Clarion Review

General

Nuns Don't Dance: A Love Story: Love of God, A Country & A Man

Norma L. Bronoski
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Three Stars (out of Five)

In the early 1960s, with the Soviet Union threatening to build a wall to separate East and West Berlin, Louisa Meier, a young American postulant, is sent to Munich by her Wisconsin convent. She has been assigned to learn German so she can teach it at the order's school upon her return. During her year in Germany—a last hurrah before taking her vows—Louisa learns more than just the language; a variety of characters in Munich teach her the ways of the world outside the convent.

Louisa becomes good friends with Rachel, a fellow teacher at the language school, whose values are quite different from Louisa's and who is on a mission to find a husband. Rachel tries to be a mentor to Louisa, but when she finds out, after several months of friendship, that Louisa is about to become a nun, the two drift apart. They meet only occasionally, but continue to influence and confide in each other.

While readers don't learn a great deal about Louisa's childhood and background, they do find out that she never had a strong male presence in her life; her father died when she was young, and her mother raised Louisa and her four sisters. In Munich, Louisa becomes acquainted with four men who show her different characteristics of the male sex. The Lederhosen-wearing Herr Schmalz teaches her about the fun and earthy pleasures of Germany. In cerebral Dudley, she sees the intellectual side that rules some men. From Ivo she learns a harsh lesson about the male sex drive. In handsome Friedrich, she may find a happy balance of all of these elements, which presents her with a difficult decision when it comes time to return home to take her religious vows.

The novel would be most interesting for readers who are learning the German language. Each phrase spoken by the characters in German is repeated again in English, which is distracting for casual readers. The English dialogue lacks the ease of natural speech: "'Believe

me, Louisa, the Black Forest is anything but sinister,'" one character explains. "'It is a beautiful area of thick trees stretching for many kilometers. It is named for the abundance of dark pine trees"

Although Bronoski, a first-time author, briefly describes the background of many of her characters and even shifts the perspective to Friedrich on occasion, none of the characters are truly three-dimensional. Readers are never fully let into Louisa's thoughts, making it difficult to understand some of the decisions she makes.

Additionally, Bronoski tends to knock readers over the head with the themes of her story, rather than letting them unfold on their own. A more careful timeline construction would also have been beneficial, since one character apparently gives birth only six months after meeting her baby's father.

Despite its flaws, *Nuns Don't Dance* is a light and fun read about the awakenings that can occur while sojourning in a foreign land, and how sometimes one can only get to know oneself when one is forced to adapt to unfamiliar circumstances.