

Remarkably Bright Creatures by Shelby Van Pelt

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.



Bio

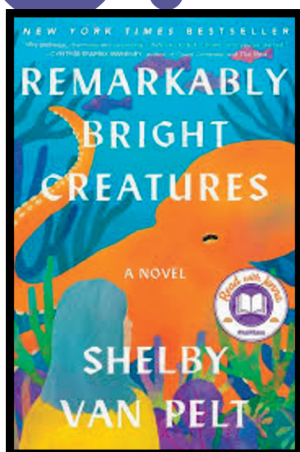
When Shelby Van Pelt isn't writing, she's herding cats and wrangling children. Her debut novel, *REMARKABLY BRIGHT CREATURES* (Ecco, 2022) was an Instant New York Times Bestseller and a Read With Jenna Today Show book club pick. In 2023, she was awarded the Heartland Prize for Fiction and the McLaughlin-Esstman-Stearns First Novel Prize from The Writer's Center. Remarkably Bright Creatures has sold over a million copies. It has spent, in aggregate, a year-plus 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.

Awards and Nominations:

- Read with Jenna Today Show Book Club Pick (2022)
- Named a Best Book of Summer (2022) by Chicago Tribune, The View, Southern Living, USA Today
- Goodreads Choice Award Nominee for Fiction (2022)
- Goodreads Choice Award Nominee for Debut Novel (2022)
- Audie Award Finalist for Audiobook of the Year (2023)

Take a look at these alternate covers from different countries and discuss how your first impression might have been different and which cover you think best represents the book.



US



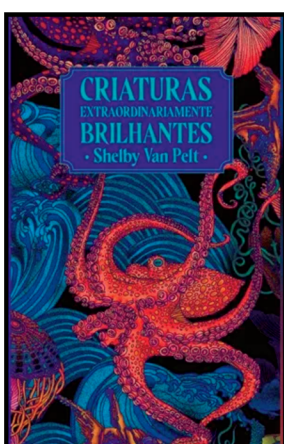
Danish



Hebrew



Germany



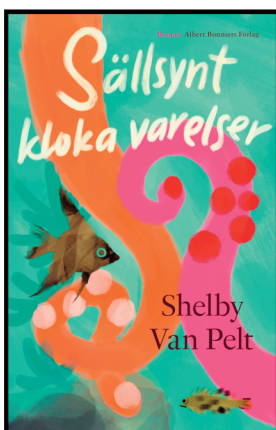
Portuguese



Hungarian



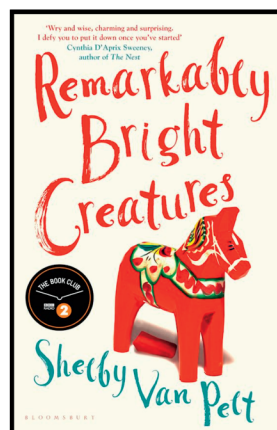
Bulgarian



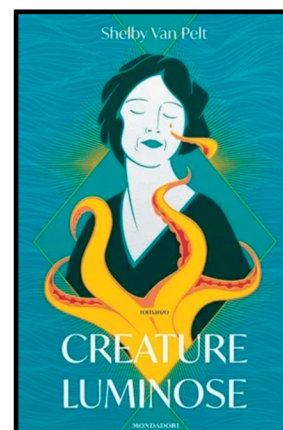
Sweden



Greece



United Kingdom



Italy

Marcellus – Perhaps the most beloved book character of 2022, Marcellus is a Giant Pacific Octopus who lives in the Sowell Bay Aquarium. He's curmudgeonly, but also extremely intelligent and knows his days are running out.

Tova – A seventy-year-old widow who doesn't want to become irrelevant or move to a nursing home, so she takes a night job at the Sowell Bay Aquarium to stay active. This is where she meets Marcellus.

Cameron – A thirty-year-old, struggling in life in Modesto, California. He drives north to Sowell Bay, Washington looking for his father after losing his job and getting dumped by his girlfriend. Once he arrives, Cameron takes a temporary position at the aquarium to make enough money to stay in town.

