



# *Remarkably Bright Creatures*

by Shelby Van Pelt

---

*Martin County Library System Book Club Kit:*

---

## *Remarkably Bright Creatures*

by Shelby Van Pelt

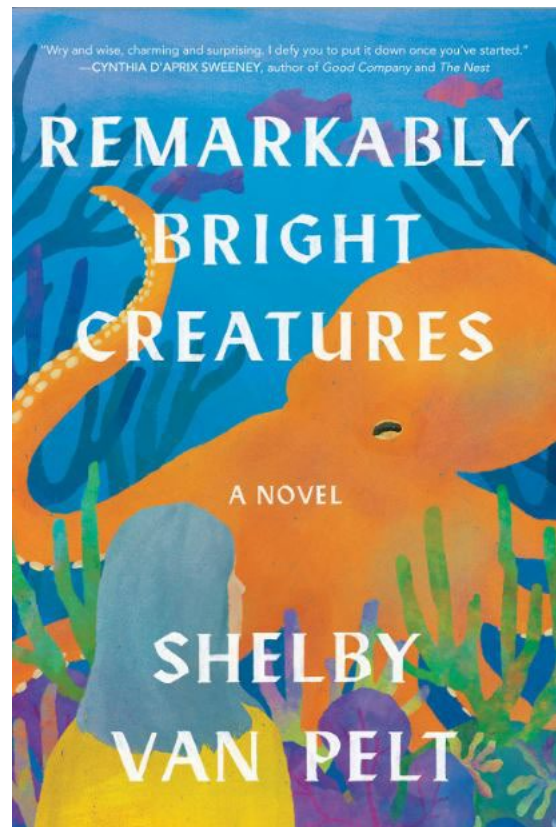
Included in the Kit:

- [Book summary](#)
- [Author biography](#)
- [Discussion questions](#)
- [Recipe suggestion](#)

### Book summary

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 the Puget Sound over 30 years ago.

As she works, 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 tentacles for his human captors—until he forms an unlikely friendship with Tova.



also available to  
download from Libby



# *Remarkably Bright Creatures* by Shelby Van Pelt

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

Source: Author's website. ([shelbyvanpelt.com](http://shelbyvanpelt.com))

## Meet the author

When Shelby Van Pelt isn't feeding her flash-fiction addiction, she's juggling cats while wrangling children. Her debut novel, *REMARKABLY BRIGHT CREATURES*, will be published by HarperCollins in May 2022. Born and raised in the Pacific Northwest, she's currently missing the mountains in the suburbs of Chicago.



Source: Author's website. ([shelbyvanpelt.com](http://shelbyvanpelt.com))



# *Remarkably Bright Creatures*

## by Shelby Van Pelt

### 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?
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



# *Remarkably Bright Creatures* by Shelby Van Pelt

- 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. Marcellus's 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?
  10. 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?

Source: Stephanie Larratt. "13 discussion questions for 'Remarkably Bright Creatures' by Shelby Van Pelt." *Today*, 19 May 2022. (<https://www.today.com/shop/13-discussion-questions-remarkably-bright-creatures-shelby-van-pelt-t254869>)



# *Remarkably Bright Creatures* by Shelby Van Pelt

## Recipe suggestion

### Florida Keys Smoked Fish Dip

A creamy, spicy smoked fish dip straight from Key West. Served with slices of jalapenos and crackers, it's like a little piece of appetizer heaven.

### Ingredients

- 2 cups smoked whitefish, about 1 lb.
- ¼ cup mayonnaise
- ¼ cup sour cream
- ½ teaspoon Old Bay seasoning
- 4 drops hot pepper sauce or to taste
- 2 drops Worcestershire sauce or to taste
- 1-3 drops liquid smoke (only if needed as some smoked fish is stronger than others)
- 2 teaspoons minced sweet onion
- 2 teaspoons red bell pepper, minced
- Squeeze of lemon juice
- Cracked black pepper to taste



### Instructions

Flake fish, being careful to pick out all the bones, and place in food processor with all remaining ingredients. Process until smooth.

If you like your spread with a little more chunkiness just retain part of the fish aside and stir in afterwards. Refrigerate at least 1 hour for flavors to blend. Serve with sides of sliced lemon, jalapeno slices, celery sticks, carrot sticks and crackers.

This document may be reproduced upon request in an alternative format by contacting the County ADA Coordinator (772) 320-3131, the County Administration Office (772) 288-5400, Florida Relay 711, or by completing our accessibility feedback form at [www.martin.fl.us/accessibility-feedback](http://www.martin.fl.us/accessibility-feedback)