and enrich the lives of the people in their adopted country. This is an ancient promise that Tehmina takes seriously. And so, while faced with the larger choice of whether to stay in America or not, Tehmina is also confronted with another, more urgent choice: whether to live in America as a stranger or as a citizen. Citizenship implies connection, participation, and involvement. Soon destiny beckons in the form of two young, troubled children next door. It is the plight of these two boys that forces Tehmina to choose. She will either straddle two worlds forever and live in a no-man's land or jump into the fullness of her new life in America.

*If Today Be Sweet* is a novel that celebrates family and community. It is an honest but affectionate look at contemporary America—the sterility of its suburban life, the tinsel of its celebrity culture, but also the generosity of its people and their thirst for connection and communication. Eloquently written, evocative, and unforgettable, *If Today Be Sweet* is a poignant look at issues of immigration, identity, family life, and hope. It is a novel that shows how cultures can collide and become better for it.

## If Today Be Sweet Details

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## From Reader Review If Today Be Sweet for online ebook

### Susan de la Vergne says

It's a sweet story, about a recently widowed woman from Bombay who tries to decide whether to move to suburban Ohio to live with family. But she spends the entire book deciding. Fortunately, she's an interesting character, but often annoying because she's indecisive. Finally something happens (she rescues two children) and gets off the fence, literally: Her deciding moment comes as she's climbing a fence, trying to decide on which side to jump down. Too literal a metaphor for me. But the character's observations about life in the US (clean, fresh, organized, detached, lonely, overly fearful, sterile) are the most interesting parts. Her ambivalence is driven by that--do I go home to the warm exciting difficult swirl of Bombay or stay near my son in the well-ordered blandness of suburbia?

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### Ellen says

Enjoyable, but not as good as either *The Space Between Us* or *The World We Found*. A bit fairy-tale-esque in a way, what with Jerome and Josh getting a wonderful new chance with their loving aunt in the countryside. A lot of things were squeezed into the final chapter; certain things, such as Rustom's Omar Khayyam messages, could've been a continuing occurrence throughout. The dialogue was weaker than I've come to expect from Umrigar, though certain characters (Grace) were characterized quite well through dialogue.

On the subject of Grace! I am of two minds about her. I used to know someone who could be her slightly-older sister and I relate completely to her awfulness as a boss. In a perfect world I wouldn't be criticizing Umrigar's portrayal of the awful, snobby, career-woman boss: after all, I certainly know such people do exist. But something about her screwing up with such frivolity and being summarily fired by the benevolent CEO...doesn't completely sit right. Then again, Susan is also a career woman, though her career is not focused on as much. And Grace is pretty dismissive of Joe's political views in an irritating way. And I guess every fairy tale needs a witch...though Tara already wins that role.

Anyway! Certain threads were picked up and then abandoned to some extent: most noticeably, the Bombay apartment break-in.

So yes, a fun book, but not as good as the others of Umrigar's which I have read...and pretty much couldn't put down.

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### Natalia Melo says

Livro bonitinho, leitura fácil e história para quem gosta de água com açúcar, mais sentimental é ingênuo. Mas não é uma forte indicação.

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### Louise says

Umrigar is one of my "go-to" authors. So many good books. *THE SPACE BETWEEN US* is wonderful. This one, not as good but still worth reading. It's about a widow trying to find her place in the world

without her husband. A popular and touching topic but I think Umrigar approached the subject with an overly simplistic viewpoint. Possibly she was trying too hard to combine numerous story lines into a satisfying conclusion. It clicks together in a way that reality never does.

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### **Marcy says**

Tehmina was in deep despair after her husband died. They were quite the lovable couple. They were both caring enough to take in another child, (they already had a son named Sorab), into their home when his beloved mom died, and his alcoholic father could not adequately take care of him. Both of Sorab's parents saw the loss of their son to America, but they were happy he was happy married to a white American woman who loved him and bore their son. Tehmina and her husband lived in Mumbai, but visited America to see their family four weeks a year.

