

# Life in the Fat Lane

*Cherie Bennett*

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## **Life in the Fat Lane** Cherie Bennett

Beauty pageant winner, homecoming queen--Lara has the world at her feet. Until she gets fat.

Despite a strict diet and workout schedule, Lara is soon a nameless, faceless, 200-pound-plus teenage blimp. She's desperate to get her to-die-for body back--and to find an explanation for her rapid weight gain.

When she's diagnosed with a mysterious metabolic disorder that has no known cure, Lara fears she'll spend the rest of her life trapped in a fat suit. Who will stand by her? Her image-conscious family? Her shallow friends? Her handsome boyfriend? Or will she be left alone in the land of the fat girls?

## **Life in the Fat Lane Details**


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# From Reader Review *Life in the Fat Lane* for online ebook

## Hylary Locsin says

Originally posted on my blog: <http://libraryladyhylary.blogspot.com> ! Check it out for more reviews!

Junior in high school, Lara Ardeche, has the perfect life. Beautiful, popular and thin, Lara has spent her life competing in and winning beauty pageants. Her beautiful, thin mother and handsome father adore her, as does her cool boyfriend Jett and her best friend, Molly. Lara's life becomes even better when she is elected homecoming queen, despite the fact that she's just a junior. In the months following her homecoming victory, however, Lara's life becomes a living hell as she inexplicably begins to gain weight very rapidly. As she grows bigger and bigger, her popular friends abandon her, and Lara tries everything to get back to her former thin self. Matters are only worsened by her "perfect" parents who constantly pressure her to diet. After rigorous medical testing, Lara finally discovers that a rare metabolic disorder is the cause of her weight gain, a disorder for which there is no cure. As Lara's life continues to fall apart, she discovers that perhaps things were not as perfect as she had imagined, even when she was thin.

*Life in the Fat Lane* provides a unique view of the teenage obsession with appearance as Lara Ardeche experiences both sides of the coin. Beginning the novel as a thin, beautiful and popular homecoming queen, the reader sees the benefits of fitting in with society's ideal image. As Lara gains weight rapidly, eventually ending up a size 24, the emotional torment she experiences illustrates the loneliness of being "different." As the reader transitions with Lara from beauty queen to "freak," Bennett takes the audience on the heartbreaking journey with her character. Secondary to Lara's weight disorder but equally heartbreaking is the breakdown of Lara's parents' marriage. Lara's mother provides a clear image of the future Lara may have had as a thin, beautiful woman, particularly the fact that this future is far from perfect. Overall, *Life in the Fat Lane* is a realistic look at what happens when the lie of perfection fails, and how to overcome the realization that appearances aren't everything.

I enjoyed this novel quite a bit because it took a different perspective on a common topic: dealing with obesity in high school. Instead of having spent her life overweight, Lara Ardeche transitions from beautiful and perfect to living "in the fat lane." I thought this was interesting, and I'm sure will resonate with readers who have experienced weight fluctuations.

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## Natalie says

I'm tempted to put this in the "read" section because I came quite close to finishing this, but when it started to get cringe-worthy (and when it was almost due to the library) I decided to put it away. Far away.

I guess I just don't quite get the point of this book. Our heroine is supposed to be this effervescent, extremely nice character, yet she comes off as incredibly shallow, irritating and ignorantly snarky.

For the first couple chapters, all we do is obsess whether Lara will win prom queen. I'm sorry, is a f\*\*\* supposed to be given here...?

Anyhow, at the dance, she makes comments on everyone's appearance, and insults a "fat girl," by trying to "help her." Ugh.

It's weird, because usually in a book like this the "fat girl" would be the protagonists, and Lara/popular girl would be the villain, the "oh-so-nice" one that's actually a b\*\*\*\*.

We also meet Lara's best friend, and the only thing we really learn about her is that she's a) really nice, which "makes up for" (b she's "extremely overweight/fat/chubby". She's a size fourteen. Here again, I question the message of this book. Aren't cheesy weight books like this supposed to *help* with self-esteem and other eating issues?

