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KATIE LUTHER

THE GRAPHIC NOVEL

Susan K. Leigh
Illustrated by Dave Hill

Mother
of the
Reformation

CONCORDIA PUBLISHING HOUSE • SAINT LOUIS

Zuhlsdorf



Black Cloister
Wittenberg



Brehna
Convent



Torgau



Erfurt



Nimbschen
Convent

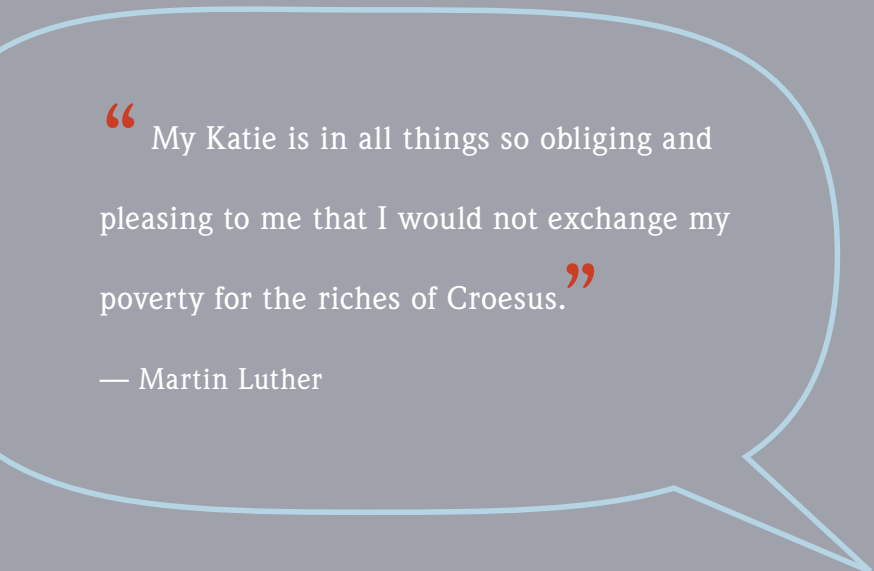




This is the story of Katie Luther.

Born into a destitute family of noble lineage, Katharina von Bora grew up in a convent and was relegated to live as a nun in pre-Reformation Germany. She settled into a life of study and service at a nunnery near Nimbschen. Then, when Dr. Martin Luther's writings were spread throughout the land, some found their way into the hands of Katie and some other nuns at the nunnery. Those writings were the impetus for change. As much as Luther helped to reform the Church and spark sweeping change in Germany, he helped to transform a humble nun into a strong, intelligent, and inspiring leader in her own right.





“ My Katie is in all things so obliging and
pleasing to me that I would not exchange my
poverty for the riches of Croesus.”

— Martin Luther

❖ Katie's Early Years



On January 29, 1499, in the old family manor near Lippendorf, a daughter—Katie—is born to Katharina Haubitz von Bora and Hans von Bora.