When Tehmina's husband suddenly died of a heart attack, Tehmina suffered. Thrity Umrigar's words show Tehmina's grief and despair: "How effortless, how untroubled living had been when Rustom had been alive. Like riding in a Mercedes-Benz, Tehmina now thought, with tinted windows that kept the outside squalor at bay and shock absorbers that smoothed and muted all of life's bumps. And now, without Rustom at the wheel, she suddenly felt as if she was traveling in the old Ambassador her father used to own, with its rattling doors and the kind of shocks that made you feel every pothole at the base of your spine. Her fall from grace had been as quick and astounding as Rustom's heart attack."

Tehmina, now living in her son's home, without her husband, has to decide whether to live in Mumbai or in the small Ohio town where her son and family reside. Thrity Umrigar clearly shows throughout this book how hard this decision is for Tehmina. Tehmina is vulnerable and sensitive. This decision is also hard for her Indian son and American wife. A cultural tension pervades Sorab's home, for his wife is White American, their son is American, and Sorab stands between his now American, and once, Indian culture.

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### **Erica says**

I really enjoyed this book. Great information about Indian culture.

In Umrigar's tender fourth novel, Tehmina "Tammy" Sethna is torn between two cultures that couldn't be more different: Bombay and Cleveland. The former is her homeland, but after her husband's recent death, she's been staying with her son and his family in America. Tehmina loves being near grandson Cookie, but she often feels like an intruder in her American daughter-in-law's home, and she's disconcerted by the changes in her son, Sorab, who is stressed from the corporate rat race. Though Tehmina's loneliness floods her with memories of her husband, the Parsi community back in India and her traditional ways, she finds no small amount of purpose (and celebrity) in Cleveland after suspecting her neighbor of child abuse and intervening on the children's behalf. Immigration laws, meanwhile, force her to decide whether she'll remain in Cleveland or return to Bombay. Umrigar (*The Space Between Us*) shows the unseemly side of American excess and prejudice while gently reminding readers of opportunities sometimes taken for granted

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### **Sarah says**

This is an incredibly sweet-natured and even corny book, and I enjoyed it despite the stereotyped characters and occasionally wooden writing and imagery. Umrigar is writing about an older Parsi woman who comes to the USA to stay with her son and daughter-in-law after her beloved husband dies. She must decide whether to move to the US, or return to her life in Bombay. The whole book involves her sitting "on the fence," including a literal fence-sitting scene. But I enjoyed the details about India and the analysis of trying to fit into a new world and a new family, as the protagonist tries to decide what parts of her life and personality she can retain and what has to be jettisoned as she grows into a new place and family. I thought *The Space Between Us* was a far superior novel.

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### **Cynthia Sillitoe says**

I loved this book. It's much more lighthearted than her other books and really delightful.

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### **Pamela Pickering says**

Apparently I have chosen the wrong book of this author to explore. Why did I abandon this book? My top reasons: 1) after 3 chapters I found the writing to be incredibly cheesy . It almost seemed as if it was written by a junior high kid. Of course, I'm not a fabulous writer either but it is not my profession. 2) Please remember I've only read 3 chapters in this book when I say this and things might change later in the story. The writer points out what is "wrong" with every American character that is introduced into the story by this point. She describes mainly the negatives whereas she seems to highlight the positives of the Indian characters. Even Eva, a woman she has come to love and consider as her best friend, she states she would be embarrassed to be seen with in India due to the woman's size. Another example, she states when American children are dirty they always appear to be dirtier than the poorest of Indian children. Maybe the story evolves and the main character changes her outlook somewhat I just did not care to find out. I realize we Americans are far from perfect and our culture can be superficial at times but there just seemed to be too many blanket statements about it in this work.

In perusing other poster's reviews of the author's work it seems this book happens to be much different compared to her previous works. Perhaps I will try one of her other works instead. This one gets returned today.