Then - oh, no! - Lara begins to gain weight. She literally starves herself in order to try to make herself thinner, and her mother publicly insults her in front of her family.

The book gets increasingly worse as it goes on, as she gains more and more weight and becomes more and more whiny and irritating. Perhaps there's a point at the end of the book where she realizes "being fat is okay!" or some sort of weird ending like that, but it's also my problem with Specials (though with the latter, it's cutting instead of weight): the message is the what *not* to do, but the actual real message is lost in the ending.

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### **Tabitha Olson says**

While this book brought up some very good issues about how terrible overweight people are treated, I found it preachy and many times got irritated with Lara's whining.

I can understand that she's feeling sorry for herself because she used to be a beauty queen and now she's one hundred pounds overweight. But I don't want to read that same thing a zillion times, right up to the end of the book. It made me lose sympathy for Lara, and by the end of the book I thought she was a stuck up brat. I also had difficulty with her disease, Axell-Crowne Syndrome. It isn't real - the author made it up. And because of this disease, Lara felt superior to other overweight people because gaining weight wasn't her fault. Stuck up brat strikes again. To top it off, she gets mad at other people for assuming she was overweight from eating too much, yet she assumed that exact thing with other overweight people. How does she know the person she's looking down on isn't also suffering from Axell-Crowne Syndrome? It's hard to relate to a hypocrite, especially one who never seems to learn her lesson and grow from it. I didn't like other messages in the book either, such as Suzanne's gorgeous boyfriend, Tristan, hating that Suzanne is overweight. If the point of the book is to say not everyone can be thin and that's okay, then why doesn't Tristan love Suzanne for who she is, regardless of her weight?

Anyway, there are many ways the author could have handled this story, and it's a shame she chose this one.

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### **Karla Strand says**

This book was just okay. I was looking for a good message for YA about weight but was disappointed. The main character starts out at 115 or something and gains 100 pounds. Now while that is a drastic weight gain in 1 year, I couldn't get past the fact that this 5'7" character topped out at 218 and yet was described as enduring torturous teasing and stares, couldn't fit into the movie theatre seat and was in essence some huge

tub of lard. This is just so unrealistic. I am 5'5" 200 pounds and am not a tub, I fit into my movie theatre seats just fine and certainly don't have people staring at me like some freak of nature. 218 pounds is not that heavy. So the book was alright but I just couldn't get past the fact that the girl topped out at only 218. I know it may not be healthy and all of that but to think that a person that height and weight would've been wearing a size 22/24 is unrealistic.

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### **Diana says**

If you're thin and you read this, I'm not sure if this will be comic relief or what... But if you're fat and you read this it will be painful. Very painful. *Would you rather be stupid or fat? Stupid, yell the children! Would you rather be ugly or fat? Ugly, yell the children.*

Lara is the perfect girl who suddenly starts gaining weight for apparently no reason at all. She discovers that it could be because of an incurable disease but her family and social life begin to unravel as she gets fatter and fatter.

I don't know how I feel right now. It depressed me and really made me feel low reading it. Being fat, you know how people see you and how they feel about your fatness but it was so vivid in this book that it just made me sad to read it.

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### **Esther says**

I thought this book partially illustrates the society's obsession with appearances and how it's affecting women all around the world.

Life in the Fat Lane is about a teenage prom queen who seems to have it all. Suddenly, she rapidly gains weight and tips the scale to an unbearable number, motivating her to do whatever it takes to return to her original figure. It doesn't help that her mother, who is also thin-obsessed, pressures her daughter to lose weight and gives dieting method advice to her. Despite all her efforts to lose weight, the girl is unable to, and instead, keeps gaining weight. She isolates herself and is the subject of much gossip, having to move to another school out of shame, and breaking up with her one boyfriend - who still loved her through it all. Distraught, she realizes that she has a disease that makes her unable to lose weight and keep gaining weight. However, as she befriends her piano teacher and starts socializing with understanding and open-minded characters, she soon grows to accept herself and accept everything inside and outside of her skin. With this self-acceptance and motivation to move on without worrying about her weight anymore, she finds happiness and naturally starts losing weight.

