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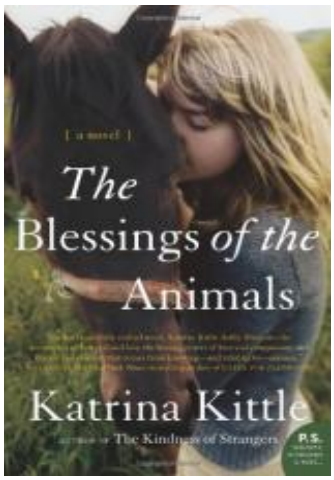
The Blessings of the Animals

by Katrina Kittle



About the Book

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divorce, she wonders if there are secret ingredients to a happy, long-lasting marriage or if the entire institution is outdated and obsolete.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 50th 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.

Discussion Guide

1. The last line of Chapter 2 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?

Author Bio

Katrina Kittle has lived in the Dayton, Ohio, area for most of her life. She grew up in a home where books were prized possessions, and original stories and poems were given as gifts. Her father is a voracious "chain reader," who encouraged her to read widely, and still greets her at the door with, "Did you bring me any books?" Her childhood was full of horses and books and hiking in the woods and camping with Girl Scouts and bossing the neighborhood kids into huge theatrical productions.

Originally interested in dance and theater, Kittle studied at the North Carolina School of the Arts and Ohio University, first as a theater major, then accepting an invitation to join the Honors Tutorial Program in English. She had a double major in English and education, worked in the theater costume shop, rode on the university?s equestrian team, kept a Theater minor, and graduated in 1990 with a BA in English and a BS in Education, earning the honor of Outstanding Graduating Senior for both departments.

After graduating, Kittle taught high school Advanced Placement British Literature for five years, then spent several years freelancing as a children?s theater director and creative writing instructor. She has worked as a writer-in-residence and taught creative writing workshops for several elementary, middle, and high schools, universities, and organizations. She has taught students as young as third grade and has had an 80-year-old student in her Fiction Intensive at The Antioch Writers? Workshop.

During "the freelance years," Kittle also worked in case management support at the AIDS Foundation Miami Valley (now the AIDS Resource Center), cleaned houses (which she found "very Zen-like and perfect for the writing life: you get left alone with your hands busy doing mindless work while your brain can simmer story ideas"), and worked as a veterinary assistant.

Kittle then taught 6th- and 7th-grade English at the Miami Valley School in Dayton, where she directed a middle school play each year. If she were to remain teaching, she would wish to be nowhere else, but she is so grateful to be fulfilling a lifelong dream to write full-time.

She is the author of *Traveling Light* and *Two Truths and a Lie*. Her third novel, *The Kindness of Strangers*, was released in February 2006. Early chapters from this third novel earned Katrina grants from the Ohio Arts Council and from the Montgomery County Arts and Cultural District. *The Kindness of Strangers* was selected as a Book Sense pick for February, and was the Fiction Book winner for the 2006 Great Lakes Book Awards.

Kittle runs and studies Latin dance. She's also on a cooking spree (when she's "cooking" figuratively on a new book, she's usually cooking a lot literally, too). In addition to her favorite pesto, she's especially fond of a recent espresso-chocolate cake she discovered in Nigella Lawson's fabulous cookbook *Feast*. She is also dabbling in Indian cooking, and so far her friends are willing guinea pigs.

With her purchase of a house in June 2009, Kittle has become obsessed with gardening. She tilled garden beds and planted seedlings before she unpacked a single box *inside* the house. With the gardening came new cooking challenges --- how to preserve the harvest? She is determined to learn to can before next fall's garden bounty.

Kittle loves theater and tries to get her theater "fix" at least once a year, usually auditioning for something at the Dayton Theatre Guild.

She also loves to travel. Recent travel highlights include spending the night with a goat under her bed in Ghana; riding horseback through the hills of Sintra, Portugal; and floating on her back in the Mediterranean looking up at the cliff-cut city of Positano, Italy.

Katrina Kittle keeps Dayton, Ohio, as her home base, where she is the proud aunt of Amy and Nathan, and where she lives with her assistant, Joey the cat.

Critical Praise

"Wonderfully poignant characters and a deeply satisfying exploration of love in its many incarnations, some of them a bit furrier than others, make this novel Katrina Kittle?s most insightful yet. Don?t miss it!"

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Publication Date: August 1, 2010

Genres: Fiction

Paperback: 464 pages

Publisher: Harper Perennial

ISBN-10: 0061906077

ISBN-13: 9780061906077