FICTION

I Love You, Charlie Tanner

Lynne Golodner

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Categories
Contemporary Jewish Life
Love & Relationships

Review

By Nina Schneider – October 27, 2025

Lynne Golodner's third novel reads like a parent's worst nightmare. Narrator Charlotte, nicknamed Charlie, is a forty-year-old woman trying to process her impulsive decision to drop out of college and live off the grid for twenty years in a cult-like agricultural commune.

As a young, beautiful, and naïve woman, Charlie follows her charismatic professor turned lover on a fateful journey to rural Nova Scotia, where he demands that she cut off contact with her bewildered Midwestern Jewish parents. Charlie tells herself that James loves her, despite his mysterious absences. There are many explicit sex scenes in which James tries to convince Charlie of his fidelity to her.

The author offers beautiful descriptions of the natural world and the plants and produce that Charlie lovingly tends at the commune. Slowly, Charlie comes to terms with her tendency to be a follower and to look for love in all the wrong places. Although she realizes that she is being controlled, she feels trapped. She has "lost her voice."

After she uncovers some dark secrets about James and the commune, she finally garners the strength to break away from them. Charlie escapes Canada in the middle of the night in her parents' old car with some ill-found money. Mystery and murder follow her to Vermont, where she meets a supportive new female friend. Here Charlie attempts to make a new life and dares to contact her long-lost family. They immediately fly east to reconnect despite the immense pain she has caused.

Charlie's parents, who were once secular but sought solace with a Jewish congregation after their daughter cut them off, encourage her to attend services. She reluctantly joins them and meets the rabbi, a handsome widower who immediately takes an interest in her. A romance begins and she slowly embraces Jewish rituals and customs she never knew as a child. Charlie's new love interest seems slightly derivative of the "hot rabbi" in the popular television series *Nobody Wants This*. But our narrator earns a second chance at happiness in midlife, with her family, friends, and new love cheering her on.

Nina Schneider, MFA, is a writer and retired English and Media Studies professor based in the Boston area.