The only thing that I wish the author could've done more of, was to delve deeper into the protagonist's feelings and emotions, besides stating the basic "I'm no longer a size zero" rant. Being obese myself, I crave a text that will quench my thirst for understanding and true depth, because I want there to be a book about obesity and the affect it's having on women. However, I give the author credit for putting in the basics, and making her message loud and clear at the end.

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### **Aimee says**

This book was total garbage. It's like somebody told the author "Okay, here's a big advance payment, now

write a book to make fat girls go rah-rah and all the skinny ones go away and stuff themselves with butter and chocolate." And she tried but she really didn't have any idea what they really wanted or how to go about it.

The characters, one and all, are cardboard. NONE of them are likable. Lara, the main character, is supposed to make you root for her, but she doesn't. She's a self-absorbed, spoiled princess who we're supposed to believe is actually a sweet and kind girl. But she hangs around with two cardboard mean girls named Lisa and Amber, plus a cardboard mouthy chunk named Molly. Lara seems to like Molly best but this doesn't make her tell Lisa and Amber straight out to stop taking potshots at Molly. And Molly herself is supposed to be likable, so different from Lara and the other skinny, shallow girls. But she's every bit as catty as Lisa and Amber, even to their faces. But of course in Cherie Bennett's world it's A-ok for Molly to be rude and insulting, because you see, she's not skinny! Don't you get it?

For that Matter, if Molly is so wonderful, why does she keep wasting her time with Lara and the Two Mean Friends in the first place?

Lara is extremely popular, then suddenly and inexplicably she begins putting on weight and just like that, nobody wants to be seen with her. Except Sarah, whose kindness Lara dismisses because Sarah is "nice to everybody" like that's a bad thing. (But remember, Lara is famous for being nice. But the rules don't apply to her.)

Lara balloons up to 200-plus pounds, which, contrary to what the author says, is not a size 22 and would not preclude somebody from getting into a seat at the movies.

While in the hospital trying to find out why she keeps gaining weight, Lara is visited by Fatty Patty, an overweight classmate whom Lara had never directly insulted, though she had not objected when her friends did. Patty implies that she has cursed Lara by wishing her to become fat. Okaaaay.

Anyway, Lara's whole family seems to have been cursed, as they have to move to Michigan from Tennessee, her father leaves for a younger woman and her mother falls into a suicidal depression.

The kids at Lara's new school are just as mean, but she makes cardboard quirky friends outside of school.

For one, her new piano teacher, Suzanne, who is fatter than Lara, eats huge plates of food and wears things like hot-pink denim bib overalls.

I guess we're supposed to admire Suzanne's "fat acceptance" or something, but she really just came across as gross. And somebody as big as her would have been pretty uncomfortable in denim overalls, and hot pink denim overalls sound like baby clothes.

Anyway, of course Lara eventually begins to lose weight, presumably because Patty psychically took pity on her or thought she'd learned her lesson. I should add that Lara got a diagnosis, a fictitious disease that defies all the laws of biology by making its victims gain more weight the less they ate. Uh huh.

But the thing is, Lara never really changed. She was still the self-absorbed, looks-obsessed, cardboard princess she always was.

If Cherie Bennett had done this with an eye to being ironic and over the top with stereotypes and tropes, she could have made this a hilarious read. But she was not, and the book sucks.

And I'd also add that at this time when in some high schools the obesity rate is 75 percent or even higher, books about The Fat Kid are out of date. There is no single Fat Kid; the Fat Kids are the majority.

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## **Laura (Booksforbreakfast) says**

I remember reading this over and over when in high school. I related with Lara so much and felt a connection with her. I decided to read it again and felt the same way, if not more now that I'm older.

There is something about the writing in this book that is very captivating and made it very hard for me to put the book down. It was hard for me to empathize with Lara at first because she does has a bratty attitude, but

looking at her life and what happened to her, I can't say I blame her.

