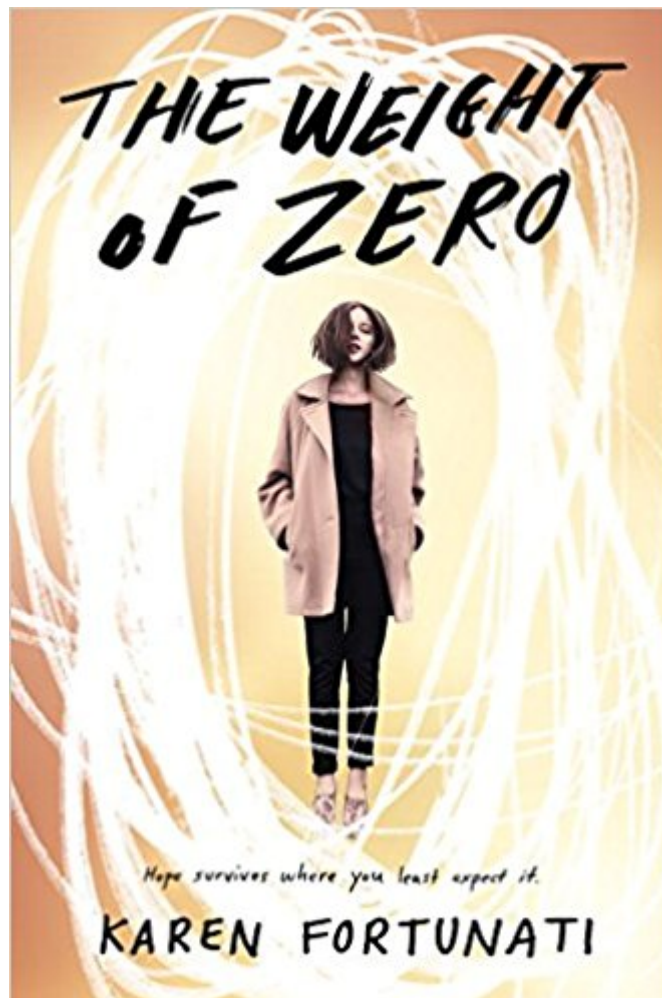


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The Weight Of Zero



Synopsis

For fans of *13 Reasons Why* and *Girl in Pieces*, this is a novel that shows the path to hope and life for a girl with mental illness. *Zero* is a novel by Seventeen-year-old Catherine Pulaski knows Zero is coming for her. Zero, the devastating depression born of Catherine's bipolar disorder, almost triumphed once; that was her first suicide attempt. And so, in an old ballet-shoe box, Catherine stockpiles medications, preparing to take her own life before Zero can inflict his living death on her again. Before she goes, though, she starts a short bucket list. This bucket list, combined with the support of her family, new friends, and a new course of treatment, begins to ease Catherine's sense of isolation. The problem is, her plan is already in place, and has been for so long that she might not be able to see a future beyond it. This is a story of loss and grief and hope, and how some of the many shapes of love—maternal, romantic, and platonic—affect a young woman's struggle with mental illness and the stigma of treatment.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Gr 9 Up—Seventeen-year old Catherine was diagnosed with bipolar disorder soon after her grandmother passed away two years ago. She's struggled with the diagnosis and treatment since then, swinging from manic episodes to deep depressions, which led to her first suicide attempt. Now, her life appears to be more stable, but Catherine knows it is just a matter of time before the depression, or Zero, takes over. She knows what answers to give to her therapist and her mother so

they don't suspect, but Dr. McCallum suggests Catherine take part in group therapy, called Intensive Outpatient Program. She meets with the group every week to talk about issues. Catherine goes but feels like Zero could strike at any moment. She doesn't want to end her life without experiencing anything, however, so she starts a list of things she needs to do before Zero takes over. Readers have a front-row seat to the teen's moods, thoughts, and fears. There is talk about sex, drinking, and drugs throughout, along with cutting, bulimia, anorexia, obsessive compulsive disorders, and other possible triggers. Catherine is a believable protagonist surrounded by fleshed-out secondary characters. The pace picks up as Catherine gets more involved in her history project and makes connections at school and in therapy. The author stresses how bipolar disorder can manifest and includes background and resources at the end of the book. VERDICT Recommend to readers who enjoy realistic fiction, want to learn more about bipolar disorder, or have a similar disorder. —Natalie Struecker, Atlantic Public Library, IA

An ABA Indies Introduce Title Pick A New York Public Library Best Book for Teens "An honest, informative, and ultimately optimistic novel about living with mental illness." -Kirkus Reviews — "Fortunati tackles social stigma and mental health realistically and honestly." — Publishers Weekly — "Recommend to readers who enjoy realistic fiction, want to learn more about bipolar disorder, or have a similar disorder." — SLJ — "Everyone takes a unique path to their dark places, but Karen Fortunati's portrayal of the road back is inspiring." — Trouble Is a Friend of Mine "This book absolutely floored me. It tore me apart and rebuilt me, in the best possible way. It is by far the best depiction of depression that I've read in a very long time. I spent the last half of the book in grateful tears, filled with a deep recognition that gave me hope for life and love for Catherine. I cannot express enough what this book meant to me. Read it. It will change you." — Flannery Fitch, Bookshop Santa Cruz (Santa Cruz, CA) — "You might think that a story about having bipolar disorder would be depressing. But this story will lift you up, open your eyes, and make even your darkest Zero moments seem manageable. Everyone should read this book. It will help you face those bad times, and it will help you appreciate the good times." — Clarissa Murphy, Brookline Booksmith (Brookline, MA) — "A real story that needs to be told about bipolar disorder and how it affects someone who is afflicted by this, The Weight of Zero also concentrates on the value of good doctoring, strong support from family and friends, and the will to continue living." — Kathy Taber, Kids Ink Children's Bookstore (Indianapolis, IN) —

