



## **The Elephant Keeper's Daughter**

*Julia Drostén , Deborah Rachel Langton (Translator)*

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**From the bestselling author of *The Lioness of Morocco* comes the beguiling novel of a young woman trapped between the expectations of her family and the desire to live free.**

Ceylon, 1803. In the royal city of Kandy, a daughter is born to the king's elephant keeper—an esteemed position in the court reserved only for males. To ensure the line of succession, Phera's parents raise her as a boy.

As she bonds with her elephant companion, Siddhi, Phera grows into a confident, fiercely independent woman torn between the expectations of her family and her desire to live life on her own terms. Only when British colonists invade is she allowed to live her true identity, but when the conquerors commit unspeakable violence against her people, Phera must add survival to the list of freedoms for which she's willing to fight.

Possessed by thoughts of revenge yet drawn into an unexpected romance with a kindly British physician, the elephant keeper's daughter faces a choice: Love or hatred? Forgiveness or retribution?

## The Elephant Keeper's Daughter Details

Date : Published April 10th 2018 by AmazonCrossing (first published August 8th 2016)

ISBN :

Author : Julia Drosten , Deborah Rachel Langton (Translator)

Format : Kindle Edition 295 pages

Genre : Historical, Historical Fiction, Fiction, Cultural, India

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## From Reader Review The Elephant Keeper's Daughter for online ebook

### Susan says

Phera, the third daughter of the royal elephant keeper, is raised as a male so that there is an heir. (Okay, side note: great now they have an heir! But how are they expecting the line to live past Phera?) However, when the British invade and the king is forced into exile, Phera's life is turned upside down and her family flees. Now Phera can enjoy being a female but misses the freedoms of being male! That all becomes a moot point when the British track down her family. The writing in this book is rich and descriptive, the setting is beautiful. This provides a stark contrast to the actions of the invading British. Phera makes for a strong female character and it was enjoyable to read how she overcomes her struggles and protects her family!

A copy of this book was provided by NetGalley and AmazonCrossing in exchange for an honest review.

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### Monerl says

Wieder einmal hat mich das Autorenpaar in eine hinter uns liegende Zeit entführen können. Diesmal spielt die Geschichte vor dem historischen Hintergrund Ceylons, dem heutigen Sri Lanka, einem Inselstaat im Indischen Ozean. Mit Julia Drostens begeben wir uns in das einstige Königreich Kandy, das sich bis 1815 noch erfolgreich gegen seine Eroberung und Kolonialisierung behaupten konnte. Doch alles begann in 1803, als eine kleine Truppenabteilung des britischen Heeres die Hauptstadt Kandy einnahm. Hier beginnt auch der vorliegende Roman.

Die Brüder Charles und Henry Odell gehören zu so einer kleinen Truppe, die von der britischen Krone nach Kandy geschickt wird. Zwei Brüder, die unterschiedlicher nicht sein könnten: Der eine selbstverliebt, brutal und ehrgeizig der andere ein Mensch mit Herz und Verstand. Einer möchte das Land erobern, der andere das Herz einer Frau.

Als Leser verfolgt man interessiert und gespannt dies geschichtliche Entwicklung Ceylons und ist ob der gewalttätigen Behandlung der einheimischen Bevölkerung von den Briten sehr betrübt und berührt. Mit viel Gewalt und Desinteresse für Bräuche und Lebenswandel der Menschen wird die Kolonialisierung durchgeführt.

Dies ist der Rahmen, in dem wir auch Phera und ihre geliebte Elefantenkuh Siddhi begleiten. Ich fühlte mich wundervoll in die faszinierende und exotische Welt und das Leben in Ceylon eingeführt. Gespannt verfolgte ich Pheras Geburt und die Hintergründe, warum sie dem einstigen König als Junge vorgestellt wurde. Pheras Schicksal und das des Königreiches Kandy gingen mir sehr ans Herz. Phera entwickelt sich zu einer starken Frau, die dennoch weiblich bleibt und nicht kitschig verklärt wird.

