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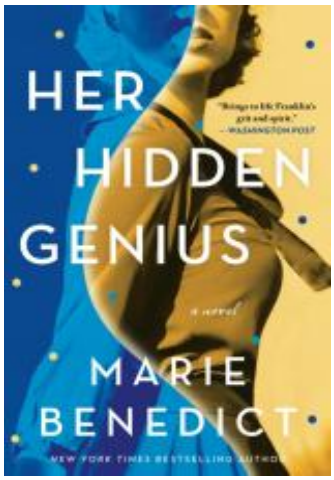
Her Hidden Genius

by Marie Benedict



About the Book

The new novel from the *New York Times* bestselling author of THE MYSTERY OF MRS. CHRISTIE!

She changed the world with her discovery. Three men took the credit.

Rosalind Franklin has always been an outsider --- brilliant but different. Whether working at the laboratory she adored in Paris or toiling at a university in London, she feels closest to the science, those unchanging laws of physics and chemistry that guide her experiments. When she is assigned to work on DNA, she believes she can unearth its secrets.

Rosalind knows if she just takes one more X-ray picture --- one more after thousands --- she can unlock the building blocks of life. Never again will she have to listen to her colleagues complain about her, especially Maurice Wilkins, who would rather conspire about genetics with James Watson and Francis Crick than work alongside her.

Then it finally happens --- the double helix structure of DNA reveals itself to her with perfect clarity. But what unfolds next, Rosalind never could have predicted.

Marie Benedict's powerful new novel shines a light on a woman who sacrificed her life to discover the nature of our very DNA, a woman whose world-changing contributions were hidden by the men around her but whose relentless drive advanced our understanding of humankind.

Discussion Guide

1. Before reading HER HIDDEN GENIUS, had you heard of Rosalind Franklin? What, if anything, did you know about the history of DNA, and how did the book affect your understanding of that history?

2. Compare Rosalind?s experiences in France to her experiences in England. What was the biggest difference you noticed between each culture?s expectations for scientists and women?

3. Rosalind asserts early on that marriage and science are not meant to coexist for working women. Do you think that idea is a product of her time period, or her personality? Does she reevaluate it throughout the book, and if so, how?

4. How does Rosalind?s Jewish identity shape her behavior and priorities throughout the book? How are she and her family still contending with the events of World War II?

5. What did you think of Rosalind?s approach to lab safety? How do you think things have changed for modern scientists?

6. Jacques pushes Rosalind to be honest with their colleagues about the nature of their relationship. Why does she resist? How would you feel in her position?

7. Watson and Crick are not the first colleagues to use Rosalind?s work without her permission. Compare Wilkins? use of Rosalind?s preliminary data at the Cavendish conference to Watson and Crick?s acceptance of credit for discovering the structure of DNA. How much do you think Rosalind knew or understood about the data and images that Watson and Crick used without her knowledge or permission? How does this affect her?

8. Collaboration in science is crucial for the most robust discoveries, so how should collaborative projects proceed in a fair fashion, and how should credit be assigned for those discoveries? Do you think the so-called gentleman?s agreements between heads of institutions that were meant to govern areas of focus in Rosalind?s time still exist today, or have they been replaced by more definitive guidance and contracts? Are there still people like Rosalind whose contributions are ignored or attributed to others?

9. What do you think is Rosalind Franklin?s greatest legacy? Does the author?s note make you think more expansively --- or differently --- about Rosalind?s legacy? Any other takeaways?

Author Bio

Marie Benedict is the *New York Times* and *USA Today* bestselling author of DAUGHTER OF EGYPT, THE QUEENS OF CRIME, THE MITFORD AFFAIR, HER HIDDEN GENIUS, THE MYSTERY OF MRS. CHRISTIE, THE ONLY WOMAN IN THE ROOM, LADY CLEMENTINE, CARNEGIE'S MAID, THE OTHER EINSTEIN. She also has coauthored with Victoria Christopher Murray the *New York Times* bestselling THE PERSONAL LIBRARIAN, a ?Good Morning America? Book Club pick; THE FIRST LADIES, Target?s 2023 Book of the Year; and A PAIR OF ACES. All have been translated into multiple languages, and many have been selected for the Barnes & Noble Book Club, the Target Book Club, the Costco Book Club, the Indie Next List and the LibraryReads List. She lives in Pittsburgh with her family.

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