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Suggested Reads

When Women Were Dragons by Kelly Regan Barnhill

Remarkably Bright Creatures by Shelby Van Pelt

Nightbitch by Rachel Yoder

Burnt Sugar by Avni Doshi

Lily and the Octopus by Steven Rowley

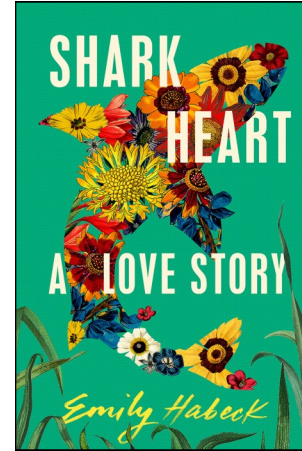
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A Novel Idea Book Club Kit

Shark Heart by Emily Habeck



From Author's Website

A gorgeous debut novel of marriage, motherhood, metamorphosis, and letting go, this intergenerational love story begins with newlyweds Wren and her husband, Lewis—a man who, over the course of nine months, transforms into a great white shark.

For Lewis and Wren, their first year of marriage is also their last. A few weeks after their wedding, Lewis receives a rare diagnosis. He will retain most of his consciousness, memories, and intellect, but his physical body will gradually turn into a great white shark. As Lewis develops the features and impulses of one of the most predatory creatures in the ocean, his complicated artist's heart struggles to make peace with his unfulfilled dreams.

At first, Wren internally resists her husband's fate. Is there a way for them to be together after Lewis changes? Then, a glimpse of Lewis' developing carnivorous nature activates long-repressed memories for Wren, whose story vacillates between her childhood living on a houseboat in Oklahoma, her time with a college ex-girlfriend, and her unusual friendship with a woman pregnant with twin birds. Woven throughout this bold novel is the story of Wren's mother, Angela, who becomes pregnant with Wren at fifteen in an abusive relationship amidst her parents' crumbling marriage. In the present, all of Wren's grief eventually collides, and she is forced to make an impossible choice..



Discussion Topics

- Why do you think the author chose to give Lewis a fictional condition instead, a “Carcharodon carcharias mutation,” instead of a real life one?
- At Lewis’s “send off,” the partygoers “discovered the same private truth: Lewis and Wren’s situation made them feel better about themselves” (page 136). What do you think this statement says about humanity’s general approach attitude toward suffering?
- Why might Angela have taught Wren to ask herself the question: “What do I need?” What does this question provide Wren? Are there questions like this that you ask yourself? How if so, how do they help you?
- George always loves Angela, never wavering in feeling that she was the love of his life, even though they are not together. What do you think about his unrequited love from afar? What is the hardest part about loving someone who is still alive but no longer in your life?
- In his transformation from man to great white shark, Lewis goes from becoming much more cynical which contrasts Margaret C. Finnegan’s unyielding optimism. How do these two attitudes reflect the differing ways in which people adapt to change and hardship?
- The author uses a unique writing style, blending prose, poetry, and playwriting. Why do you think she chose these styles? In sections with sparsely written pages, what does the empty space evoke?

- What do the human-animal transformations in *Shark Heart* say about the connection between humans and animals?
- As Lewis gradually becomes a great white shark, how do his personality changes strain his work and marriage? Beyond the world of the book, how do the ways people naturally change over time challenge or enhance relationships?
- How did Angela’s condition prepare Wren to take care of Lewis? How was Wren’s prior caretaking experience ever an impediment during her time with Lewis? Might this time with Lewis have been different—for better or worse—without her prior experience with Angela?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FROM RANDOM HOUSE PUBLISHERS



Author Biography

Emily Habeck has a BFA in Theater from Southern Methodist University’s Meadows School of the Arts as well as master’s degrees from Vanderbilt Divinity School and Vanderbilt’s Peabody College. Her debut novel *Shark Heart* was a Book of the Month selection, a New York Times book review editor’s choice, and the #1 Indie Next pick for August 2023. She is from Ardmore, Oklahoma and currently lives in Cambridge, Massachusetts.