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### **Charlotte Guzman says**

This is one of my favorite authors and have read 3 of her books. She always affects me in a good way because she writes about family and what is the right choice and relationships.

This story was mainly about Tehmina a Parsi woman from India visiting her family in Ohio after the death of her beloved husband. Her decision to stay with her son and family or go back to India. A kind woman Tehmina affects many people in America and forms new relationships and so forms a new family.

I would like to be like Tehmina a woman with a heart of gold.

A lot of emotion in this story. This author didn't disappoint me.

Highly recommended!

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### **Susan says**

This was a kind of silly book in many ways. There were some things that were interesting, but it wasn't nearly as good as *The Space Between Us*. Tehmina is a 66 year old widow who has come from Bombay to stay with her son and American daughter-in-law while trying to decide where to spend the rest of her life: in America with them or back in Bombay. There's a lot of agonizing over this decision by all parties. Then there's a sub-plot in involving an abusive mother living next door. The way this plays out is not especially realistic. Much of the dialogue is awkward, and I got the feeling that the book was a means for Umrigar to complain about all the things she doesn't like about the US: too sterile, too heartless, too over scheduled, yada yada. It got old. Still, I didn't totally dislike the book. It had some interesting things to say about the experience of immigrants.

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### **Susmita Bhattacharya says**

A beautiful book. Poignant, heart-wrenching, humourous and poetic. Thrity Umrigar at her best.

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### **Karen says**

I love Thrity Umrigar, *The Space Between Us* and *The Weight of Heaven* are two of my favorite books. But *If Today Be Sweet* was just an okay read. Thrity is at her best writing about India and Bombay. This book took place in Ohio (no offense to my friends in Ohio) with flash backs of life in Bombay, some of the best parts of the book. But for me not enough time in India. This definitely is a book for book clubs, lots to discuss.

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### **June says**

This is the 3rd Umrigar book I have read and my second favorite. I still believe "*The Space between Us*" is by far her best book so far. I am not sure if it was true in "*The Space...*" as well, but I find that Umrigar goes into such long episodes of characters' thoughts that it is disorienting once she comes back to the scene. This was more so a problem in *Bombay Time* (when there were many more characters) but it happens quite often in this novel as well. But this book succeeds in its wonderful analysis of the immigrant experience of Indian Americans. There are some descriptions of America and Americans compared to life in Bombay that rang so true to my own experience as an American born Chinese who has visited Malaysia and Taiwan. While America was always the perfect standard when I was younger, the more I return to my parents' countries of origin, I see so much richness, and paradoxically simplicity, in those countries that are different/lacking in the US. Umrigar has transported the reader into the mind and heart of Telmina as she decides whether to leave her home in Bombay to live with her son and daughter-in-law in the US following her husband's death.

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## **Shelley says**

I would give this novel a 2-1/2 star if I could. It wasn't the best writing and it did go on and on quite a bit about some things and it was quite predictable as well, but it's not too often that I find myself wanting to laugh out loud as I did in this story as it was just too cute to hold back. It's about a 66 year old Parsi woman who can't make up her mind where to live as her beloved husband, Rustom, passed away the year before. She has to choose whether to live in Ohio with her son, Sorab, and white wife, Susan, and their son, Cavas, "Cookie", where everything is so different from her ways of life in India, or return back in India where she has always lived, and has her daily routine and friends. It was interesting to see through the eyes of Tehmina, the ways some things are done here in the states where it's the "normal" way and the way things are done in India where it's their "normal" way.

Tehmina is such a sweet natured character that anyone reading this book will either want to have her as a mother, grandmother, or friend, and want to be around her, not to mention want to try all of her delicious sounding Indian dishes she makes. I didn't get this same good feeling from Susan. I didn't feel that Sorab and her marriage seemed genuine and actually found Susan to be quite harsh and mean. Cookie seemed like a spoiled brat as well.

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