Ultimately, it's about relationships and family/peer dynamics, and how you feel about yourself on the inside. Even though it was published seventeen years ago (!! ) it is still relate-able and I feel it was before its time. Definitely give it a try!

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### **Stephanie A. says**

Wow, lots of angry reviews. I reread it today just to make sure, but my original opinion stands. This book did a great job of showing how it feels to go from thin and gorgeous to hopelessly overweight (and from Molly on the side, you also get what it's like being the overweight friend of someone much slimmer). The idea of succumbing to a disease where you literally cannot stop gaining weight adds an extra layer of horror, while making you grateful that at least you don't have that problem.

Lara is a likable character throughout, never mean, just honest. The writing is vivid and some scenes have stayed with me for years, like Lara raiding the fridge after realizing the diet's doing no good, or realizing that Jett loves her but isn't "in love with" her anymore (HEARTBREAK). I also love that even though this book was published in the late 90s, her mother is a dated cliché, with a mindset of "how to be a good wife/proper woman" evidently unchanged her entire life - I can definitely see that happening. So many issues in this family, it's a delicious soap opera to have for a backdrop while the real story unfolds.

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### **Emily Benoit says**

Concept/Ideas: 5/5

Characters: 3.5/5

Storyline/Plot: 5/5

Overall Rating 5/5 stars

Wow, this book was amazing. This book actually being a reprint of an older version published in 1998, I've never heard of this book. I loved it from page one, to the very end. The plot was very original. Who would have ever thought someone would write a novel about a BEAUTY QUEEN ending up being the one to be the "fat girl" in high school. Exactly. Very original in my opinion.

The book was very well paced, and I read through it quickly. The only thing that was a downer for me had to be character development. Lara didn't really seem to change until the VERY end, which sort of bugged me. It would have been nice to see her embrace herself a little earlier on in the novel if anything.

I found other characters to be extremely shallow, and ALMOST a bit unreal. Being overweight myself, yes, I do know how cruel people can be. But the way Lara was treated in the novel seemed so unrealistic. People DO NOT go around making fun of you as much as this book portrays it to be. Being bigger... In high school I've only ever been called things to my face about twice. And I'm in grade 11. So, that did irritate me, because it is not as bad as this book makes it out to be. Another lesson learned in this book would have to be the fact that you really can't judge anyone. Even Lara, being the perfect girl, ended up having a very unperfect life

behind the scenes. It goes to show that you really need to love and accept yourself, but at the same time, no judge others. You NEVER know what their life is like, and why it is the way it is.

The one character who stood out was Lara's boyfriend Jett. He seemed pretty good, and stood by Lara throughout the book. He was a good boyfriend from what I judged. Another character I loved was Suzanne. Wow, what a lady! Totally thinks the same way I do. Loved her motivational, moving character. I wish Lara would have taken her word more seriously.

Overall, Loved this book. It was so awesome, and does relate to people, weight issues or not!! A great, moving read.

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### **lanie says**

I love a good eating disorder (ED from here on out) story. Let's get that fact out of the way first. I find the psychology of them endlessly fascinating and one day, I hope to work with and help those that suffer from EDs.

Perhaps my more-than-casual interest in EDs colored my perception of this novel too strongly. Maybe author, Cherie Bennett, did not intend to address EDs at all, though much of the story centers around typical disordered thoughts and some characters are governed by what is usually looked at as disordered behavior, though Bennett refrains from using any specific terms (purging, binging, etc.) to refer to Lara's behavior. This story is not strictly about an ED, but it is firmly entrenched in that world. What Bennett did intend to do is a mystery to me.

Beauty queen and conveniently-named (for a completely unimaginative fat joke in the novel's latter half), Lara Ardeche (pronounced Ard-ash, can you see it coming?!?), is the straight-A, perfectionist, popular girl with parents who have no problems obsessing about her weight and eating habits over the dinner table. That's about 3 precursors for an ED right there. I'm willing to give Bennett one point for correct information, but I'm about to take away a million points for negligence.

