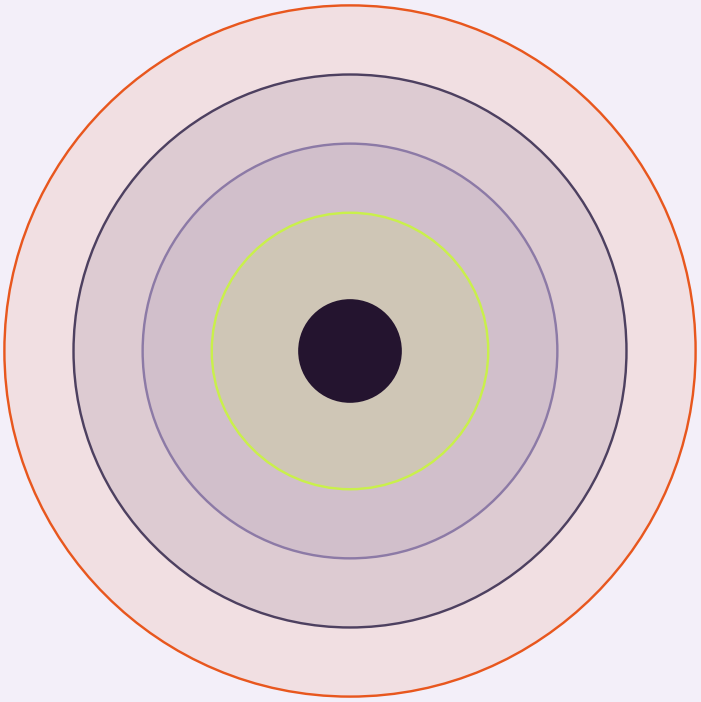


Remarkably Bright Creatures

A reading of the book by Shelby Van Pelt (2022)

1. ACTION BOOK

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ABOUT THIS EDITION

This is HourLife's reading of Remarkably Bright Creatures, in our own words. It is not a substitute for the book.

BEFORE YOU START 01

The book in a minute

Remarkably Bright Creatures is Shelby Van Pelt's first novel, published in 2022. It is set in Sowell Bay, a small town on Washington's Puget Sound, where Tova Sullivan, a widow in her seventies, cleans the local aquarium at night, decades after her teenage son Erik vanished at sea. On her rounds she gets to know Marcellus, a giant Pacific octopus who narrates some of the chapters himself, counts his days in captivity and has little patience for the humans who visit him. Cameron, a man of about thirty who drifts from job to job, arrives in town looking for the father he never knew. The novel moves between these three voices to tell a quiet story about grief, loneliness in later life, and friendships that turn up where nobody expected them.

Below are the 9 ideas HourLife readers vote up most, each in our words with a note on what it asks of you, and then the steps that put them to work.

WHAT READERS KEEP

The takeaways

1 HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

Grief can hide inside a routine that looks like ordinary tidiness.

Tova mops the aquarium floors and wipes the glass every night, and she does it carefully. The work gives her days a shape after years of not knowing what happened to her son. A routine can hold you up, but it can also be a way of not looking at the thing that hurts.

2 HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

Real friendship can come from the least likely direction.

The bond at the centre of the book is between an old woman and an octopus. Neither of them expected it, and both are changed by it. If you only look for company among people like you, you may walk past the friend who would have mattered most.

3 HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

Being self-reliant can slowly turn into keeping everyone out.

Tova is proud of managing on her own, and she dislikes being pitied. Her friends in town keep offering help, and she keeps finding polite ways to turn it down. Independence is a strength until it becomes the reason nobody gets close.

4 HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

A drifting life often has an unanswered question about where you come from underneath it.

Cameron, raised by his aunt after his mother left, loses jobs and blames other people for it. Looking for his father is his first real attempt to understand himself. Restlessness sometimes eases once you face the question you have been avoiding.

5 HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

Small, steady care can say what you cannot put into words.

Much of the book's tenderness is in plain acts: a clean tank, a visit, a meal, someone showing up again the next night. People who struggle to talk about feelings can still show them. Noticing those acts is part of loving people who speak that way.

6 HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

A creature this clever is owed more than a good tank.

Marcellus is sharp, funny and fully aware that he lives behind glass. His chapters make it hard to see the animals in an aquarium as exhibits. The novel leaves you asking what we owe other minds, even when we keep them well.

7 HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

Time is short, so the moment to reach out is usually now.

Marcellus counts his days and knows his life is nearing its end, which gives his choices urgency. Most of us act as if there will always be time for the call or the visit. The book is a gentle push to stop waiting for a better moment.

8 HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

Letting someone help you is a gift to them as well.

Refusing help can feel like sparing others trouble, but it also shuts them out. When Tova starts to accept company, the people around her get something too: a way to show they care. Being needed is one of the ways a friendship grows.

