



Daughter of Rome

Tessa Afshar

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Daughter of Rome is an intricate Christian novel focused on Priscilla and Aquila, following them from their charged first meeting through to their work as Corinthian tent makers.

Little is known about the couple's early days, but the book suggests a provocative reason for Priscilla's conversion. Here, she's the daughter of a Roman general and has long been shunned by her brother. An affair and a miscarriage left her grief-stricken. Later transformed by her belief, Priscilla extends kindness to the needy. Aquila, a disinherited Jewish leather worker, is touched by her actions.

During their early interactions, both Priscilla and Aquila delicately negotiate their emotions. They begin with hesitant humor that morphs into respect and desire, and their love story is engrossing. Further, it's rooted in the community of believers who guide them. Invigorating scenes build a cross-section of Rome, where people of all stripes find God.

Amid heartening depictions of Christian house churches, the invented characters humanize the biblical ones. Marcus, an eight-year-old runaway whom Priscilla and Aquila shelter, heals Priscilla's longing for motherhood. The painful reason for his destitution reveals the impact of other people's sins. An arc on finding justice for Marcus underscores the lengths that Priscilla will go to mirror the love she's received from God. Antonia, a haughty patrician, enlivens the plot with dark schemes that invite an opening for spiritual grace.

Paul is portrayed with a renegade air that's steeped in wisdom. Celebrated though he is, he's integrated with ease, and his characterization is down-to-earth. In this and other ways, Tessa Afshar inhabits the world of early Christians with refreshing clarity. From life under the threat of persecution to domestic details and her characters' innermost thoughts, she makes early Christianity spark.

KAREN RIGBY (January / February 2020)

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