

The Actor and the Housewife

By Shannon Hale

These discussion questions are designed to enhance your group's conversation about *The Actor and the Housewife*, Shannon Hale's hilarious tale of the unlikely friendship between a suburban housewife and her dreamy celebrity crush.

About this book

Seven months pregnant and far from home, Becky Jack walks into the office of a Hollywood producer to sell her first screenplay and, much to her shock, meets silver screen heartthrob (and the object of her celebrity affection) Felix Callahan. They spend an awkward and unexpected day together and, though his cursing and drinking contradict her strict Mormon values, Felix and Becky somehow form an unshakable friendship.

Through the next decade, Felix and Becky experience tests of their bond they could never have anticipated. The everyday challenges of raising four unique children and running her household are exacerbated when Becky's community expresses increasing curiosity and doubt about her handsome, dashing best friend. When her sweet, supportive husband Mike expresses discomfort with Felix's role in Becky's life, Becky protects her marriage and ends her friendship. But as the years go by, both Mike and Felix's gorgeous French wife Celeste realize that the strange love their spouses have for each other is utterly platonic. Felix and Becky see each other through the good times, like co-starring in a romantic comedy written by Becky and even walking the red carpet together, and the bad, when Celeste leaves Felix for another man and then, worst of all, Mike loses his battle with cancer. After Mike's death, Becky finds herself restarting her life as a widow, and eventually wondering if, after everything, she can find a new way to love Felix, 'til death do they part.

For discussion

1. Shannon Hale says that the character of Becky is not drawn from her own life, but Becky and the narrator seem to share the same perspective and sense of humor. How much of the author do you think comes through in Becky's character?
2. What do you think accounts for the immediate bond between Felix and Becky? Is it their similar sense of humor? Is it possible to have platonic love at first sight? How does this compare to Becky and Mike's first meeting?
3. Becky often reflects on the dowdiness of her own appearance: her clothes, hair, weight, jewelry, etc. How do you picture Becky? Do you think she sees herself the way other people see her?
4. When Becky meets Hollywood producer Annette, she tells Becky they can "just deal woman to woman." (p. 3) What do you make of the relationships between women in the novel? Do Becky and Celeste develop a real friendship? While filming *Blind Love* Becky detects the "tiniest arctic breeze" from Celeste, but for the most part Celeste is very sweet to Becky. Is there genuine affection between them?
5. On her website, Shannon Hale confesses she thought of several actors as she formed Felix's character. Is there a celebrity you think he resembles?

6. Becky says that her husband Mike is “big as life” and consistently describes him as her perfect mate. How do they keep their marriage so strong? What are some of the challenges they face, and how do they overcome them?
7. What role does religion play in Becky and Felix’s relationship? Does Felix respect Becky’s Mormonism? Does Becky ever stop hoping to convince Felix to believe in God?
8. Becky constantly checks in with herself about her feelings for Felix, making sure that his presence in her life does not jeopardize her marriage, but she does feel comfortable harboring harmless crushes on her favorite fictional characters like “Gilbert Blythe, Mr. Rochester, Harry Hamlin as Perseus.” (p. 47) Who are the fictional characters you’ve fallen in love with? Do you believe having a crush on a fictional character or actor is always “harmless”?
9. Becky often describes her own emotions using food, like when she says that Mike’s sweetness “made her feel all warm and gooey, as if her heart were hot brownies.” (p. 25) What are some other examples of this, and what do you think it reveals about Becky?
10. What do you make of Becky’s list on page 118? Do you think it’s possible to draw one firm line between appropriate and inappropriate behavior? Where on this list would you draw the line?
11. Usually being in Felix’s world as his dear friend makes Becky feel special, but on occasion (such as at her church potluck or the New York City nightclub) being in his world makes her feel insecure, ashamed, or neglected. What happens on these occasions? Why does Becky still want Felix as a part of her life? Are there times when Felix feels insecure while in Becky’s world? Why or why not?
12. After co-starring in a movie and attending numerous press events together, Felix and Becky eventually find themselves the subject of a torrid gossip television program. Were you surprised when this happened? Did Becky succeed in “avoiding the very appearance of evil”? Did reading this part of the story change the way you feel about tabloids and the paparazzi?
13. Were you surprised by Celeste’s betrayal of Felix? Why or why not? Do you think her desire all along was to have a child? Did this justify her behavior for Becky? What about for you?
14. Many characters throughout the novel express their disapproval of Felix and Becky’s friendship, saying at various moments that men cannot be friends with women unless they are attracted to them or that adult men and women cannot maintain strictly platonic friendships. Which characters feel most strongly about these questions, and which do you agree with? Can men and women be just friends?
15. Being a mother is the most important part of Becky’s identity. What kind of a mother is she? How does she relate to her children? How does she compare to the other kinds of mothers in this book? When Mike dies, why does Becky begin to question herself as a mother? What do you think eventually helps her regain her self-confidence?
16. If you were in Mike or Celeste’s position, would you be comfortable with your spouse having such a close friendship with a member of the opposite sex? Why or why not? Would it change things if that friend was famous, rich, attractive, etc.?

17. On the jacket, Becky is holding a homemade pie. What role does her pie-making have in the story?
18. Becky admires romantic movies and considers them important experiences for married women, so they can remember what it felt like to first fall in love. What do you think is so appealing to women about romances?
19. Becky believes there was so much coincidence in her relationship with Felix, it had to be divinely inspired. What does Felix think? Have there been unusual coincidences in your own life? How do you explain them?
20. Becky claims the romantic comedy is her favorite genre, but the book didn't have a typical romantic comedy ending. Were you happy with the ending or left hoping for a different outcome? What do you think Becky and Felix's relationship will be like going forward?

Suggested Reading

The Guernsey Literary and Potato Peel Pie Society by Mary Ann Shaffer and Annie Barrows, *The Friday Night Knitting Club* by Kate Jacobs, *The 19th Wife* by David Ebershoff, *The Beach House* by Jane Green, *What I Did for Love* by Susan Elizabeth Phillips, *The Jane Austen Book Club* by Karen Joy Fowler

Shannon Hale is the author of *Austenland*, *Rapunzel's Revenge* (a graphic novel), and six young adult novels, including the Newbery Honor winner and *New York Times* bestseller *Princess Academy*. She is at work on a seventh young adult novel and her second graphic novel, *Calamity Jack*. She lives with her husband and two children in Salt Lake City.