



Still Life with Elephant

By Judy Reene Singer
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Introduction

The way to a cheating man's heart is through . . . an elephant?

Professional horse trainer Neelie Sterling somehow missed the fact that her veterinarian husband, Matt, was having an affair with his blonde, pretty business partner. Neelie often misses things. (When Matt originally told her he was getting a colleague to help with the practice, she thought he said collie and Neelie likes dogs.) Now the blonde is saying she's pregnant, and Neelie's life is in a tailspin. But she sees an opportunity to patch up the holes in her disintegrating marriage when she learns that Matt is leaving for Zimbabwe to rescue a badly injured elephant. Foolishly optimistic, she joins the expedition.

On a dangerous, revealing, exhilarating trip through Africa, Neelie comes to learn a lot about herself as a woman and a wife. But it isn't until they return home with their pachyderm patient that her eyes are truly opened to what is going on around her. And with the help of a very large and very special animal, she may even discover how to love again.

Questions for Discussion

1. Why do you think Neelie sometimes hears things incorrectly? Do you think she does this deliberately, is there a psychological basis for it, or is it just a personality quirk?
2. Is Neelie right to behave in the way she does when she finds out Matt is leaving her for Holly, and that Holly is pregnant with their child? What would you do if you were faced with this situation?
3. What are Neelie's relationships with her family members like? How about the animals in her home, like Grace the dog and Mousi the horse? Do you think that animals are easier to get along with than people? Why or why not?
4. Neelie decides to join Matt on the trip to Zimbabwe to try and win him back. Do you think this is a good idea? Why or why not? Is there any good way to win an ex back?
5. How does what happened to Neelie's horse Homer affect her for the rest of her life? How has it affected her current relationships with other people?
6. Why does Margo and Abby's plight affect Neelie so much? How does she see her own life reflected in theirs? Why is it so important to her that they be saved?
7. Do you think Neelie and Tom are a right fit for each other? Is their relationship one that can last?

About the Author

Judy Reene Singer is a dressage competitor, horse trainer, and all-around animal lover. The author of the novel *Horseplay*, she has written about the equestrian world for more than a decade and was named top feature writer by *The Chronicle of the Horse* in 1996. She is a frequent contributor to international animal rescues and a foster mother to three elephant babies.