Remarkably Bright Creatures

by Shelby Van Pelt

About the Book

For fans of A MAN CALLED OVE, a charming, witty and compulsively readable exploration of friendship, reckoning and hope that traces a widow's unlikely connection with a giant Pacific octopus.

After Tova Sullivan?s husband died, she began working the night shift at the Sowell Bay Aquarium, mopping floors and tidying up. Keeping busy has always helped her cope, which she?s been doing since her 18-year-old son, Erik, mysteriously vanished on a boat in Puget Sound over 30 years ago.

Tova becomes acquainted with curmudgeonly Marcellus, a giant Pacific octopus living at the aquarium. Marcellus knows more than anyone can imagine but wouldn?t dream of lifting one of his eight arms for his human captors --- until he forms a remarkable friendship with Tova.

Ever the detective, Marcellus deduces what happened the night Tova?s son disappeared. And now Marcellus must use every trick his old invertebrate body can muster to unearth the truth for her before it?s too late.

Shelby Van Pelt?s debut novel is a gentle reminder that sometimes taking a hard look at the past can help uncover a future that once felt impossible.

Discussion Guide

1. What kind of person do you think Marcellus would be if he were human? What qualities do Marcellus and Tova both share that make this remarkable friendship a success?

2. Each of these characters --- animal and human --- need each other in a specific way, even if they don?t realize this at first. What qualities bind these characters to each other? Are they connected by loss, grief or something else?

3. On page 9, Tova empathizes with the sharks in the big aquarium tank, musing that she ?understands what it means to never be able to stop moving, lest you find yourself unable to breathe.? Why do you think she feels so compelled to keep busy? What would happen if she simply stopped?

4. In contrast to how Tova keeps busy, Cameron emerges as a character who deals with grief by remaining stagnant, refusing to even try to reach his potential, much to the frustration of those who care about him. Why do you think he sabotages himself? Have you ever had someone like this in your life?

5. Marcellus is extremely smart --- smarter than any human he encounters. Have you had encounters with animals --- octopuses or otherwise --- who demonstrated surprising levels of intelligence, emotional or otherwise? Have you felt ?seen? by an animal or felt a relationship with an animal deepen upon earning their trust?

6. REMARKABLY BRIGHT CREATURES takes place in a Pacific Northwest coastal town in the recent past. The watery Puget Sound setting plays a major role in the plot, but how else does the setting inform the novel? How do you think the novel would be different if it were set somewhere like Arizona or Minnesota?

7. Marcellus remarks on page 59 that ?fingerprints are like keys, with their specific shape. I remember all keys, too.? From the house key Tova loses to the ring of keys Marcellus finds at the bottom of the sea, the novel is filled with various types of keys. What do you think keys symbolize in this novel?

8. Tova reflects on her experience caring for her husband through his illness and eventual passing, and with no surviving family to do the same for her, she worries about being a burden on her friends as she ages. How do you view the role of community and family in caring for older people? How did Tova?s views on this change throughout the book, and why do you think they did?

9. In the middle of the novel, on page 177, Cameron says to Tova, ?conscience does make cowards of us all.? What do you think he means by this statement? Do you agree with this?

10. Tova?s Swedish Dala Horses are some of her most treasured possessions. Why do you think that is? Are there heirlooms in your family that carry a similar significance?

11. This novel explores different characters who are faced with major choices: they can open themselves up to something new and take an unexpected, daring opportunity, or they can continue on as they have been. Have you ever faced a moment in your life where a critical choice could change everything? Did you take the leap or not?

12. Marcellus? life in captivity is much different than the life of an octopus in the wild --- and eventually, Terry reveals that Marcellus was rescued from the sea after a life-threatening injury. Aquariums play an important role in education and conservation, but some people view keeping animals, especially intelligent ones, in captivity with skepticism. What do you think?

13. In the last few pages of the novel, Tova and Cameron realize how they are truly connected. What do you imagine

they are doing a year from the novel?s end?

Author Bio

When Shelby Van Pelt isn?t writing, she?s herding cats and wrangling children. Her debut novel, REMARKABLY BRIGHT CREATURES, was an instant *New York Times* bestseller and a "Read with Jenna" Today Show Book Club pick. In 2023, she was awarded the Heartland Prize for Fiction and the McLaughlin-Esstman-Stearns First Novel Prize from The Writer?s Center. REMARKABLY BRIGHT CREATURES has sold over two million copies. It has spent, in aggregate, over a year on the *NYT* Hardcover Bestseller list.

Born and raised in the Pacific Northwest, she?s now missing the mountains in the Chicago area with her family.

Remarkably Bright Creatures

by Shelby Van Pelt

Publication Date: April 29, 2025

Genres: Fiction

Paperback: 384 pages

Publisher: Ecco

ISBN-10: 0063204169

ISBN-13: 9780063204164