Clarion Review

Historical

Falling for the Devil
Britt Holmstrom
CreateSpace
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Three Stars (out of Five)

Falling for the Devil, by Britt Holmström, explores the dark era of early seventeenth-century Scotland. Readers are taken along on one woman's internal journey as she struggles with religious faith and doubt. The book raises complex spiritual questions, such as how God can allow suffering and the nature of sin. Holmström also delves into the ways in which the painful realities of life affect a person's faith as well as the potentially destructive force of religious fervor.

The novel tells of Elspeth Finnie, a woman raised to brew ale and to think for herself. While fervent in her desire to remain faithful to God, unending drought, famine, death, and war bring Elspeth's beliefs into question. The thread of faith she does grasp grows thinner as she valiantly faces the circumstances of her life, from hunger to miscarriage. When religion becomes a powerful political tool and witch hunts imply the source of God's disfavor, Elspeth's struggle to maintain her beliefs intensifies—especially when she finds herself in the tightening noose of the witch trials.

Holmström, author of four other novels and a short-story collection, has penned a tale with a fascinating subject and setting. She takes readers on an exploration of the history and culture of the time period, examining in particular how otherwise average people allowed mass witch burnings to occur. And while Holmström clearly takes umbrage at what unchecked religious fervor can lead to, she credits people of faith with having sincere hearts that honestly question even as they hold on to what they believe.

Though at times compelling, Holmström's writing has a tendency to feel slow. This may be ascribed to the plot being primarily driven by the main character's internal journey rather than by action. The story is overall quite dark and offers little lightheartedness as payoff for the reader. Additionally, the narrative is in present tense, a device that adds awkwardness to a

historical read already facing heavy, plodding moments.

That said, Holmström makes readers care about her complex and intriguing characters. The text is also technically clean, with a good layout and a strong cover design that support its overall professional feel. Though it may weigh on the heart, *Falling for the Devil* is a book fans of dark historical fiction will find worth reading.

Diane Gardner