What a beautiful, important book! Catherine's story will resonate with readers who have felt that struggle of living with pain and self-blame. It's a deeply life-affirming, empathy-reaching story and reminds me a bit of Francisco Stork's powerful novel, *The Memory of Light*, in that both novels focus on recovery rather than the events that lead up to a suicide attempt. Readers need novels like these, novels that show characters moving forward, building up a life, looking for and finding acceptance and hope. Fortunati does a brilliant job countering the weight of *Zero* with the cumulative weight of new and ongoing relationships. The relationships between family, boyfriend, clinic friends, and new best friend felt very real and honest, with no false promises of a relationship being a cure-all for mental illness. That's not what relationships are for or can actually do, but there is real healing for Catherine as she learns to be honest with others and herself. I appreciated that Catherine's best friend Kristal was just as valuable to her as her new boyfriend—she didn't just tunnel herself into a relationship with a boy to find healing and a social life. Michael was sweet and wonderful, but he wasn't the only reason for Catherine to embrace her life. The Jane subplot shows how Catherine starts to care about things, begins to take a role in her education that goes way beyond the classroom. Lastly, since I'm an English-major nerd, I have to admire the mini-plot surrounding Catherine's two readings of *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*. The first time she read it (on the advice of her previous therapist) she had a visceral reaction to it, a feeling of betrayal that a character who resonated with her was (she felt) nothing like her in a key way. Fortunati doesn't belabor the point, but Catherine is reading through a fog of depression, making it hard to see the book's message of hope for what it really is. The fact that she later on can read the book and see that message of hope for herself shows how far she's come, and it's a beautiful moment she's achieved all on her own.

This book. Oh boy. This book addresses bipolar disorder in such a real, emotional, practical, healing way. It doesn't romanticize or make mental illness a giant, toxic elephant in the room. It does the exact opposite. This book shows us through delicate, unpretentious prose, authentic dialogue, and complex, relatable characters, that mental illness is treatable and manageable. Thank you, Karen Fortunati, for writing this beautiful, essential book.

The Weight of Zero was one of the best books I have ever read. I just know that this book will be made into a major motion picture, and I will be first in line when it is! Karen Fortunati's writing draws the reader in -- this was a book I could not put down. I loved the ability of the author to make me feel like I was there and make me feel like I knew all of the characters. What an amazing story of life, hope, friendship, strength and love. This book is for anyone to read and I can't wait to tell everyone I know to read it. Kudos to Karen Fortunati for sharing this book and her talent of writing with the world. I can not wait to read her next book!

The Weight of Zero is a must read for every teenager and every family that is touched by mental illness. From the moment I discovered what the "zero" in the title was referring to, I was hooked. I have been in mental health environments where I've been asked my number, and I've lied about that number. And from the moment I started to get to know Catherine, the main character, I wanted to keep reading. I had to know if "zero" was going to win. And I prayed it wouldn't. I have a relative who died by suicide and it is a pain that will never vanish. The writing in this book is so superb that I felt like I was in Catherine's struggle with her and her Mom and everyone that cared for her. The plot is not predictable and completely consuming. I'm so grateful to have read it and will be buying copies for my friends for Christmas!

From the very first page, the character of Catherine caught my attention... and it stayed with me throughout the book!!! If this book were published when I was still teaching high school literature, it would definitely have been part of my required reading texts. Not only is the subject of mental illness explored (specifically depression/bipolar disorder) but incredible insight is given into bullying and society's views on mental illness. Anyone who reads this book would be easily reminded of John Green's THE FAULT IN THE STARS and the moving internalization of the feelings of young adults who are going through physical or psychological problems... often life-threatening. Karen Fortunati has beautifully captured the mental state of Catherine, but in addition to this, we are captivated as well by all of the people who surround her. It is one of those books that stays with the reader long after the last page has been read!!!

Despite the heavy subject the book was a light and enjoyable to read. The book may have been written for young adults but kept the story and characters fluid and honest.

Fortunati does such a beautiful job helping the reader crawl into the head of Catherine Pulaski, a girl

who suffers from bipolar disorder and feels all the stigma that diagnosis can bring. Catherine's lost her best friends, who now tease her mercilessly; she's lost her reputation at school as "normal;" she's lost her mother's trust since she tried to kill herself a year prior to where the book starts; and she's lost her grandmother, whose death triggered Catherine's bipolar symptoms and set the illness raging in her life. This book is heartbreaking and raw and real, but Fortunati does a brilliant job of balancing the darkness with the light in characters that help Catherine maneuver through the emotional roller coaster of her disorder. I LOVE Michael, the love interest, and as an Italian American, my heart melts with the scenes featuring Michael's Italian-American family. While Catherine's goal is to avoid Zero, that horrible nothing that hits when she's as depressed as she can possibly get, Fortunati definitely scores a TEN with this book!

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