9 HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

The truth still matters when it cannot change the past.

Tova has lived for decades without an answer about her son. Knowing would not bring him back, yet the not-knowing shapes every year. Sometimes peace comes less from closure than from finally being told, and being able to tell others.

PUT IT TO WORK

Your action book

Do the setup steps once, then keep the habits going. The setup changes your week; the habits keep it changed after the first good one.

The download puts this whole reading and a printable action book in one PDF: the setup checklist, then a page of real calendar days for each habit, starting on the day you choose.

SET UP ONCE

- [ ] List three people you have lost touch with
- [ ] Write one letter and send it
- [ ] Accept one offer of help you would normally refuse
- [ ] Ask an older person about their life
- [ ] Spend an hour watching an animal closely

KEEP UP DAILY

- [ ] Send one short message a week to someone you miss
- [ ] Keep a small ritual of care
- [ ] Tidy for ten minutes, then name the feeling

30 days · Nov 6 - Dec 5, 2026

Part two, after the reading, prints each of these as a page to fill in by hand.

THE LAST WORD

Before you go

Pick one step from the action book and do it today. An idea from a book starts to count once it changes what one ordinary day looks like.

PART TWO

The action book

Change the setup once, then keep it up. 5 setup actions to do once, and 3 habits to mark each day for 30 days.

Nov 6 - Dec 5, 2026

Print it, or write on it in any PDF app.

SET UP ONCE

The setup checklist

Each of these is done once. Do one a day, and check it off when it is done.

- [ ] SETUP 1

List three people you have lost touch with

Write down three people you used to see or speak to and now don't.

Next to each, write the last thing you remember doing together.

MY VERSION

DONE ON

- [ ] SETUP 2

Write one letter and send it

Use the night shift above to draft a short note to one of them.

Copy it, edit it into your own words, and send it this week by text, email or post.

MY VERSION

DONE ON

- [ ] SETUP 3

Accept one offer of help you would normally refuse

The next time someone offers a lift, a meal or a hand with a chore, say yes.

Notice how they react.

MY VERSION

DONE ON

- [ ] SETUP 4

Ask an older person about their life

Call or visit a grandparent, older neighbour or relative and ask one question about their past, such as what their first job was.

Listen without steering the story.

MY VERSION

DONE ON

- [ ] SETUP 5

Spend an hour watching an animal closely

Visit an aquarium, a park pond or a garden, or simply watch a pet.

Write down three things it did that surprised you.

MY VERSION

DONE ON

DAILY HABIT 1 OF 3

Send one short message a week to someone you miss

Pick a fixed time, such as Sunday evening.

Nov 6 - Dec 5, 2026 · 30 days · circle each day you do it

SMALLEST VERSION

CUE

WHERE

November 2026

MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN
						1
2	3	4	5	6 ○	7 ○	8 ○
9 ○	10 ○	11 ○	12 ○	13 ○	14 ○	15 ○
16 ○	17 ○	18 ○	19 ○	20 ○	21 ○	22 ○
23 ○	24 ○	25 ○	26 ○	27 ○	28 ○	29 ○
30 ○						

December 2026

MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN
	1 ○	2 ○	3 ○	4 ○	5 ○	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30	31			

EACH FRIDAY

WHAT HELPED

WHAT GOT IN THE WAY

ONE CHANGE TO THE SETUP

DAILY HABIT 2 OF 3

Keep a small ritual of care

Choose one regular act for someone else, like a weekly call or dropping off groceries.

Nov 6 - Dec 5, 2026 · 30 days · circle each day you do it

SMALLEST VERSION

CUE

WHERE

November 2026

MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN
						1
2	3	4	5	6 ○	7 ○	8 ○
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EACH FRIDAY

WHAT HELPED

WHAT GOT IN THE WAY

ONE CHANGE TO THE SETUP

DAILY HABIT 3 OF 3

Tidy for ten minutes, then name the feeling

At the end of the day, tidy one small space.

Nov 6 - Dec 5, 2026 · 30 days · circle each day you do it

SMALLEST VERSION

CUE

WHERE

November 2026

MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN
						1
2	3	4	5	6 ○	7 ○	8 ○
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December 2026

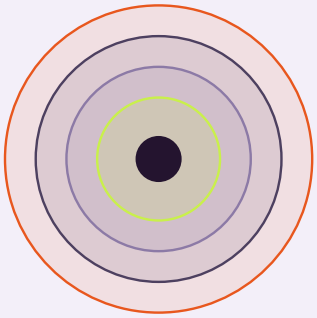
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EACH FRIDAY

WHAT HELPED

WHAT GOT IN THE WAY

ONE CHANGE TO THE SETUP



Nobody is too old, too lost or too strange to be found by a friend.

HOURLIFE NOTE AFTER SHELBY VAN PELT