

All This Heavenly Glory: Stories

by Elizabeth Crane



About the Book

Charlotte Anne Byers is one gloriously flawed human being --- a character in whom every reader will see herself reflected. The story of Charlotte's life --- from her stint in the youth chorus of her mother's opera company to her battles with addiction, doomed love, and the burdens of familial duty --- comes to us through Charlotte's most private thoughts, her most outrageous associations, her most wicked barbs, her most painful memories, her most honest revelations.

This is fiction so intimate, so immediate, so involving that reading it is like making a new friend.

Discussion Guide

1. "Ad" is a breathlessly worded personal that introduces just about every aspect of Charlotte's character: her desires, her quirks, her gripes and delights. How does it serve as a first impression of Charlotte? If you created a similar ad, how would it read? What would you include and what would you hope it conveyed about you?
2. At eight years old, Charlotte finds herself in the youth chorus of her mother's opera company, and the experience exposes her to a world of pageantry, melodrama, and the idea of castration. Was such a world too sophisticated for a young girl, or is Charlotte mature enough despite her tender age? And how does her precociousness affect the woman she becomes?
3. Charlotte's friendship with Declan is complex, and it causes her to think about fame, intimacy, and dependency. What does Declan's insecurity say about him? What does Charlotte's response to it say about her? What does she learn from him? How would you behave in that type of relationship?
4. Did you read this book as though it were a novel, or a story collection? What makes this a novel, or not?

5. Why do you suppose Crane chose to write most of Charlotte Anne's childhood stories in the present tense and the adulthood stories in the past tense? How does this contribute to your experience of the story? Do our distant memories feel constant in some sense?
6. What do you think of Charlotte Anne's spiritual life? Does it make her even less reliable as a narrator, or does it make her more human? Do you agree or disagree with her views on spirituality? How do her views evolve?
7. Clearly, Charlotte Anne has her flaws and her strengths. Is she someone you'd want to be friends with, or someone you'd want to strangle? If you were Charlotte Anne, would you want to strangle yourself?
8. "Ad" and "Glory" both employ elements of fantasy, but most of the book is based in reality. How does fantasy contribute to the book and to your understanding of Charlotte Anne? Does it distract you? How so?
9. Jenna is certainly Charlotte Anne's touchstone. How might Charlotte Anne's life be different if she didn't have Jenna? Would it be better in any way? Who is your Jenna? How do you think your best friend would help you if you were faced with some of the same situations as Charlotte Anne?

Author Bio

I grew up in Manhattan on the Upper West Side in something of a musical family; my mother was an opera singer, my father is a musicologist, my stepdad manages classical musicians. (My stepmom, with a background in school psychology, is a Mediator and Mediation Trainer. But she can carry a tune too.) My own career as an opera singer (in the children's chorus at New York City Opera) was cut short by a massive case of stage fright before I hit fifth grade; it may or may not be coincidental that I'd taken up writing by this point, after having read *Harriet the Spy* (admittedly, at this point, a cliché, but it's true) when I was eight. In fifth grade they held a contest at school to write a caption for a photo of two pigs kissing. "I've just met a girl named Maria!" won me ten dollars, which I still consider to be the beginning of my current career. (No need to point out how many decades passed before I would be financially compensated again for my literary achievements.) Fast forward X number of decades and X number of career missteps to a level of dissatisfaction significant enough to compel me to take a shot at some kind of actual career from my childhood passion. (Okay, I taught for a number of years, and that was fun, but I was unsurprisingly overworked and underpaid, and also trying to write in my spare time, which was somewhat nonexistent.)

Some of my favorite web sites are McSweeney's, Free Will Astrology (check it out. I know nothing about astrology, but it's called Free Will for a reason, and the guy who writes them is very funny, but guaranteed they will freak you out), FreeTranslation.com (when you're bored, type a passage into any language, get the translation, and then translate it back. guaranteed humor value. Found magazine (a site of found notes, lists, etc. that have a weirdly literary/arty feel), eBay (because you can never have too many Little Kiddles).

Favorite childhood books: **The Bad Child's Book of Beasts, From the Mixed Up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler, The Complete Nonsense of Edward Lear, The Phantom Tollbooth.** Now: anything by George Saunders, Ken Kalfus, David Foster Wallace, Rick Moody, Aimee Bender, Lydia Davis, Lorrie Moore. Recent favorite books include **The Feast of Love**

by Charles Baxter, and **Dear Mr. President** by Gabe Hudson.

Elizabeth Crane's stories have appeared in *The Sycamore Review*, *Washington Square*, *Weep Daily*, *New York Stories*, *Book*, *The Florida Review*, and *Eclipse*. She lives in Chicago.

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