Vor jedem Kapitel gibt das Autorenpaar sehr interessante Informationen an den Leser weiter, die zur Recherche und nach mehr Wissen wollen verführen und anleiten. Das ist ein Erkennungszeichen von Julia Drostens. In jedem Buch des Autorenpaars kann man diese Informationen finden. Das schätze ich sehr und macht das Lesen zu einem ausehöhnlichen Erlebnis. Hier, in "Die Elefantenhüterin", sind es geschichtliche Hintergründe zu Ceylon / Sri Lanka, zu Elefanten, zum Buddhismus unvm., das den Horizont des Lesers erweitert.

Fazit:

Ich habe dieses Buch sehr gerne gelesen, da es mich durch die bildhafte und flüssige Sprache der Autoren sehr gut unterhalten hat. Mit großem Interesse verfolgte ich die Entwicklung des Landes sowie die Liebe von Phera und Henry. Ich habe viel dazugelernt und sehe auch Elefanten wieder mit etwas anderen Augen als vorher. Insgesamt ein tolles Buch, das zwar an einigen Stellen vorhersehbar ist, was aber dem Lesegenuss keinen Abbruch tut, da die Geschichte insgesamt eine ganz runde Sache ist.

Bisher hat mich noch kein einziges Buch von Julia Drosten enttäuscht und ich warte schon sehr gespannt auf das neue aus der Feder von Julia und Horst Drosten!

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### **Yvonne (It's All About Books) says**

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I have a weak spot for historical fiction, especially if they are set in an era or country I'm not all that familiar with. I was instantly intrigued when I first read about **The Elephant Keeper's Daughter**, with its promises of a country/culture I don't know

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### **Sue Morcumb says**

I was not sure that I was going to like this book but after the harrowing fight between the British and the Indian population, the story became very interesting!! There times I found the blatant barbaric treatment of people too much, I have never been an advocate of wanton destruction or violence just for the sake of it, (burglars breaking into others homes and smashing things up for the sake of it, or excrement on their walls etc) as an example and a fact, and some of the scenes were just blatant enjoyment for a very twisted and evil man, and there was a lot of this behaviour in this book, which I felt spoilt it, but the Dr and eventually the young woman who had been a boy all her life, their declaration of love was well written and personal, which I thought was well written, but I do think that the violence and rape of innocent victims was repeated too much and the references to the behaviour of one man was unnecessary, but I suppose it shows, Good overcomes Evil, but I do wonder what would have become of a Persecuted family having not been thwarted by another person. I think also, it is hard to imagine as an Englishwoman that our Men did such things, I am not naive that this did not happen, and in this book, we only had the one character, but it does make you wonder if, in reality, this did happen. I would not read this book again as I found that the story whilst very good, was damaged by too much violence. I think there should be a Footnote somewhere in the book to advise people who read this book, that there are some scenes that some people would find upsetting.

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### **Katesscrappyard@gmail.Com says**

I was very intrigued by the cover and synopsis of this book. This story takes place in India during the British Invasion. Phera is born the third daughter to the royal elephant keeper. As girls cannot carry the title, she is passed off as a boy at birth. Once the British invade, Phera's family is torn apart as they seek to survive. and Phera no longer needs to pretend to be a boy. During an encounter with the a British commander Phera witnesses unspeakable cruelty to her family. This part of the book was quite disturbing as graphic rape and beheadings are described in detail. I understand that these events very likely took place during war-times

which in itself is even more disturbing but I wouldn't buy a book that has these types of detailed events. There was also a graphic sex scene in a brothel that I felt was unnecessary, detracting from the plot. Following these events, Phera falls for the brother of the commander that destroyed her family. It's a sweet romance that leads to healing and rebuilding. Other than the two scenes I described above, I really enjoyed the book and would recommend it for anyone that loves history and a little bit of culture.

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### **Kim says**

I loved this book. I could hardly put it down. When baby Phera is born her mother and Nanny pass her off as a boy as the family needs an heir to keep their family's position as chief elephant trainer to the king. Phera is given an elephant that was born the same day as her by the king to train.

During a British takeover the family flees with other villagers and Phera takes her beloved elephant with her. At the age of twelve she is finally allowed to be a girl.