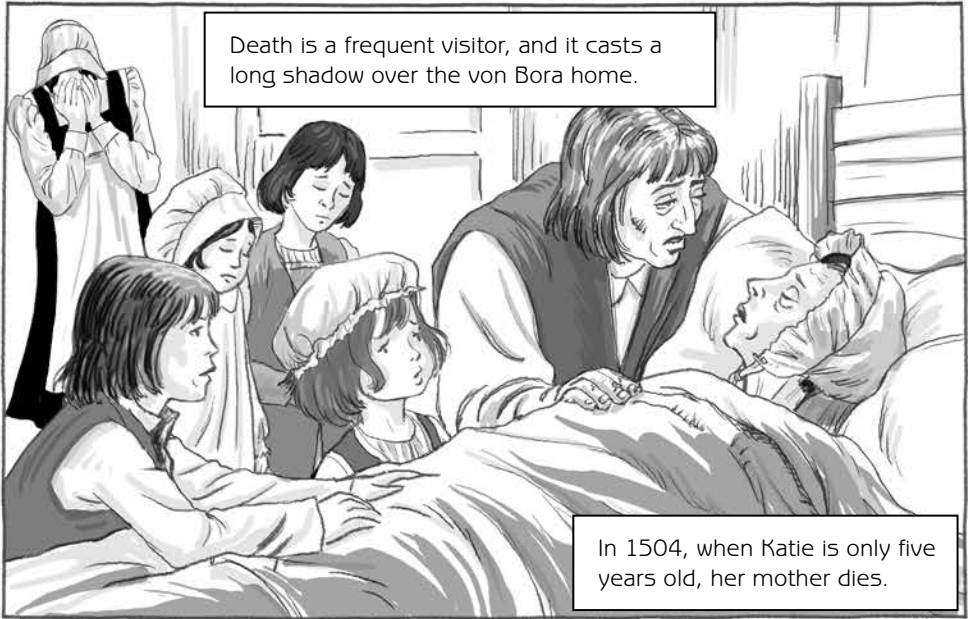




We will name
her after you,
Katharina.

We will call her
"Katie."

Katie had three brothers and one sister.





The only real options for young ladies in medieval times are marriage, staying home to help take care of other family members, or going to a convent to become a nun. About a year after her mother died and around the time Katie turns six, it would have been time for her to start school. There probably was no school for girls in her village, so she is sent to a convent school in Brehna, about 30 miles from home.



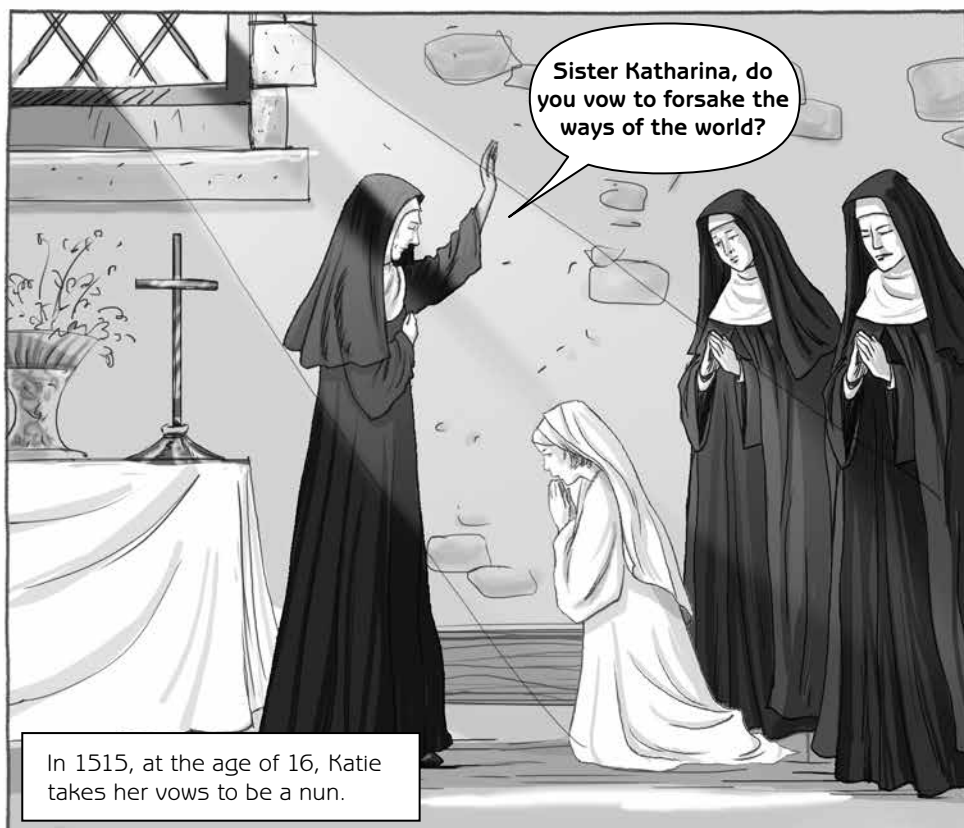
Katie never lives with her siblings or parents again. Instead, she learns the routine and rigors of convent life.



After three years in Brehna, nine-year-old Katie moves to Nimbschen to join the convent there. The abbess is Margaret Haubitz, a relative on her mother's side. Katie's aunt on her father's side, Magdalena von Bora, is a nun there too.

