

Love in the Elephant Tent by Kathleen Cremonesi
Reading Guide Questions

1. Kathleen admits that “there had never been anything significant between any man and me.” /43/ So why does she fall for Stefano? What makes her involvement with him different from any of the other casual affairs she’s had on the road?
2. Kathleen and Stefano both admire seagulls. What are the ways in which they compare themselves to the freewheeling birds throughout the book? Why do the comparisons seem apt to them and are they accurate, in your opinion?
3. Zoltan’s story /53, 54/ is a metaphor for the ugliness lurking beneath the surface of the circus, not only for the people but also the animals living and working there. How do you think Kathleen and others reconcile themselves to that ugliness? Can that metaphor be extended to life in general?
4. What does Zoltan’s retreat to the circus and how he is handled there say about society’s treatment of those with mental health issues?
5. Do you think circuses have changed over the years since Kathleen and Stefano worked in one? How?
6. At one point, Stefano says that caring for the elephants makes him feel like he’s living “truer.” /58/ Do you think he’s being honest or lying to himself—and to Kathleen?
7. Kathleen writes that “Illusion is the circus’s greatest feat,” /74/ and that she hides her feelings, using “emotional prudence as both weapon and armor.” /76/ Do you think that that is actually the case? Is Stefano really more emotionally open and honest?
8. Why is Kathleen, who says she is so guarded, willing to take risks and fling herself into dangerous situations, like swimming with sharks and riding an ostrich?
9. How do Kathleen’s and Stefano’s relationships with their parents affect their relationship with each other? What compromises do they have to learn to make for each other along the way?
10. How does Kathleen’s perception of her mother and the her Suzy Homemaker /183/ image change as the book progresses? In struggling to not project that particular image, what other traditional stereotypes does Kathleen end up falling into? /192/
11. Does it seem to you that, like the circus’s tigers, /210/ Kathleen is performing more and more against her nature the longer she spends with the circus?
12. Why is it so important to Stefano that Kathleen cook for him? And why is Kathleen so resistant to doing exactly that?
13. What are the prizes, or lessons, Kathleen’s life at the circus has gained her, in your opinion? And perhaps cost her?