



Charming

METTE BACH

What good is fame without the girl of your dreams?

Charming

METTE BACH

Seventeen-year-old Char has studied music, but didn't think of it as a future until she posted a video of herself singing and it went viral. So now, instead of going to queer youth events or taking part in her school's LGBT club, Char spends her time figuring out how to get enough online fame to fuel a singing career. When one of her videos is bombarded with vicious online comments she is relieved to find an app that offers support and encouragement to people who are being bullied online.

Using the handle Charming, Char gets to know the creator and moderator of the app, who calls herself Cinders. Cinders inspires Char to reconsider her obsession with having the ideal online presence and concentrate on who she really is. Can Char show Cinders how much she means to her when they finally meet?

METTE BACH was born in Denmark and raised in Delta, BC. She is the author of Lorimer's teen novels *Femme*, *Killer Drop* (named a Best Book for Kids and Teens), and the Real Love books *Love is Love* and *You're You*. Mette works for Family Services of Greater Vancouver running a meal program for homeless and at-risk youth. She lives in Vancouver.



Real Love

Don't miss Cinders's story in the companion novel

RL 3.7 | Teen fiction

LORIMER

James Lorimer & Company Ltd., Publishers
www.lorimer.ca



eBook also available

\$14.95 CAN / \$8.99 US

ISBN-10: 1-4594-1387-3

ISBN-13: 978-1-4594-1387-0



9 781459 413870

LORIMER

Charming

METTE BACH

JAMES LORIMER & COMPANY LTD., PUBLISHERS
TORONTO

Copyright © 2018 by Mette Bach

Published in Canada in 2018. Published in the United States in 2019.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, or by any information storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher.

James Lorimer & Company Ltd., Publishers acknowledges funding support from the Ontario Arts Council (OAC), an agency of the Government of Ontario. We acknowledge the support of the Canada Council for the Arts, which last year invested \$153 million to bring the arts to Canadians throughout the country. This project has been made possible in part by the Government of Canada and with the support of the Ontario Media Development Corporation.

Canada



Canada Council
for the Arts Conseil des arts
du Canada



ONTARIO ARTS COUNCIL
CONSEIL DES ARTS DE L'ONTARIO
an Ontario government agency
un organisme du gouvernement de l'Ontario



Ontario
Ontario Media Development
Corporation

Cover design: Tyler Cleroux

Cover image: Shutterstock

Library and Archives Canada Cataloguing in Publication

Bach, Mette, 1976–, author

Charming / Mette Bach.

(Real love)

Issued in print and electronic formats.

ISBN 978-1-4594-1387-0 (softcover).--ISBN 978-1-4594-1388-7 (EPUB)

I. Title. II. Series: Real love (Series)

PS8603.A298C43 2018

jC813'.6

C2018-902561-1

C2018-902562-X

Published by:

James Lorimer &
Company Ltd., Publishers
117 Peter Street, Suite 304
Toronto, ON, Canada
M5V 0M3
www.lorimer.ca

Distributed in Canada by:

Formac Lorimer Books
5502 Atlantic Street
Halifax, NS, Canada
B3H 1G4

Distributed in the US by:

Lerner Publisher Services
1251 Washington Ave. N.
Minneapolis, MN, USA
55401
www.lernerbooks.com

Printed and bound in Canada.

Manufactured by Friesens Corporation in Altona, Manitoba,
Canada in July 2018.

Job # 245778

This digital edition first published in 2018 as 978-1-4594-1390-0

Originally published in 2018 as 978-1-4594-1387-0

For Cathleen With for teaching and inspiring creativity

PROLOGUE

Viral

CHAR GILL WAS RIDING WITH HER MOM in the SUV. They had just loaded the car with stuff from Bed Bath & Beyond. Now her mom was chatting away about how she had to stage her next open house. She was explaining to Char how she used to hire stagers, but that it was easier to do it herself. Char's mom did everything herself, from manicures to taxes.

Char was staring at her phone.

“Put that away and help me navigate,” her mom pleaded.

“That’s what GPS is for,” Char said.

“Do you even know how to read a map?” her mom snapped.

Char rolled her eyes. “Mom, this is important.”

“So is making the right turnoff on the highway.” They were on their way to the new outlet mall near the airport in Richmond. Char had tagged along because she wanted to check out shoes. But what was happening was way better than shoes.

“No, this is like, really, really important,” Char insisted. She couldn’t look away from her phone’s screen. If she looked away, maybe it would all vanish.

“What is it?”

“Never mind.”

There was no point in telling her mom. She wouldn’t get it. There was just no way. But as they drove toward Richmond, Char saw her video get more than a hundred thumbs-up on YouTube in just twenty minutes. Everyone liked her cover of Rihanna’s “FourFiveSeconds.” At this rate Char would be famous before graduation.