Jeanne – Cameron's aunt, who raised him

Daphne Ann – Cameron's Mom

Brad & Elizabeth – Cameron's best friend and his wife

Simon – The wealthy man Cameron comes to town to meet

Avery – Cameron's love interest in Washington

Marco – Avery's son

Terrance/Terry – The director of the Sowell Bay Aquarium

Ethan – The Scottish grocer who is interested in Tova. He also befriends Cameron, connecting Cameron to the temporary aquarium job and giving him a place to park at night.

The Knit-Wits – Tova's friend group, made up of Mary Ann, Janice, and Barb

Lars – Tova's older brother

Erik – Tova's son, who drowned as a teenager decades earlier. While the police said it was suicide, Tova never believed that was the case.



1. Read through the questions before your meeting and select your favorites so you can prioritize them. Most clubs won't have time for every question, so start with those that you are most excited to discuss.
2. Did the book change how you think about zoos and aquariums after reading the thoughts of Marcellus? What are the pros & cons?
3. Although Tova gets lonely in her home, she opted to find an overnight position without co-workers. Discuss her choice and whether you prefer to work alone or in a group.
4. This book counters heavier topics with a lighter tone leading to a range of emotions as you read. What emotions did it illicit in you?
5. As Tova considered moving into the retirement community, did you hope she would embrace a new chapter or stay in her existing home with her friends nearby?
6. Optional follow-up: Have you considered your future living arrangements?
7. In their own ways, Marcellus, Tova, and Cameron were all at points in life where they could use a friend who was a cheerleader for their happiness. Who did you find yourself cheering for the most as you read?
8. While she didn't need to work for money, Tova needed to stay busy and keep moving to survive and keep depression away. Conversely, Cameron's circumstances and mental health had him remaining still in life. Did you relate to either character's natural coping tendencies?
9. What do you think the significance of the Dala horse was to Tova? And why do you think Erik hid the one he had repaired?
10. At what point in the book did you know what Marcellus was trying to tell Tova? Were you surprised when the full story was revealed?
11. Many readers reported not liking Cameron at the beginning of the book. How did you feel about him, and did that change by the end of the book?
12. Some readers expect books with animals as main characters to be geared toward children rather than adults. How did you feel about this concept in an adult novel when you first started reading and did your opinion change throughout the book?
13. Optional follow-up: Have you read any other books you'd recommend with animal main characters?
14. Marcellus is both curmudgeonly and endearing. Did he remind you of any human characters from other books?
15. Has anyone seen the documentary My Octopus Teacher? How was the real Octopus similar to & different from Marcellus? Would you recommend the film?
16. We all know the saying, "don't judge a book by its cover," but let's be honest – many of us do. What was your first impression of this book based on the cover?



"I suggest honoring Marcellus and his sneaky, snacky ways by serving small seafood 'treasures.'"

SEAFOOD OPTIONS:

Crab Rangoons

<https://www.inspiredtaste.net/57668/crab-rangoon/>

or

Furin Japanese Restaurant & Bar

21 Lincolnway, Valparaiso, IN 46383

Has the best Crab Rangoons in town!



Smoked Salmon on Crackers

<https://www.inspiredtaste.net/57668/crab-rangoon/>



NON- SEAFOOD OPTIONS:

Make yourself a snack board with these fun food items!!

Caprese Kabobs!

Consisting of mozzarella, basil and tomatoes on a skewer! Throw in a balsamic glaze dipping sauce and you've got a nice refreshing snack!

Stuffed Dates

Whether that's with goat cheese, honey and pecans (Courtney's personal favorite or bacon wrapped, Stuffed Dates are a delicious snack!

Flavorful Nuts

Make your own or any of the premade interesting combinations at your local grocer! (Target has some interesting ones, like Lemon Poppyseed Cashews!)



References and Inspirations!

Character List and Questions

<https://bookgirlsguide.com/remarkably-bright-creatures-book-club-questions/>

Food Pairings

<https://www.instagram.com/thebookclubcookbook/p/CkzXlcxMZPj/>