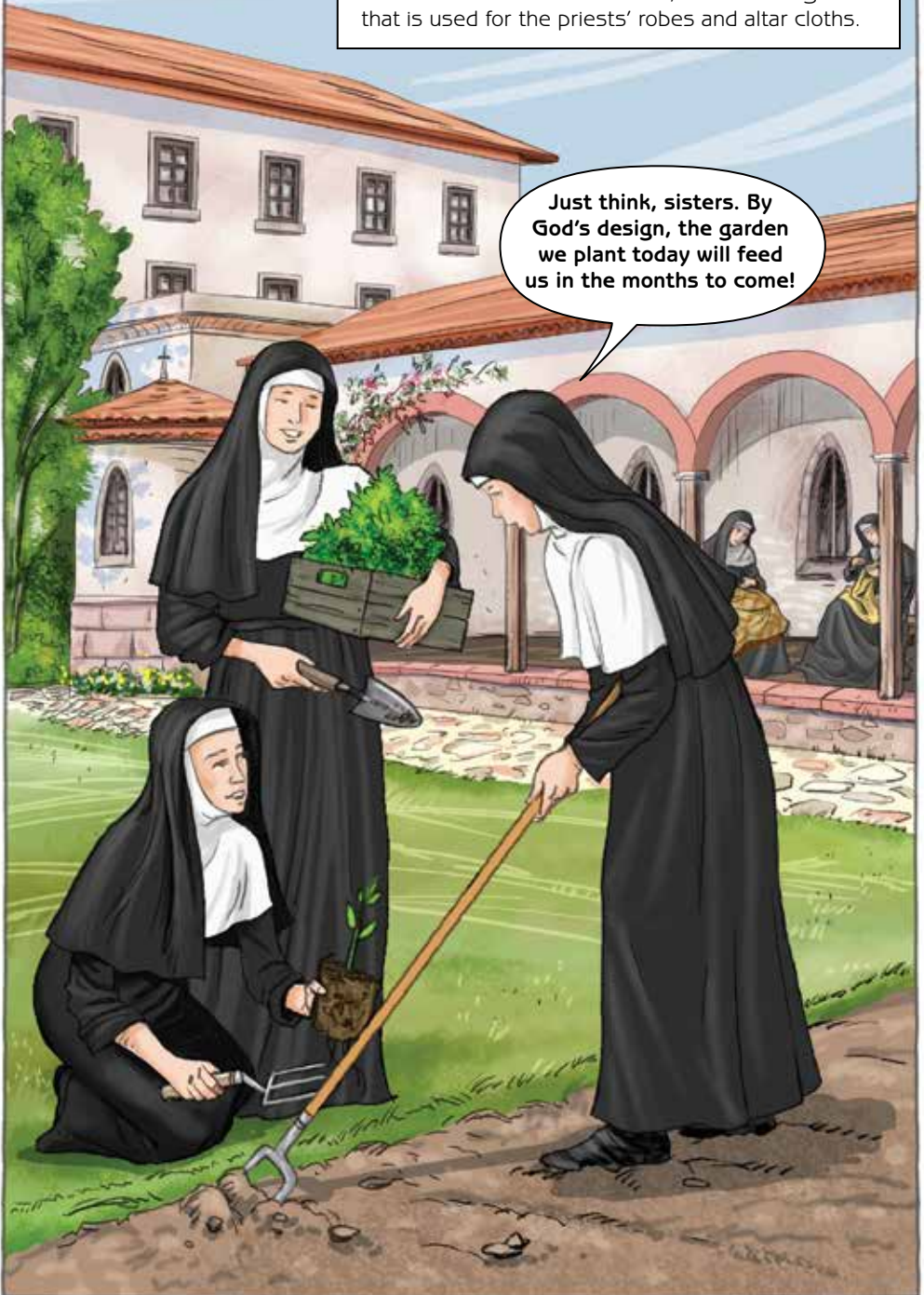
Welcome to our
nunnery, Katie. I'm
your Aunt Margaret.