But when their small village is raided again her sister Samintha is repeatedly raped, her other sister is killed, her father is beheaded and Phera escapes into the jungle on her elephant.

To find out how this story ends you will have to read it for yourself.

Thanks to Netgalley and the publisher for the advanced copy of this book in exchange for an honest review.

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### **Dora Okeyo says**

*If this is how my year's going to be in terms of books that make me come undone, then, by all means, bring it on.*

This book unravels a disruption that Phera's family never imagined would come upon them with the British invasion. Their heritage, their homes, their faith, dignity and life all become undone on one night when one of their own betrays their King and has him exiled to create room for the British.

In all this, Phera stood out as the youngest child to be born to the Elephant Keeper of the Palace. She's born female but has to live the first twelve years of her life as male because of a lie her family told the King. She cannot declare the truth too because according to their custom only males would be Elephant Keepers and she loves Siddhi-her elephant cow, too much to jeopardize that.

The authors invite you into Sri Lanka, into Phera's world and you see it through her eyes, feel it through her heart beat and her anguish becomes your own and her people's death and brutal treatment at the hands of the British makes you wonder just how much a person could take.

It is a tale that reminds me of an African proverb, **Until the story of the hunt is told by the lion, the tale of the hunt will always glorify the hunter.**

I am glad to have gotten the chance to read this book courtesy of NetGalley. My views on it are on the tale and for such a long time colonization has often bragged about introduction of civilization into colonies but with this tale, and as with many more, I beg to differ.

If you are into historical fiction, then I'd recommend you read this book. It'll break your heart, challenge your beliefs, but it's a well told story that's bound to make you want to walk through that jungle with Phera and her elephant cow.

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## **Bookfan36 says**

Brief synopsis from the book cover:

Ceylon, 1803. In the royal city of Kandy, a daughter is born to the king's elephant keeper—an esteemed position in the court reserved only for males. To ensure the line of succession, Phera's parents raise her as a boy.

As she bonds with her elephant companion, Siddhi, Phera grows into a confident, fiercely independent woman torn between the expectations of her family and her desire to live life on her own terms. Only when British colonists invade is she allowed to live her true identity, but when the conquerors commit unspeakable violence against her people, Phera must add survival to the list of freedoms for which she's willing to fight. Possessed by thoughts of revenge yet drawn into an unexpected romance with a kindly British physician, the elephant keeper's daughter faces a choice: Love or hatred, forgiveness or retribution?

Story: 4 out of 5 stars

Writing: 4 out of 5 stars

Character development: 4 out of 5 stars

Overall: 4 out of 5 stars

Review:

The story is well told and gives you an idea what life would have been like for local population in Sri Lanka during colonial times. The story is full of intrigue and it tells of the story of a young girl who is forced to grow up as a boy because of her parent's deception to the king. It's hard to live with the consequences her parent's deceit but it also means having tremendous freedoms she wouldn't have had as a girl one of which is being able to care for her loyal elephant Siddhi. When the British invade and the king is overthrown she can finally be herself. The cruel events that happen during colonial rule forge Phera and she turns into a tremendously independent strong woman. Who despite everything is still able to love.

The characters are realistic; you feel their love, pain, torment, and anguish. It felt like I was there in the jungle with Phera and her elephant. The writing was so vivid you smell the flowers, the pungent aroma of food being cooked, the moist odours of the jungle after the rains. You hear the chirping of the birds and the sounds of animals moving through the undergrowth.

Overall this is a great story set in an interesting location and time. , I would recommend it for fans of historical fiction and woman's fiction fans of Renita D'Silva will like it.

Review copy provided by NetGalley in exchange for a honest review

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## **Kylene says**

I'm really conflicted on this one. The Elephant Keeper's Daughter had a few really big strikes from me, but there were also some things I liked.

I'll start with the things that bothered me:

I had a really hard time believing that Phera had no clue she was a girl until she was twelve. She worked with elephants everyday and would have seen the difference between male and female elephants. She would have at least been a little suspicious!

Also, I'm not a big fan of the purely evil bad guy in novels, especially when there's any portion that's from his/her POV. All I need is a little depth--maybe a reason why he's evil, maybe an aspect of his life that shows him not being evil--but Charlie is all evil all the time.

