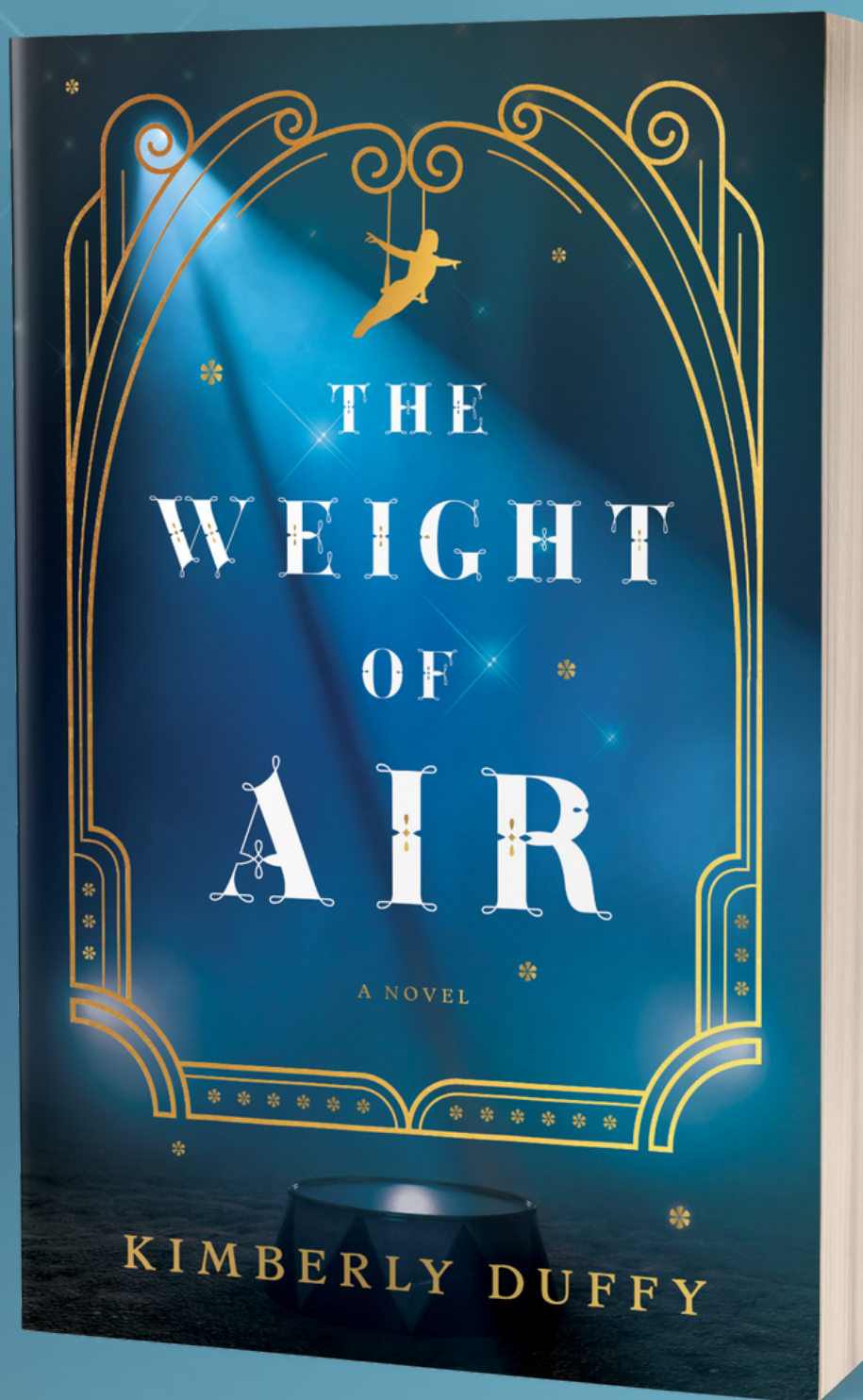
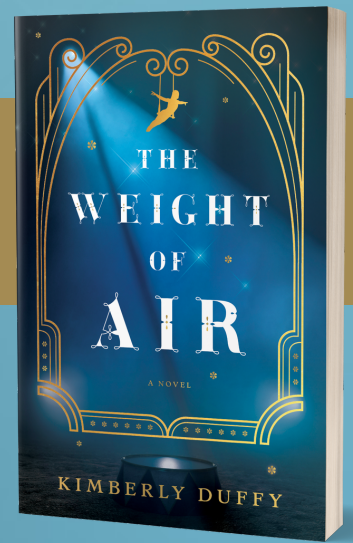