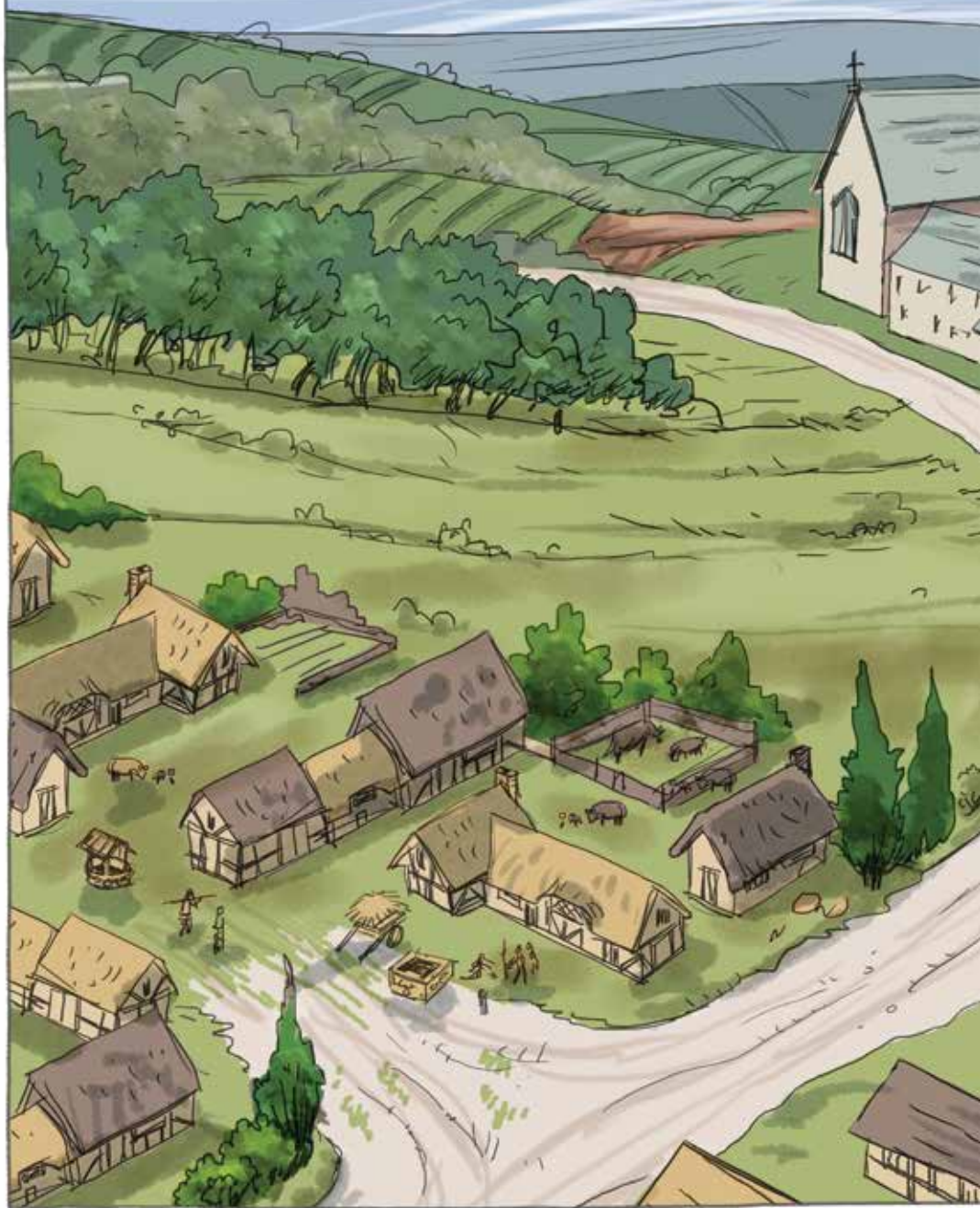


Life in the convent is spent praying, singing, and studying Latin. The sisters raise most of their own food, do all of the washing, and maintain the buildings. They produce wine, ale, and honey, and some even do fine needlework, embroidering cloth that is used for the priests' robes and altar cloths.

Just think, sisters. By God's design, the garden we plant today will feed us in the months to come!



The convent is situated amid a large estate where dozens of people live. The people work together, raising their own food and selling goods that provide income for the estate. The work Katie does at the convent helps prepare her for her future.





The Abbess

Women in the Middle Ages had little opportunity to have careers. A woman who came from a royal family or who married into a royal family would have wealth and status. But otherwise, the only way a woman could hold a position of power was to rise through the ranks in the convent. The position of abbess was an elected position. Other nuns in the convent would vote to choose who among them would have that opportunity of leadership and management.