Chapter numbers are, instead of chronological, beginning from one, Lara's weight measurements as they change through the book. Convenient for the reader, sure, so you don't have to do math or flip back chapters to add up Lara's weight and the plot points are all centered around weight, so the subject matter changes with each weight change. On the other hand, how gross and patronizing, to completely reduce this character to her weight and size, offering minimal plot with plateaus.

Also, when Lara is deemed to be at her perfect weight in the beginning of the novel, it gives someone who might tend toward disorder a goal weight to attain. Numbers are known to be triggering for those who are suffering with an ED. Although anyone with an ED picking up a book with this title is probably looking for trouble, a good bit of fear-based "thinspiration" and Bennett provides plenty of it.

Lara is under an insane amount of pressure from almost every source. Her parents have a rocky, seemingly loveless marriage, her friends are superficial and make derogatory comments about Lara's less popular plus-sized best friend to her face, her boyfriend is deemed unsatisfactory though she does love him, she has



beauty pageant demands and she has self-imposed high academic standards. When she gains a little bit of weight, the pressure mounts and her barely-existent self-confidence falters until everything threatens to give way. Then does, when she continues gaining weight. Her grades take a dive, her parents relationship fractures, her friends turn on her, she can't even diet "right" (she abstains from eating during the day and sneaks food at night), and continues to gain weight to the point of hospitalization.

Being the person I am, I analyzed the clues given: Lara diets and "cheats" when failing to succeed at adhering to impossible restrictions, she works out to extremes. This has ED written all over it. Even when her weight gain was minimal, her mother provided immediate scrutiny. God. Her mother. What a piece of work. She set a terrible example, smoking and restricting her own eating for fear of weight gain and in the interest of keeping her man. All this set up to tell a pretty good story of what can happen when a perfect storm of pressure breaks down the spirit and body of a seemingly perfect girl.

But no.

I was debating revealing the next detail, but the following fact can be found on the back of another 1998 edition, so it's technically not a spoiler: it turns out that Lara develops a FICTIONAL metabolic disorder that causes her to gain weight, regardless of calorie intake.

I read the acknowledgments, where Bennett thanked someone for medical references, so I assume the disorder is based on something real. That's fine. The fact is that the doctors tell her that she's retaining insane amounts of water, her body is highly efficient, the less you feed it, the more "efficient" her body could get, leading to more weight gain.

Seriously? I mean, wouldn't she at least have some kidney problems or something?

Whatever. She gets "fat" (I won't reveal her weight at either end of the scale but she and everyone else calls her this), word spreads in her hometown that it is out of her control and she gets some pity, even though her old superficial asshole friends turn against her.

I understand the appeal of using an outside force as the controlling factor - completely governing the weight she will be. Most bodies have a set-point at which they will return with normal eating habits, which is out of anyone's control.

Why, then, was that not enough to be a compelling story? Looking at how a "perfect" girl dealt with weight gain -- flying in the face of what everyone around her seemed to judge about her -- would have made for an empowering story, had Lara ever for one second stopped hating her new body.

No. Life in the Fat Lane supplied the perfect bogeyman, an unstoppable force onto which Lara could place the blame for her weight and could safely hate her body without hating herself...though she kind of did that too.

After Lara's family moves, she loses all her social capital as well as the pity she'd gained at her old school. Lara's new school was a horror show of fat-hating stigma (which, to be fair, a lot of high schools probably are for most people that fail to fall into a narrow ideal) and everyone else's disdain for her was only compounded by her own self-loathing.

Even as she allowed herself to start a new life in a new town, deigned to make friends with the other outcasts (she was horrified that they gravitated toward her, as if she was one of them) and found a way to enjoy a

talent that didn't rely on her beauty -- she never seemed to stop hating herself. What she went through didn't make her change her opinion of anyone of size who were surely to blame for their own weight problems, except, OMG, some of them can apparently dress themselves and still have style! And sometimes they can find guys that like them, if they're blind or probably still want them to lose weight.

