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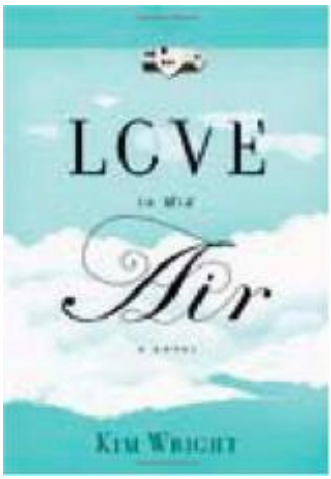
Love in Mid Air

by Kim Wright



About the Book

A chance encounter with a stranger in an airplane sends Elyse Bearden into an emotional tailspin. Suddenly, Elyse is willing to risk everything: her safe but stale marriage, her seemingly perfect life in an affluent Southern suburb, and her position in the church. As Elyse embarks on a risky affair, her longtime friend Kelly and the other women in their book club begin to question their own decisions about love, sex, marriage, and freedom. In the end it will take an extraordinary leap of faith for Elyse to find --- and follow --- her own path to happiness.

Discussion Guide

1. What do you think the title means? Obviously, Elyse meets Gerry on an airplane but in what other ways does she remain ?in mid air? during the course of the novel? At what point, if any, would you say she finally lands?

2. Although the novel is told from Elyse?s point of view, the voices of the other women are a major part of the story and they represent varying, and at times contradictory, perspectives on love and marriage. Are all the viewpoints equally valid? Did you identify primarily with one character or did you find yourself siding with different women at different points in the novel?

3. When Elyse reflects on Kelly?s past affair she says ?She was my best friend. It happened to one of us and so, in a way, it happened to both of us.? How do you think Kelly?s painful romantic history influences Elyse?s decisions? How does it influence the role Kelly plays as Elyse?s confidant?

4. What makes Gerry so irresistible to Elyse? Is it merely the fact he isn?t Phil, or are there other qualities in his personality and/or the way the two met that make it believable Elyse would be easily seduced?

5. Is an affair ever forgivable? Do you find Elyse?s situation sympathetic or do you see her as impulsive and selfish?

Does the fact she has a child make the situation worse? Do you agree with Kelly that society?s double standard makes an affair more acceptable for a man than for a woman?

6. The story is set in the south and much of the action revolves around the social life of a church. Would **Love in Mid Air** be a drastically different book if it were set in another part of the country or could these things happen in any affluent American suburb?

7. While watching a movie starring Elizabeth Taylor, Elyse says that she can?t bear to see other women unhappy and that this is why she moved to a place ?where the women hide their pain so well.? Is this accurate? Is there evidence that other women in the group are also hurting or is the statement simply a projection of Elyse?s own state of mind? Is discontent among women really contagious? What signs are there at the end of the book that Elyse?s decisions have had an impact on how the other women view their own lives?

8. It would be easy to see a novel about a married woman who is having an affair as a classic womancaughtbetweentwomen sort of story. How is **Love in Mid Air** different from your standard love triangle?

9. The book is full of symbols --- broken pottery, falling, myopia, vintage movies, the cat, the casseroles, the handcuffs, the old love letters Kelly gives to Elyse, even the fact the women walk in circles for exercise. What do you think these symbols mean to Elyse and how does their significance change through the course of the story?

10. Kelly tells Elyse that an affair is like cocaine because it takes more to get you off every time, and Elyse?s behavior does become increasingly reckless as the novel progresses. Do you think she?s lost touch with reality? That she wants to be caught? That she?s trying to force either Gerry or Phil to react in a way that takes the decision out of her hands?

11. Would things have worked out differently if Elyse and Phil had kept the original marriage counseling session they?d scheduled instead of choosing counseling with Jeff? Did the fact he was their pastor and friend hamper Jeff?s ability to understand what was really going on in their marriage?

12. Lynn is an enigmatic character throughout the book, but especially at the end when, after saying that ?Jesus and Elvis and wild horses couldn?t drag me back? she abruptly reconciles with her exhusband. Elyse imagines why Lynn might return to her marriage. Do you find Elyse?s fantasy plausible or do you think Lynn could have other reasons for going back? Why do you think Elyse?s postcard in a way that takes the decision out of her hands?

13. We see everything in the book through Elyse?s eyes. How would the story have been different if Kelly had been the narrator?

14. Elyse is upset that Tory is present during the scene on the church steps and wonders what stories she will tell herself later about what she?s witnessed. How do you think these events --- the affair, seeing her father strike her mother, the ultimate divorce?will affect Tory?s future life?

15. Also in the scene on the church steps, Elyse literally ?takes the fall? for something Kelly had done years earlier. Do you consider it ironic that it is her decision to keep Kelly?s letters, and not the affair that pushes the novel to its climax? Although Phil?s actions are surprising and violent, Elyse believes she?s been ?set free on a technicality.? Why do you think she compares being struck to a kind of religious grace? Did the reactions of any of the other characters who

witness the event surprise you?

16. Elyse clearly changes the most in the course of the novel but there are sizable shifts in other characters as well. How does Gerry change? Belinda? Jeff? Nancy? Phil?

17. Elyse recalls at one point that her grandmother told her ?When you marry the man, you marry the life? and she concludes the inverse is also true; if she leaves Phil she will have to leave her comfortable life --- i.e., economic security, the church, her close group of friends, and perhaps even her child. Is this what?s happening at the end of the book? Or are there signs that the transition might not be as wrenching as she predicted?

18. Would you say that **Love in Mid Air** has a happy ending?

Author Bio

Kim Wright is the author of LOVE IN MID AIR and THE UNEXPECTED WALTZ. She has been writing about travel, food, and wine for more than 20 years for many magazines including *Wine Spectator*, *Self*, *Travel & Leisure* and *Vogue*. She has twice won the Lowell Thomas Award for travel writing, and she is the food and wine editor for *Charlotte Taste*. THE CANTERBURY SISTERS is her third novel. Kim lives in Charlotte, NC.

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