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Fat Chance, Charlie Vega

by Crystal Maldonado

“A **sweet and cheerful debut**. *Fat Chance, Charlie Vega* moves with **rom com energy** and a whole lot of awkward, goofy, chubby-girl-with-a-crush-on-a-boy vibes.”

—**Gabby Rivera**, author of *Juliet Takes a Breath* and *Marvel’s America*

ABOUT THE BOOK

Coming of age as a Fat brown girl in a white Connecticut suburb is hard. Harder when your whole life is on fire, though.

Charlie Vega is a lot of things. Smart. Funny. Artistic. Ambitious. Fat.

People sometimes have a problem with that last one. Especially her mom. Charlie wants a good relationship with her body, but it’s hard, and her mom leaving a billion

weight-loss shakes on her dresser doesn’t help. The world and everyone in it have ideas about what she should look like: thinner, lighter, slimmer-faced, straighter-haired. Be smaller. Be whiter. Be quieter.

But there’s one person who’s always in Charlie’s corner: her best friend Amelia. Slim. Popular. Athletic. Totally dope. So when Charlie starts a tentative relationship with a cute classmate, the first worthwhile guy to notice her, everything is perfect until she learns one thing—he asked Amelia out first. So is she his second choice or what? Does he even really see her? *Ughhh*. Everything is now officially a *mess*.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Describe Charlie’s relationship with her mom. Why does Charlie think her mom wishes Amelia was her daughter? How is Charlie envious of Amelia’s relationship with her parents? Discuss Brian’s relationship with his two moms. How is Charlie more at home around Brian’s moms and Amelia’s parents than she is with her own mom? Discuss Brian’s reaction when he witnesses how Charlie’s mom talks to her.
- What are Charlie’s issues with self-image? How does her mother make it worse? After Charlie’s dad died, her mom became totally focused on herself. She lost weight and began dating. Debate whether it is fair to expect Charlie to follow her path. Charlie finds shopping for clothes with her mom and Amelia a humiliating experience. How is this related to her issues with weight? Brian tells Charlie that everyone likes her. How is she shocked by this comment? Discuss Amelia’s advice to Charlie: “You need to be kinder to you. Let yourself be human” (p. 341).

- Compare and contrast Charlie and Amelia. How do the girls describe one another? What threatens their friendship? How do they work through this tough time? Amelia identifies as pan, and Charlie is overweight. Cite evidence that the girls accept one another as they are.
- Charlie has a crush on Cal Carter and is excited when he invites her to the George Washington High School Annual Football Awards Ceremony and Dance. Discuss how Charlie is so caught up in the excitement of being asked out by Cal that she doesn't hear the entire proposal. What does Brian mean when he calls Cal a "doorknob"? Charlie wonders why Cal didn't offer to pick her up for the dance. How should this have been a hint that something was awry. Explain Amelia's reaction when she discovers what happened.
- Explain the following metaphor: "I liked to think of my dad as a balloon always drifting toward the sky, and my mom as the anchor always keeping him tethered to the ground" (p. 25). How does this support the phrase "opposites attract"? Which traits did Charlie inherit from her father? Charlie describes herself and her mom as "two straight-up firecrackers." How does the "firecracker" side of Charlie's personality cause her problems at home and among her friends?
- Explain how she almost loses Brian over a "firecracker" reaction to something Amelia told her.
- Charlie says that she is a feminist. How might she define *feminism*? She explores the internet and discovers the "fat acceptance" movement. Explain how she equates this movement with feminism. How can Charlie be a feminist and still focus on typical teenage concerns—appearance and boys?
- Charlie's mom wants to have a seventeenth birthday party for Charlie. How is the party doomed before it begins? Explain why her mom wants to invite her own friends. Why do Charlie and Amelia decide to leave the party and text their friends to meet them at Jake's. Discuss how this is the perfect birthday celebration for Charlie. Brian gives her an exquisite leather-bound journal. What does this gift reveal about Brian?
- Charlie is an excellent writer. What did her dad mean when he told her that an author must be fine "writing naked"? Ms. Williams, Charlie's English teacher, recognizes her writing abilities and encourages her to enter a short story competition. Charlie writes about a strained mother-daughter relationship. How is this "writing naked" for her? Discuss her mother's reaction when Charlie wins the competition.
- Toward the end of the novel, Charlie says, "I was already on the path to seeing my own self-worth, but Brian took my hand and made the route less lonely" (p. 302). How is Brian patient with Charlie as she makes the journey toward self-acceptance? Debate whether Charlie's relationship with her mother improves by the end of the novel.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Crystal Maldonado, debut author of *Fat Chance*, *Charlie Vega*, is a writer by night and a marketer and social media manager by day. She has been published in *Latina* magazine, the *Hartford Courant*, and *Dogster*, and is the co-founder of the online magazine *Positively Smitten*. She lives in Western Massachusetts with her husband, her dog, and her super-duper adorable daughter.