Tomorrow There Will Be Apricots

by Jessica Soffer



About the Book

Lorca spends her life poring over cookbooks to earn the love of her distracted mother, a chef, who is now packing her off to boarding school. Desperate to prove herself, Lorca resolves to track down the recipe for her mother?s ideal meal. She signs up for cooking lessons from Victoria, an Iraqi-Jewish immigrant profoundly shaken by her husband?s death. Soon these two women develop a deeper bond while their concoctions --- cardamom pistachio cookies, baklava and *masgouf* --- bake in Victoria?s kitchen. But their individual endeavors force a reckoning with the past, the future and the truth --- whatever it might be.

In TOMORROW THERE WILL BE APRICOTS, we see how food sustains not just our bodies, but our hopes as well. *Bukra fil mish mish*, the Arabic saying goes. *Tomorrow, apricots may bloom.*

Discussion Guide

1. When the novel opens, Lorca has just been suspended from school for cutting herself. Why do you think she stole her mother?s paring knife? What is the significance of her doing so?
2. On page 3, Nancy says to Lorca, ?I?m a good mother.? It isn?t the only time this sentiment appears in the novel. What is the subtext of this conversation? Discuss the impression you have of these two women as the novel opens and discuss how this impression changes or doesn?t throughout the novel.
3. Why does Lorca?s mother leave New Hampshire and her marriage to return to New York City? She says, ?It?s what I have to do for myself?for women everywhere.? (Page 11) Identify elements of the themes of women?s liberation and feminism in the novel.
4. Many characters in the novel suffer from repressed feelings and thoughts, especially Lorca, Nancy, Victoria, and Joseph. Discuss these characters. How do they repress their feelings, and what are the consequences of this?
5. What first gives rise to Lorca?s plan to make her mother *masgouf*? What does the dish come to represent to Lorca? What does it represent to Nancy, and to Victoria?

6. Compare and contrast the two primary ?couples? of the novel: Victoria and Joseph; Nancy and Lorca. How are their relationships similar and how are they different? What parallels can you draw between their respective struggles and suffering? Victoria thinks many times that she has been difficult to love?do you think she?s right? What about Nancy, who seems to attract more love than she can, or wants, to deal with?
7. This novel explores some family dynamics that can be difficult to look at head-on. Discuss the various families, particularly with regard to how people show love and find happiness (or at least attempt to).
8. Lorca hurts herself repeatedly throughout the novel but sometimes tries to repress her urges. Why do you think she starts to resist, and why do you think she ultimately gives in each time? What do you think it means to Lorca to discover her mother may also have been a self-mutilator? Why is this revelation important for your understanding of these two characters?
9. On page 53, Aunt Lou tells Lorca of her mother, ?Someone didn?t love her enough. How about cutting her a little slack?? Similarly, Victoria shares on page 72 that she had been nothing to her own family. Victoria gave up her daughter for adoption, while Nancy herself was adopted. Discuss the effect that generations of neglect and the perpetuation of withheld love has on the characters in this novel. Do you think the circumstances justify these characters? behavior? Do you feel sympathy for them? Why or why not?
10. How does the author use details about Victoria?s and Joseph?s Jewish traditions to show their alienness? Do you think the story would have been significantly different if Victoria and Joseph had been an American couple? What does their history have to do with the events of the novel?
11. None of the relationships in this book are simple. A ?third wheel? infringes upon several: Aunt Lou constantly inserts herself between Lorca and Nancy; Dottie constantly inserts herself between Victoria and Joseph; and in a way, Lorca?s self-esteem and self-mutilation get between her and Blot. How do these outside influences adversely or positively affect the primary relationships they orbit? Do you think any relationship truly exists independent of any other? Support your opinion using examples from the novel.
12. When Lorca first arrives at Victoria?s apartment for her cooking class, what does she do that captures Victoria?s heart? In what ways are the two women similar? How do they help heal each other, beginning at this first class?
13. When Victoria talks about giving up her daughter on page 157, she says, ?Something, anything, was worlds better than all the nothing that had been.? What is shifting for Victoria in this moment? Who else in the novel might also have said this?
14. Though a minor character, Blot has a tremendous effect on Lorca and suffers from his own painful family history. What do you think he sees in Lorca that she can?t see about herself? Why do you think he takes on her quest for the owners of The Shohet and His Wife so readily?
15. Many characters in the novel keep secrets from one another. How does Joseph?s secret change the contours of his and Victoria?s relationship when she first discovers that he?s been keeping something from her? What about the secrets Lorca keeps from Blot?
16. Did you believe Victoria and Lorca were truly related? Why or why not? If you did, at what point did you begin to suspect the truth? What clues were there that Victoria may have been wrong about Joseph?s secret? When did you begin to suspect the truth about Dottie?
17. From both Joseph?s and Victoria?s perspectives, why does Joseph have his affair with Dottie? What brings him back to Victoria? What would you do in his situation? How do two people driven so far apart by circumstances and choices find a way back to one another? What do you think the author might say to this?
18. Aunt Lou both insinuates and flat-out tells Lorca that she will never earn her mother?s love with her behavior. She harangues her on pages 190 to 191, pointing out that ?everything you do is about her?You don?t do anything because you?re afraid you?ll miss her.? Do you think Aunt Lou is right? Why or why not?

19. One could argue that Lorca?s self-mutilation is a way for her to transmute the pain of her mother?s rejection into pleasure, however brief; to feel herself real despite her mother?s disregard. What is it that finally prompts Lorca to get angry at Nancy? What allows her to start healing from a lifetime of pain?
20. A kind of desperate hunger weaves its way throughout the story. Identify and discuss the different characters and what each truly hungers for. Do you think anyone has his or her hunger satisfied by the end of the novel? Why or why not?
21. The novel?s title comes from the Arabic saying, ?*Bukra fil mish mish*.? Tomorrow, apricots may bloom. What does the saying mean, and why do you think the author chose it?

Author Bio

Jessica Soffer is the author of THIS IS A LOVE STORY --- a "Read with Jenna" pick and an instant *New York Times* bestseller --- and TOMORROW THERE WILL BE APRICOTS. She grew up in New York City, attended Connecticut College, and earned her MFA at Hunter College. Her work has appeared in *Granta*, *The New York Times*, *Real Simple*, *Saveur*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *Vogue* and on NPR?s "Selected Shorts." She teaches creative writing to small groups and in the corporate space and lives in Sag Harbor, New York, with her family.

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