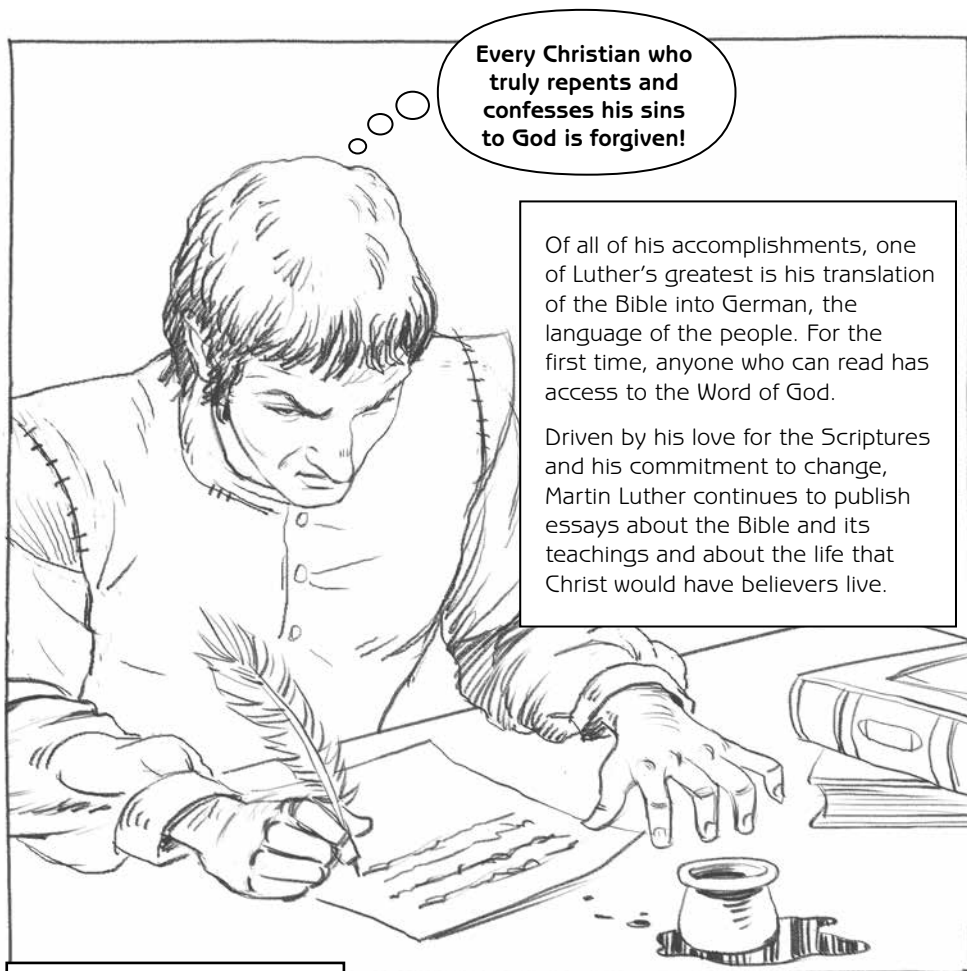


By the time Katharina von Bora has taken her vows to be a nun, Dr. Martin Luther has spent years teaching, preaching, and writing at the university in Wittenberg. His Ninety-Five Theses, which he had posted on the doors of the Castle Church on October 31, 1517, had shaken Germany and the church in Rome to their cores. And the mighty Reformation Movement had begun.

Where is Martin?

Although Dr. Luther has powerful supporters in Germany, the church leaders oppose his writings. In 1520, he goes before the pope's representatives to state his case. He loses the case, and is charged with heresy, which means speaking out against the teachings of the church. Luther is excommunicated from the Roman Catholic Church. To some, he is the enemy. But to many thousands, Luther is the one who will lead them from oppression to religious and political freedom.





Of all of his accomplishments, one of Luther's greatest is his translation of the Bible into German, the language of the people. For the first time, anyone who can read has access to the Word of God.

Driven by his love for the Scriptures and his commitment to change, Martin Luther continues to publish essays about the Bible and its teachings and about the life that Christ would have believers live.

