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Umrigar, Thrity. The Weight of Heaven

Each of us copes with loss in a different way. For Frank and Ellie Benton the sorrow is huge, occasioned by the death of their young son, Benny. As their marriage falters in the wake of the tragedy, Frank accepts a job offer in India, hoping that the change of scene will heal them. Once there the two face new challenges as Frank?s company deals with labor unrest, and Frank forms a strong but problematic attachment to Ramesh, his cook?s young son.

Soon Frank and Ellie have become surrogate parents to the boy, offering him everything from help with homework to weekend trips his parents could never afford. While Ellie is uneasy about Frank?s fierce attachment to the boy, she is also reluctant to deprive him of the joy the relationship brings. As Umrigar says, a happy family is but an ?earlier heaven.?

As Frank seeks to recreate his earlier fatherhood through Ramesh, the villagers cope with losses of their own. Frank?s company, Herbal Solutions, has blocked their access to the medicinal trees many use to earn their living. And, through her work at a local clinic, Ellie becomes increasingly aware of the hardships these families face.

Umrigar deftly sketches in the characters? past?their courtship and the tragedy that defines them as a couple?while exploring the personal and political ethics of their current situation. Umrigar?s characters are carefully developed, and they face fascinating moral dilemmas. The paths they take as they negotiate these obstacles keep the plot twisting and turning right up until the final, dark resolution.

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