Book Club Guide



Letter From the Author



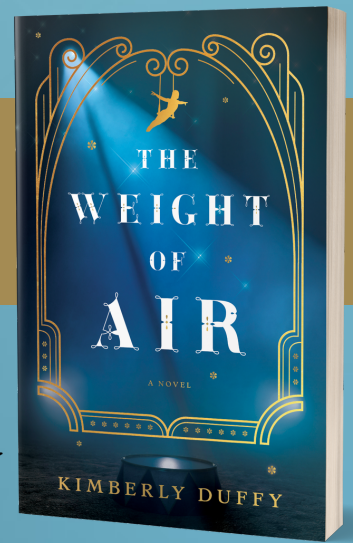
Dear Book Club Coordinator,

Thank you for considering *The Weight of Air*. It's an honor to be welcomed into someone's space and time. I don't take that privilege lightly.

The world is full of stories waiting to be told and I'm so often inspired by history—by real people or events or places. My heroine in *The Weight of Air* was inspired by a podcast I listened to on Katie Sandwina, a turn of the century circus strongwoman. I fell in love with this woman. With her strength and humor and grace. She was an anomaly—tall and large and strong when women were meant to be fragile and small—but adored and embraced. She fell in love with her husband, an acrobat much smaller than her, and together they took the circus world by storm.

And so were born Mabel and Jake. The strongwoman and acrobat. Throw in an estranged mother (an aerialist battling the effects of age on her body and job), a female clown, a show director holding onto decades of unrequited love, and a host of other performers and friends. The book is mainly set in my home state of New York and there are scenes in Little Italy, Central Park, and Coney Island. It became an ode to my family—early 20th century Sicilian immigrants who settled in a city exploding onto the world stage.





Though *The Weight of Air* explores themes of post-partum depression, body image, and a pretty swoony marriage of convenience romance, it's ultimately a book about a mother and daughter who must release the past and the things they think of themselves in an effort to save their futures. Beneath the lights of Madison Square Garden, the love story that develops between them is an aching one full of redemption and compassion, strength and vulnerability.

All my characters become special to me, but these ones became real. I had trouble relinquishing this story to my editor because I wanted to spend a little more time with them. I love Mabel and Isabella and Jake and Robert. I hope you do too.

If you'd like me to join you virtually, reach out via the "Request Author Teleconference" form under "Resources" on the Open Book website. If you're local to Cincinnati and your book club is reading *The Weight of Air*, contact me at kim@kimberlyduffy.com. I'd love to meet you.

Kimberly

Kimberly Duffy

<https://kimberlyduffy.com/>



Recipes

Why wait until you get to the circus to enjoy your favorite treats? These are the perfect accompaniment to discussing *The Weight of Air*.

¼ cup neutral oil (I like avocado or refined coconut)

¼ cup sugar

½ cup popcorn kernels

Salt to taste

KETTLE CORN

- 1) Heat oil in a large heavy-bottomed pot or skillet with a handle over medium heat. Place a few kernels in oil and cover.
- 2) When kernels pop, it's time to put the rest of the popcorn kernels into the pot, along with the sugar.
- 3) Shake pan constantly to keep sugar from burning. When kernels are only popping every few seconds, remove pot from heat.
- 4) Shake a few times until all popping has stopped
- 5) Pour popcorn, toss in some salt to taste, and serve.



NEW YORK HOT DOG

This is really the only way to eat a hot dog when you're reading a book set in New York! It's Mabel's favorite New York treat.

They joined the queue snaking from a cart and were silent until they each held a hot dog, milk buns soft and piled high with briny kraut.

Top hot dogs with sauerkraut (my favorite brand is Bubbies, but if you want to be authentic, get some Nathan's Famous) and spicy brown mustard.



