

Charlie Ford Meets Secret Agent Man

JD Tynan

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After one gets past the juvenile title, this is really a funny, engaging, mile-a-minute romp. Charlie Ford—never call her “Charlene”—is a high-spirited twenty-nine-year-old nanny to rich kids. She turned to nannying after almost completing her Army Special Forces training. However, she has a disruptive rebellious streak and abysmal luck when it comes to holding onto her jobs.

As the story opens, she has just snagged another assignment that has disaster written all over it—caring for Bella, the spoiled pre-teen daughter of screen actor Roald Munson, at his mansion in Greenwich, Connecticut. Before long, she and her charge are on a plane headed to Munson’s new movie location in Africa, and it’s all downhill from there. The “secret agent man” of the title is a chameleon—like fellow Charlie meets on the plane, who keeps popping up to lead her and Bella into, or out of, one calamity after another.

The joy of the book lies less in the drama of the perils Charlie confronts than in watching her mind deal with them. She is just as worried that her father back in Oregon will continue to misunderstand and undervalue her as she is that a particular villain will do her in. Then there are the demands of her energetic libido. Her frank reflections on these needs manage to be touching and amusing at the same time. Throughout the narrative, she feels thwarted that the guy she’s dubbed “Secret Agent Man” won’t tell her what his mission is or even give her his real name. “I knew I’d never get a straight answer out of him,” she muses, as they lie together in bed, “but I was willing to bribe him with sex, repeatedly, until he spilled his guts.”

Although the moral arenas and character viewpoints are radically different, Tynan has the same gift for depicting a rich interior life that J.D. Salinger demonstrated in *The Catcher In The Rye*. Like Holden Caulfield, Charlie Ford is forever pitting herself against the world—in her mind—and finding the world ludicrously wanting. Charlie is tough enough, though, to fight back—and she’s brimming with attitude. When her mother berates her for being fired from yet another job, Charlie reports, “I rolled my eyes so far back into my head that I actually saw my ass from a completely new perspective.”

As far as adventure-writing and mystery-plotting goes, this book is unremarkable. But in Charlie Ford, Tynan has created a character readers can love regardless of context.

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