From the blurb, I expected more of a gradual awakening of feeling between Phera and Henry, with a little more internal conflict.

The things I liked:

Siddhi!

Some of the issues I listed above are normally deal breakers for me, but this time I kept reading. The story kept moving, which kept me interested, and there wasn't any of the clunkiness that sometimes comes from a translation.

The setting (although a map would have been great!)

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### **Karen says**

I received this from netgalley.com in exchange for a review.

Set in 1800's Sri Lanka, the story follows Phera. To ensure the family line, her parents raise her to believe she is a boy until she is 12. Then the British invade and destroy their way of life so she no longer needs to be a boy.

Some of the conversational language was rather sophomoric and stilted. And I never understood why Charles was so purely evil. His hatred made no sense. Was the character made a villian just to have a really evil villian in the story? His brother Henry was completely the opposite and reminisces about their pleasant childhood. Ying and Yang? Good and bad?

There was some pretty graphic scenes of rape and torture. Appropriate for ages 15 and above.

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### **Peg says**

I enjoyed the sweeping descriptions of the sights and smells that were portrayed in the book along with the

story line of the two families intersecting. I think a good job was done portraying the ruthlessness of events that occurred at that time for no other reason than because they could. I wish though that more had been done to portray the differences that the society placed between men and woman and this was the perfect platform to do so, but it was so lightly touched that it was almost ignored. Instead of describing the restrictions of returning to being a female, it turned to romance. Otherwise, it was a great story to be told with the horrible events as a back drop.

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### **Sophia says**

Earlier this year, I came across a historical fiction set in the time of Colonial India and it was lavish with historical detail of the time period of the story and before. This book gave me a thirst for more Indian historicals. Naturally, I pounced when I spied The Elephant Keeper's Daughter on an audio list.

This book is translated into English and has a German husband and wife author team.

The narrator is new to me, but I thought she was a brilliant match considering she might be from or have ties to that part of the world. Naturally, her accents were good and she caught the nuances that I recognized from watching foreign films and engaging with some Indian Americans who are acquaintances. She did such a good job with all the technical aspects. I teared up, got angry, smiled and felt my heart warm at all the right spots.

The historical setting is Ceylon at the outset of the British gaining control and ousting the last kingdom there in the early 1800s. The story follows one family- the royal elephant keeper and his family- as they do what they have to do under the smashing and grabbing boot of the British might. This book was brutally honest much of the time about what this transition was like for the locals and the British on the scene. It was tragic and yet the heart of the people shone through.

There is a unique twist to the story of the heroine, Phera. Phera was born a girl, but there was a deception that took place at the time of her birth that made it so that her gender had to be kept hidden at all costs. For twelve years, she was reared as a boy so she could learn to take care of the elephants including her own elephant gifted her by the king. She is slated to follow in her father's footsteps as his son. But then the British invade and take over. She no longer has to perpetrate the deception and has a decision on her hands. At the same time, things get brutal and her family suffers tragedy. Trigger warning for strong violence and rape. Her focus turns to hate and revenge and then gets complicated by a love for someone who is from the enemy race.

There were so many elements addressed in this one and yes, it did bog it down a little, but when the pace would start to sag, the action would pick up again. I was enchanted by the lavish and colorful descriptions that allowed me to get a good look at Ceylon of the time- social, religious, family, traditions and more were drawn in well. Phera and those around her were engaging characters.

Okay, not the villain. I found that he was so starkly evil toward the Indians and it threw me off because his brother is the opposite and they were close. I might have got it if there was an explanation of someone from the race doing him a terrible wrong, but there was really nothing other than unreasonable hatred that went well beyond prejudice into the personal.

In summary, my reason for picking this book up was satisfied. I enjoyed my journey into Ceylon's history, but I also enjoyed getting Phera's story and getting to know this remarkable young woman who had to come

into her own under terrible circumstances.

My thanks to Brilliance Audio for the opportunity to listen to this book in exchange for an honest review.