That was the goal. That would set her up for a future. It wasn't just Char's goal, it was everyone's goal. But Char was the one on the path. And that was something she couldn't look away from for even a second.

01

All the Likes

CHAR TILTED HER PHONE EVER SO SLIGHTLY to the left. It was maybe her tenth try for a perfect selfie with her morning skim milk latte. She tapped on the cup with one of the fake nails she applied to hide her own bitten ones. It was hard to keep coming up with new stuff to post. The other girls at school seemed to find it easy. When you looked at their lives, everything seemed glamorous and beautiful. It wasn't that Char's latte wasn't good, but how could she get across how

smooth and sweet it was? Or would be, when she could put her phone down and take a sip.

Char drove to school in her new orange Fiat. Her parents gave it to her when she got her licence. It came with a lecture on not being spoiled. But Char really needed a car in Delta. Everyone had a car. It was too far to walk to school and there wasn't a bus that went that way. She parked in the school parking lot and looked at the clock on the dash. Five minutes until homeroom. Plenty of time to sip the latte and check if there was any interest in her pic yet.

Not bad! Eighteen people in the time it took to drive from the Starbucks. Most were people she knew. But there were a couple of new people, drawn by her clever hashtags, Char was sure.

Weirdly enough, Mimi liked the selfie. Mimi didn't like stuff posted by people she deemed lower than herself in social ranking. All these people from other schools and clubs and things boosted her posts. Plus she showed a ton of skin, which got likes from lots of random pervs.

Mimi had also posted a pic. Twenty minutes ago, sure, but she already had more than forty likes. Char couldn't figure it out. Was Mimi buying them or something? No one really liked her, did they? Mimi was one of those girls you could never really trust. She'd be nice to your face and she'd like a picture every so often. But she never seemed truly happy for you.

Char didn't like to admit it, but it was taking a toll on her. She was forever chasing the one thing she couldn't seem to replicate. Her cover of the Rihanna song had been posted at just the right moment. It had more than a hundred thousand views. Almost overnight, Char had gone from being someone Mimi Jenkins had never heard of to someone she had to at least follow online. It's not that Char had magically been accepted in Mimi's circle — almost no one was. But at least Mimi said hi to her at school. And that was something.

But Char knew the pressure to upload stuff was getting in the way of other things. Of school and finding love and living a good life. Char used to go

to queer youth events downtown or take part in the LGBTQ+ club at school. But it got too hard for her to defend herself for not being out. So now she spent all her free time thinking up ways to get back the excitement of instant fame. She'd never felt anything like it. Char, who had never done anything special, was a sensation. She had gone viral.

The problem with knowing that kind of bliss was getting it to happen again. Char never would have thought about it in the first place. But now she was showing the world her purchases at Lush, talking about the smell of bath bombs while she demoed scrubs on her hand. She had made a few videos of makeup tutorials and her evening skin care routine. But nothing passed one thousand views. What could she do to get those numbers back?



By the time two o'clock rolled around, Char was so tired from not paying attention in her classes that she

was ready to go home for a nap. Good thing her last class of the day was music, the only subject she really enjoyed. She picked up her guitar and sat down. She began tuning just as Ms. Merchant entered, sipping from her commuter mug. It was clear Ms. Merchant shared Char's need for a ton of caffeine to get her through the day. And she made no pretense about it. Ms. Merchant lived alone downtown. She went out to hear a lot of local music and had a good sense of style.

“All right, everyone,” Ms. Merchant began. “It’s time to talk about the Seaquam Performers’ Showcase and your year-end projects. For those of you pursuing careers in the arts, this is your big chance. You get an opportunity to perform live in front of an audience. You get a demo video shot of your performance and a shot at being voted best of the school. Not a bad way to end your last year.”

Char looked around. A lot of kids took music because it made for an easy block. Aside from Char, there were a handful of students who were serious about music. Most of them probably also had other subjects

they were good at or might have a future in. Char had to find a way to pull herself above the rest of them.

Ms. Merchant went on. “I expect that those of you who are serious about this are also nervous. That’s a good sign. It means you care.”

She looked right at Char. It was cool to have one person who believed in her. Her parents had signed up Char for piano and vocals summer camps for years. But they always told her that music was a hobby, not a career choice.

The class began to play and Ms. Merchant walked around, offering random comments. She was very careful not to hurt anyone’s feelings. She had said early on that music was an art. She told them not to let anyone tell them they couldn’t make music.

She stopped where Char was working out a chord series. “You know, Char,” she said. “When I watch you play, I can tell that you’ve really got something.”

“Thanks,” Char said.

“If you keep working hard at it, one day you’ll get there.”

“Thanks,” Char said again. But this time it felt like failure. She didn’t like the idea of years of work ahead. That sounded too hard. She pulled out her phone to check on that morning’s photo. Not too shabby. She was up to sixty likes.