

Reading Group Guide

THE BLESSINGS OF THE ANIMALS

A Novel

Katrina Kittle

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Harper Perennial / HarperCollins Publishers

\$14.99 Original Trade Paperback

ISBN-13: 978-0-06-190607-7

August 2010

Introduction:

From Katrina Kittle, critically acclaimed author of *The Kindness of Strangers*, comes a wry and moving story of forgiveness, flexibility, happiness, and the art of moving on.

Veterinarian Cami Anderson has hit a rough patch. Stymied by her recent divorce, she wonders if there are secret ingredients to a happy, long-lasting marriage or if the entire institution is outdated and obsolete. Couples all around her are approaching important milestones. Her parents are preparing to celebrate their fiftieth anniversary. Her brother and his partner find their marriage dreams legally blocked. Her former sister-in-law—still her best friend—is newly engaged. The youthfully exuberant romance of her teenage daughter is developing complications. And three separate men—including her ex-husband—are becoming entangled in Cami's messy post-marital love life.

But as she struggles to come to terms with her own doubts amid this chaotic circus of relationships, Cami finds strange comfort in an unexpected confidant: an angry, unpredictable horse in her care. With the help of her equine soul mate, she begins to make sense of marriage's great mysteries—and its disconnects.

Questions for Discussion:

1. The last line of Chapter Two has Cami entering the house (where Bobby will leave her), remembering the time she tried to touch a tornado. She thinks, "How could I have been so certain I wouldn't be hurt?" How does the tornado story parallel marriage?
2. How does the Bobby chapter affect your reading of the story? Without his point of view, what would be different for you? What does he think that you wish he'd tell Cami? What things do both Bobby and Cami misinterpret in each others' actions?
3. Discuss the importance of the scarred Passier saddle in light of what Cami learns about her parents' marriage.

4. Why is it so important for Cami to ask Bobby if he wants to work on the marriage? Would you have done the same thing? Or is this another example of her not knowing when to quit?
5. Why is it important for Cami to reclaim “Bobby's” kitchen? How does Muriel help with this decision?
6. What *are* the blessings of the animals? What gift does each of the three main animals (Moonshot, Gerald, and Muriel) give to Cami? How do these rescue animals end up rescuing her? What final gift or lesson does Luna bring at the end?
7. In what ways do the Davids epitomize the marriage vows they are not allowed to make?
8. Discuss Cami's reaction to Vijay's proposal. Are her concerns justified? Is she making a mistake?
9. Cami comes to believe that Bobby gave her a gift the day he walked out. Do you agree or disagree?
10. Cami and Vijay love each other but Vijay says, “And that's not enough.” Is he right? Is this a true assessment when considering forming a life together?
11. After the disastrous wedding shower for Olive, what “advice” would you offer to newlyweds?
12. Is Cami right to think “What a risk love was.” How do you feel about her final thoughts, “We were all—every one of us—rushing out into the hail. Dancing out into the hail every single day”? What does she mean?

About the Author:

Katrina Kittle is the author of *Two Truths and a Lie* and *The Kindness of Strangers*. She lives in Dayton, Ohio, where she teaches English and theatre at the Miami Valley School.