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### **Shari says**

This book tells the story of Phera and her elephant Siddhi. Phera is born into the family that tends to the elephants for the king. Unfortunately for her father, Phera is born a girl, but there is a misunderstanding and her father thinks the baby is a boy and somehow the King finds out. So, to keep the family secret Phera is raised as a boy.

When Phera is 12 the British come and take over the village where Phera and her family live. The king is ordered to leave and Phera's family "steals" all the elephants. British are killed and so they seek revenge on Phera's family and friends and it's ugly. Didn't like all the graphic scenes - but understand this could be something that really happened. Phera hid and somehow escapes all the carnage.

Bad British guy - Charles - starts building a road and wants to go through the village where Phera and her Mother and Sister moved to. He makes the men from the village work for him with no pay and hardly any food. His brother - Henry - is a doctor and tries to make him change, with no luck.

Henry falls in love with Phera (thinking she is a boy) and so the story goes.

There were parts I didn't care for, but mostly the story was good.

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A copy of this book was provided to me in exchange for an honest review.

### **Barbara says**

The Elephant Keeper's Daughter has something of the Victorian melodrama about it. There's an evil baddie, a kind doctor, a battle between evil oppressors and gentle country folk, a love story across class and religion, and plenty of opportunity for violence, drug abuse, rape, pillage and murder. What fun!

Phera is the third daughter of the king of Kandy's chief elephant keeper but as a result of some confusion on the day of her birth - which just happens to coincide with the birth of her favourite elephant - Phera is brought up as a boy with the intention that she take over her father's role. The evil 'British' turn up and depose the king and start bossing all his people around, quashing a rebellion by the natives with extreme violence.

Charles and Henry are brothers - one evil, one good - a nod towards the old story of Cain and Abel complete with a rather cheesy 'Am I my brother's keeper?' line snuck in for good measure.

It's quite fast moving, the plot is very black and white and at times a great big chunk of explanation sneaks in as a single paragraph that appears unexpectedly to explain why demon Charles has such a hold over doctor

Henry (see my highlights for the paragraph). I don't know if we need to blame the translator or the author but some of the prose is simplistic in the extreme.

There are no great surprises, most of the twists are predictable and surely love and good will triumph over evil and the whole cast will take a bow at the end to tumultuous applause.

I'm off to Sri Lanka later this year and visiting Kandy. This book won't really add anything to that visit but it was a pleasant enough quick read.

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### **Danielle Bonam says**

The Elephant Keeper's Daughter is a unique historical fiction; steering away from the typical tales of Ancient Egypt or World War II and focuses on the brutal colonization of the Indian subcontinent by the British. As a teacher of Eastern Hemisphere history, I was aware but I am pleased to see Dosten's out of the norm tale and hope it encourages others to look into these historic events. This was a breath of fresh air in the historical-fiction genre.

Phera is born as the third daughter to a high caste trainer of elephants for a king in Sri Lanka. Afraid of losing their esteemed position without an heir, Phera's family disguises her as a boy. Phera is taught to be an elephant trainer and is gifted the elephant born the same night as herself, Siddhi. Her education and privileges give Phera a unique gift as a woman in a world ruled by men.

The British, continuing their colonization of South Asia, are assisted in overthrowing the king in Sri Lanka, just when Phera has become an adolescent and coming to terms with being a girl. Suddenly, Phera and her family are forced to flee the capital, freeing the elephants to save them from becoming beasts of burden to the British. Phera and her family settle in a small village with Siddhi.

After successful rebellions against the British, a mad general, Charles O'Dell slaughters Phera's father and tortures the other members of her family. Charles' brother, Henry, is horrified by these acts and decides to help the local people as much as he can.

Years later, Phera faces the O'Dell brothers again as Charles plans to build a road through Phera's sanctuary village. Returning to her "male" roots, Phera and her elephant must take on the British in order to fulfill her need for revenge and save her remaining family.

Dosten paints a beautifully dark tale of the struggles faced by the native peoples of a colonized land. The atrocities of this novel were all too real and Dosten shares these horrific events as well as the hope and perseverance to get through them vividly. This was a quick read and I highly recommend it to any history fan or to someone looking to learn something new.

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