

# Remarkably Bright Creatures



## About the Author

Shelby Van Pelt is an American writer from Tacoma, Washington and currently resides in Chicago. Her debut novel *Remarkably Bright Creatures* (2022) has been on the New York Times hardcover fiction best-seller list multiple times and was a Read with Jenna Today Show book club pick in 2023.

She was awarded the 2023 McLaughlin-Esstman-Stearns First Novel Prize and \$3000 by the Writer's Center for *Remarkably Bright Creatures*. The book has now sold over two million copies.

## About the Book: (from Goodreads)

*Remarkably Bright Creatures*, an exploration of friendship, reckoning, and hope, tracing 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 eighteen-year-old son, Erik, mysteriously vanished on a boat in Puget Sound over thirty 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.

## Suggested Reads:

- *The Borrowed Life of Frederick Fife* by Anna Johnston
- *The One in a Million Boy* by Monica Woods
- *The Way We Weren't* by Phoebe Fox
- *Tell Me Everything* by Elizabeth Strout

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## Discussion Questions

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?
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?
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?