Clarion Review

General

A Rose From Charlie and Marie
Dennis Frank Macek
BookSurge
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Four Stars (out of Five)

The terms “Buddhist” and “thriller” may not seem like they go together, but author Dennis Frank Macek attaches them to one another in *A Rose from Charlie and Marie*. As his main characters unravel an international terror plot, the principles of synchronicity and living life to the fullest guide them in their adventures.

A Rose is the first novel for Macek, who has homes in Nevada and Texas. He holds a master’s degree in American literature with a creative writing focus, and he has been a teacher and a contractor for the U.S. government. He is, not surprisingly, a Buddhist.

The novel begins with Charlie’s experiences in the Vietnam War, where he is kidnapped by a group of guerillas. Charlie eventually becomes a devoted member and helps the group defend the country from destruction. Of course, going AWOL in such a manner leaves Charlie’s legal and political position uncertain when he finally returns to the U.S. He eventually marries Marie, a schoolteacher with grit and gumption, and their questionable status leads them to unconventional positions as freelance secret agents for the U.S. government.

Charlie and Marie begin their careers unquestioningly performing the tasks required of them, but soon they bring their moral senses to bear, interfering with activities that they feel are unlawful or harmful. Deeper investigation into their own secret activities eventually leads them to a man called Chang, a militant who wants to create a new Chinese state through terrorism. The couple must decide how to thwart the catastrophe.

The first section of *A Rose* is heavily weighted with Charlie and Marie’s background and could be shortened since it postpones the meat of the story. Once Charlie and Marie team up, the book’s pace becomes faster and more interesting. Daring, sneaky, and yet highly moral, Charlie and Marie make for compelling characters, while the story’s casual tone, buoyed by constant, realistic dialogue, moves the plot along quickly. Though some Buddhist philosophy appears in

the pages, this is definitely a highly readable story.

As for the Buddhist aspects of this thriller, *A Rose* often finds Charlie and Marie considering in what way to best live their "Lives," a term that is capitalized, one supposes, to signify one's ultimate purpose. They strive always to do good and not to spread harm, which often leads them to perform delicate moral calculations on their spy jobs. The tension between their positive morality and their undercover activities forms an interesting basis for this unusual story.