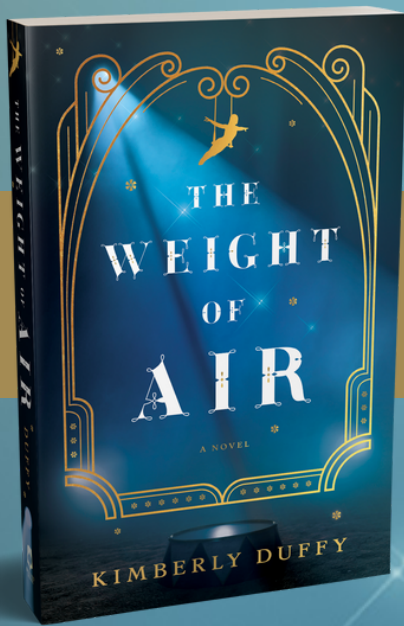
OTHER IDEAS

Some other things you can serve:

- Candied apples
- Cotton candy
- Peanuts
- Perogies
- Sausages
- Lemonade
- Funnel cake
- Soft pretzels

Fun fact: the people who sold treats at the circus were called "butchers". The candy butcher would sell candy apples and candy floss.





Discussion Questions

1. *The Weight of Air* takes place in a circus. What is your experience with the circus? Have you ever considered the lifestyle of the circus performers? How is this the same or different than what you imagined?
2. How is Mabel's relationship with her father different than her relationship with her mother, both as a child and as an adult?
3. What do Alyona's words "finish the show...fall apart later," mean to Mabel? What experience in your life required you to take this same advice?
4. How does the circus provide Mabel and Isabella/Polly both captivity and freedom?



- 5. Mabel is physically a very strong woman. How does her emotional strength change during the story?**

- 6. What do you think of Giuseppe—how he runs the circus, how he treats Mabel and his daughters?**

- 7. What was your first impression of Isabella/Polly after you learned that she did not die? Do you think her actions were justified?**

- 8. What do you think about Mabel’s statement, “A woman without a choice is at the mercy of the opportunities offered her”?**

- 9. Isabella/Polly does not perform with a net. What does this say about her?**

- 10. Discuss Robert and Isabella/Polly’s relationship.**



11. Alice says she would do anything for Katie Grace. How does her sacrifice mirror the one Isabella/Polly made for Mabel?

12. How do the secrets the characters keep influence the story and each character's decisions?

13. Jake asks Mabel, "Don't you think your mother leaving during your most formative years has something to do with your inability to believe in yourself? Why would you trust her with this?" How would you respond?

14. What did you think of the revelation that Charlotte and Jake's marriage wasn't so perfect, especially as compared to Mabel and Jake's arrangement?

15. Discuss the different ways the characters deal with rejection.



16. What is the significance of Polly taking back her name?

17. Depression is an important part of Polly's story. How does she learn to live with it and deal with its influence on her life?

18. How do the characters' fears, both real and imagined, influence their choices?



Character Quiz

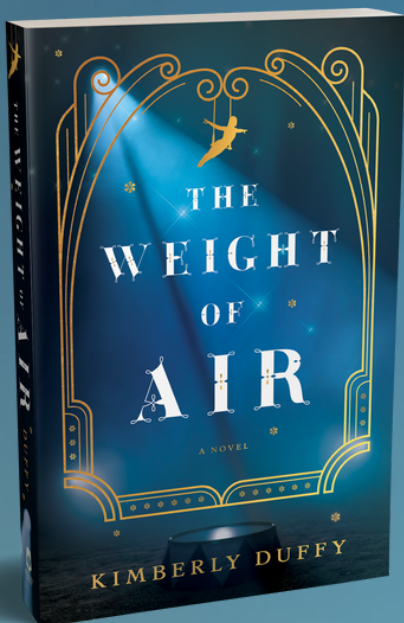
Which character from *The Weight of Air* are you most like? Which circus job is right for you?

Find out in this fun quiz:

<https://www.opinionstage.com/kim-duffy/which-circus-character-in-the-weight-of-air-are-you>



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