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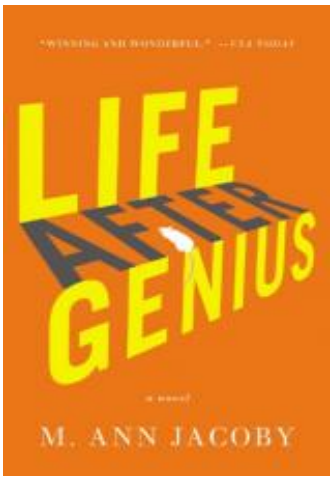
Life After Genius

by M. Ann Jacoby



About the Book

Theodore Mead Fegley has always been the smartest person he knows. By age 12, he was in high school, and by 15 he was attending a top-ranking university. And now, at the tender age of 18, he's on the verge of proving the Riemann Hypothesis, a mathematical equation that has mystified academics for almost 150 years. But only days before graduation, Mead suddenly packs his bags and flees home to rural Illinois. What has caused him to flee remains a mystery to all but Mead and a classmate whose quest for success has turned into a dangerous obession.

At home, Mead finds little solace. His past ghosts haunt him; his parents don't understand the agony his genius has caused him, nor his desire to be a normal kid, and his dreams seem crushed forever. He embarks on a new life's journey -- learning the family business of selling furniture and embalming the dead--that disappoints and surprises all who knew him as "the young Fegley genius."

Equal parts academic thriller and poignant coming-of-age story, **Life After Genius** follows the remarkable journey of a young man who must discover that the heart may know what the head hasn't yet learned.

Discussion Guide

1. Mead is considered a ?genius? by almost everyone he knows, but he has mixed feelings about the title. Why? How has being labeled a genius shaped Mead?s character?

2. What is the six-legged creature and what role does it play in Mead?s life?

3. Early in the novel, Mead?s uncle Martin accuses Mead of being an ?an overeducated, underachieving momma?s boy with no care or concern for anyone.? Why is Martin so angry at Mead? Do you think he is being too hard on Mead?

4. Describe Mead?s relationship with Percy. How is this relationship different from others in Mead?s life? How does Percy influence Mead?

5. Mead?s mother says to Mead: ?You and I aren?t like your father and his whole side of the family. We?re cut from a different cloth. I want you to have the educational opportunities I never had. To fulfill your true potential.? Does Mead?s mother have Mead?s best interests in mind? Is she a supportive and loving mother? How is she different from Mead?s Aunt Jewel?

6. Why does Mead resist working for his father?s company, Fegley Brothers? Does his attitude towards his father and his business change over the course of the novel?

7. Why does Mead return home only days before his graduation from college? Do you think Mead is a coward for doing so? Did he have any other options?

8. What do Mead?s romantic failures with Cynthia and then with Shirley teach him? How is his friendship with Haley different from his other relationships with girls?

9. What do you make of Herman? Do you feel any sympathy for him? How are Mead and Herman alike and how are they different?

10. Who is Dr. Alexander and what does he teach Mead over the course of their work together? How is Dr. Alexander different from Dean Falconia and Dr. Kustrup?

11. Toward the end of the novel, the deceased Bernard Reimann appears to Mead and tells him that in order to solve the Riemann Hypothesis he must ?stop being logical?and rely more on [his] intuitions.? What does Riemann mean by this? Does Mead take his advice?

12. Do you like Mead? Do you think he changes over the course of the novel? Why or why not?

13. Why is Mead?s mother so impressed with Herman when she first meets him in Chicago? How does Herman manipulate Mead and what makes him such a seductive personality?

14. Towards the end of the novel, Mead tells his father: ?Ancient Egyptians thought the heart to be the seat of intelligence and will. Not the brain, but the heart.? Do you agree? Why does Mead tell his father this?

15. What do you make of the novel?s ending? Would you have made the same decision as Mead if you were in his position?

Author Bio

I was not much of a reader as a kid preferring to live in my own make-believe world of characters and situations. Hours would go by like seconds. I didn?t want to stop playing to eat or sleep. Then in my twenties I started reading a lot of

trashy romance novels. Somewhere along the line I bored of those, revisited my college edition of **American Literature: The Makers and the Making Vol. II** and discovered Sherwood Anderson. I went back and reread **Catcher in the Rye** (which I surely must have read in high school) and loved it. I read and fell in love with **Breathing Lessons** by Anne Tyler and **Talk Before Sleep** by Elizabeth Berg. I decided to try Tolstoy. I read **Anna Karenina** and was surprised by how much I enjoyed this Russian classic. I was like a hungry person at an all-you-can-eat buffet. I tasted a lot of different books putting aside those that didn?t please the palate and going back for seconds and thirds on those that did. Throughout the process of writing **Life After Genius**, I often referred to **Stones for Ibarra** by Harriet Doerr and **Death of Sweet Mister** by Daniel Woodrell, reading a chapter here or a paragraph there for inspiration. Or sometimes I?d pop into the DVD player one of my favorite movies. *Elling*, which is a Norwegian film. *Son of the Bride*, which is Argentinian. Or *You Can Count on Me*. Or *Midnight Run*. Or *Terms of Endearment*. I love smart, observant, small moments. Heart-rending moments sprinkled with humor. Quirky characters. These are what send me running back to my computer to write. The place I go as an adult where time loses all meaning and I have to remind myself to eat.

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