For f-ing real?

The unnecessary disease, on top of the incessant weight bashing made for an unbelievable, yet still entirely depressing read. I cannot recommend this book for anyone and can only view it as a strong example of what not to do. Don't pull explanations out of thin air. Don't supply hate directed at a character (and a large segment of the population) that never gets resolved unless you want your characters irredeemable. And definitely, do not feed on the fears of those with actual diseases and/or endorse those behaviors, giving them perfect justification for disordered reasoning without attempting to frame any of that as such.

Sensationalistic, irresponsible BS.

(Also posted at Lose Your Cred.)

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### **Teresa says**

Okay, the only reason this book is getting two stars is because it kept me entertained enough to keep turning the pages, but having said that, I pretty much hated this book. I've read a lot of fat books in my day, and this is the first one where I was left completely uninspired. There was no humor, no irony, and really no message at all. I really don't like the idea of teenage girls reading this book, because either way I think this book could actually egg on the stereotype that girls are only valuable if they are thin. Even when the character in the book is at her biggest, she is still unable to forgive her fellow chubby classmates for being chubby. There was no repentance, no realization of inner-beauty, no acceptance of self. And the girls who were skinny, including her mother, were total self-destructive hags who were completely miserable in their own right. The only likeable character was the protagonist's "fat friend" who was a size fourteen (excuse me?), who's genuine kindness and loyalty was lost in her descriptions like "tree trunk thighs" and "fat butt." I understand that we are in a "skinny era," and I can kind of see where the author was coming from in writing the story, but in the end it left me just feeling sad and a bit assaulted!

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### **Maryam\_a\_140a513 says**

A perfect example of how someone's life can get turned upside down in a matter of days. Beautifully written in a way that is relatable to all teenagers and young adults, *Life in the Fat Lane* displays how a girl presumed to have a perfect life, a perfect boyfriend, a perfect family, popularity equivalent to Britney Spears, and winning homecoming queen can be taken away with the blink of an eye. The author, Cherie Bennett, tackles a huge contentious issue that many individuals have suffered and continue to suffer from, and shows them the light at the end of the tunnel. Inspiring writing narrated through the voice of Lara Ardeche, the girl experiencing a whirlwind of situations and emotions in her life. Additional themes include, the hardships of working through broken families as well as relationships. Another aspect that makes the book even more interesting of a read are the characters within the book that come from all walks of life. All things considered, this was definitely an enjoyable read that I cannot fault.

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## **Madeline Haut says**

This book kept me reading until the very last page. I was interested in finding out the reason for the title and the reason did surprise me. I was expecting a girl who considered herself overweight and had an eating disorder but this book was the opposite which had me interested. At first though, I felt sorry for Lara because of this disease but as the book went on I did sadly lose sympathy for her because she became rude and degrading against other larger people. This novel made me really think about the society we live in. I feel so ashamed that we live in a world where if someone is larger they are made fun of and bullies never cease to stop the name calling and judging. I did like especially the writing of this book because I can tell that it was made for a teenage reader. I could relate to the feeling that Lara and Molly felt because I always feel as if I am not toned enough and I compare myself to my thin friends who are able to eat whatever they want and still be so skinny. I liked this book a lot and it really was a page turner for me personally but I do understand how it can be degrading and frustrating because of all the comments and the family problems.

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## **Andreina says**

I don't like this book. I just don't like it! When I first picked this book up I thought it was about a girl who's been fat her entire life and decided to do something about it. But it was about this perfect girl, popular, beauty queen. She's nice to people and all that, although she doesn't say it I felt like she thought she was better looking than the rest or even better in general. Now, not everything is negative about her. I like her confidence. But I feel like I wasted my time, because I used to be fat and some of the things she said didn't make sense. Like when she was 210 Lbs. and at 5' 7" she's supposedly size 22/24. And I can tell you for sure that that's a lie, because I'm 5' 7" and when I weighed 210 Lbs I wore a size 14 pants comfortably.

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