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Children of Disobedience: The Love Story of Martin Luther and Katharina of Bora

Asta Scheib
Asta Scheib Translated by David Ward
David Ward, translator
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Perched high upon the broad limbs of a narrative, yet shrouded by the brambles of private musings, literary eyes track the flight of Katharina von Bora. From the swell of this drama, an escape through moonlit woods from a convent in Nimbschen, evolves a poignant and remarkably tender profile of a woman's inner strength. This passion, captured by Scheib's pen, has managed to transcend Katharina von Bora beyond any historical footnote labeling her simply as wife to the father of Protestant Reformation.

Left to a convent as a child by her impoverished father, Katharina became a nun despite her driving undercurrents that defied her Catholic teaching. Despite physical and sexual abuses, she was spared her sanity by way of a bosom confidante and her irrepressible vein of independence that led to marginal acts of rebellion. Embracing the theology of young Martin Luther, and inspired by the Reformation, she fled with eight young nuns to Wittenberg.

The balance of Disobedience follows the overt complexities of Katharina's controversial marriage to Martin Luther, himself a runaway monk. Yet the inner thoughts of Katharina, as relayed through Scheib's intuitive hand, reveal the true intricacies and hardships that both nurtured and plagued their union. Trials of poverty, disease, and death paled beside the continually shifting definition of love between Martin and his wife. "Every time Martinus preaches, the thought crosses Katharina's mind that he is far more strongly wedded to the church than to her…" Via passages detailing her managing of Luther's finances, offering of theological insight and operation of "…a boardinghouse, a hospital, and a madhouse…," known as The Black Cloister; the uncompromising character of Katharina is viscerally felt. At the side of her dying daughter Katharina cries, "If it would save my Elslein, I'd bring every witch and the Devil himself to her bedside."

Sidestepping the erosive action of excessive detail and banal period characterizations, Scheib effectively illuminates the complexities of Katharina von Bora and of relationships in general. Disobedience engages readers in this manner, treating its religious backdrop with historical objectivity and remaining accessible to a diverse audience. With the alphabet re-beaded to dress a foreign tongue, translator Ward and author Scheib present this English version of Kinder des Ungehorsams, which was originally met with wide acclaim when first published in Germany in 1996. Reflecting the author's ample research, including documented letters from Martin Luther to Katharina, the novel is faithful to history, and merges a seamless blend of events and emotion.
KAREN WYCKOFF (June 15, 2000)

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