Cadenza

by Justin Courter



About the Book

CADENZA is the story of a woman's drive to succeed and overcome her physical and emotional scars. It's a tale of relentless ambition, dark secrets and the lengths to which the human mind will go.

At the age of seven, Jennifer Coleman is severely burned in a house fire that kills her sister. Despite the barriers of her scarred face and her tragic childhood, she reaches the pinnacle of achievement as a classical concert pianist, but at a deep psychological cost.

During Jennifer's meteoric rise as a virtuoso pianist, her disfigurement takes on mythic proportions. She is internationally loved and admired, but unable to love herself. At a pivotal point in her career, she meets an extraordinarily creative, suicidal musician named Felix, who challenges Jennifer's beliefs and falls deeply in love with her. Will Jennifer be able to learn from Felix's example before she self-destructs?

Discussion Guide

1. Jennifer claims at the opening of the novel that she refuses to compromise. How is her life shaped by this determination, and in what ways does her life seem deficient?

2. At the end of the first scene in which Felix appears, Jennifer says, ?He seemed to be hanging from a window ledge every day of his life.? (p. 36) How is this true, and how does their first encounter set the tone for their relationship? Would you say that Jennifer saves or sacrifices Felix?

3. How does her relationship with Felix change the way Jennifer thinks about creativity?

4. What does Felix see in Jennifer?

5. In what ways are Felix and Jennifer opposites, and in what ways are they kindred spirits?

6. What kinds of appearances would Jennifer consider important, and what kinds of appearances would she consider unimportant?

7. In what ways do Jennifer?s physical and emotional scars set her apart?

8. What contrasting visions of art are represented by Gustav and Ernest? See chapter 26, and passages like the one on page 253 in which Gustav asks, ?Must market forces control everything in this country? Does the product have to be sold before it?s even finished being made??

9. Though she says she is nothing like her parents, what aspects of their characters and personalities does Jennifer display?

10. Does Jennifer?s frustration with her parents --- with Betty, especially --- seem warranted? Did her parents try to stop her artistic development?

11. What seem to be the results of the family?s silence about the death of Jennifer?s sister, Allison?

12. In what ways does Gustav help Jennifer?

13. Which version of how the house burned down and how Allison died seems to be the real one --- Betty?s or Jennifer?s? How have their memories of what occurred affected how they lived their lives?

Author Bio

Justin Courter is the author of the novels CADENZA, THE HEART OF IT ALL and SKUNK: A Love Story. His work has appeared in *The Literary Review*, *Poetry East*, *American Book Review*, *McSweeney?s Internet Tendency*, and elsewhere. He lives in New York City.

Critical Praise

?CADENZA is symphonic. It succeeds not only as an absorbing, psychologically nuanced novel, but also as a tragic fable of ambition and virtuosity. Its extraordinary heroine offers profound truths about purpose, memory, trauma, and the transcendent powers of art and love.?

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