Somehow, Katie and the other nuns at the nunnery in Nimbschen obtain some of Luther's writings.

I agree with what Dr. Luther says here.



Because the pope declared Luther an enemy of the church, having any of his books is risky. It is especially dangerous for those who serve in church work—such as priests and nuns—to read his books or to attend his church services.



Despite the dangers, Katie and several of the other nuns in her convent decide to leave the order. They write to their family members asking for assistance.

Katie writes to her brother Hans, but he declines her request. She realizes she is on her own.



Dear Katie,
I am sorry, but
I simply cannot
help you.



dangerous endeavor

Leaving a monastery or convent was a serious offense. Punishment was harsh and might even include execution!

Somehow, the plot by Katie and her sister nuns to escape is discovered—either someone turned them in or their letters were intercepted. They are severely punished for their betrayal. But their spirits are not broken.

Katie waits and hopes and prays for her release from the convent. Martin Luther's writings and preaching have begun a movement that cannot be suppressed.



Eventually, Aunt Magdalena relents and writes to Dr. Luther herself, asking him to help the nuns leave the order.

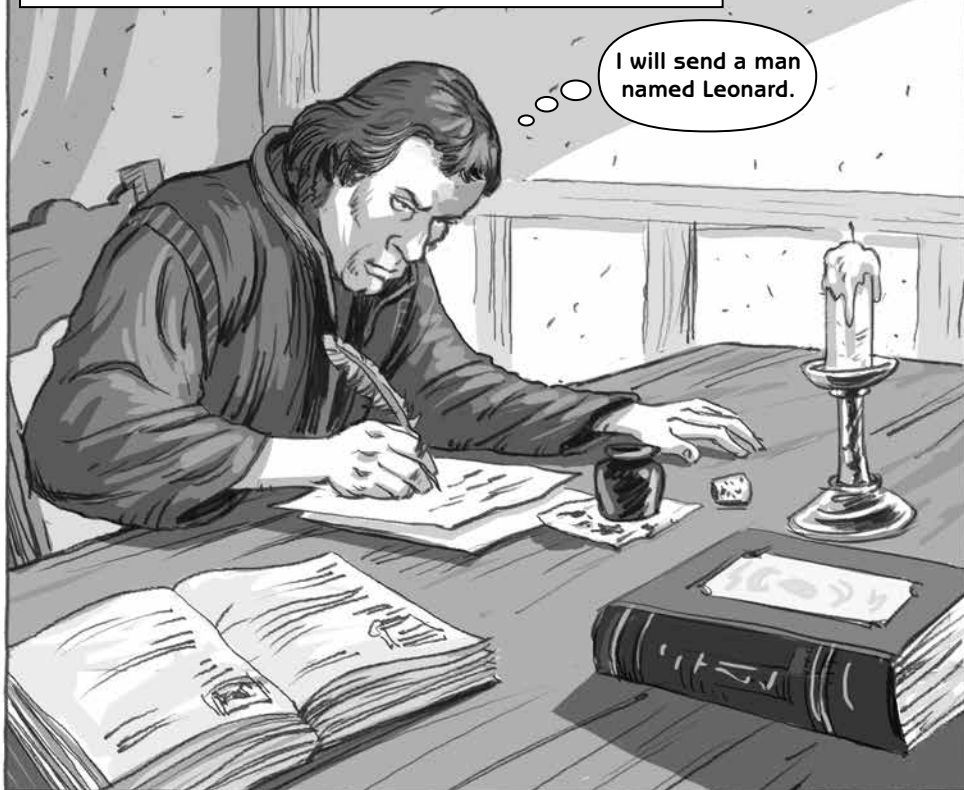


It is my Christian obligation to help these women.



Over the course of several weeks, after writing several letters back and forth, Luther and Magdalena devise a plan to help Katie and eleven other nuns escape from the convent.

I will send a man named Leonard.



Under cover of darkness on April 4, 1523, the night before Easter, Katie and the other nuns sneak out of their rooms and make their way to a door in the wall.



Outside the wall, Leonard Koppe, a merchant from Torgau, brings his wagon around, and ...



At a secret signal, the girls leave the convent, climb into the back of the wagon, cover themselves, and snuggle around the empty barrels. They had no belongings, no change of clothes, and no money.

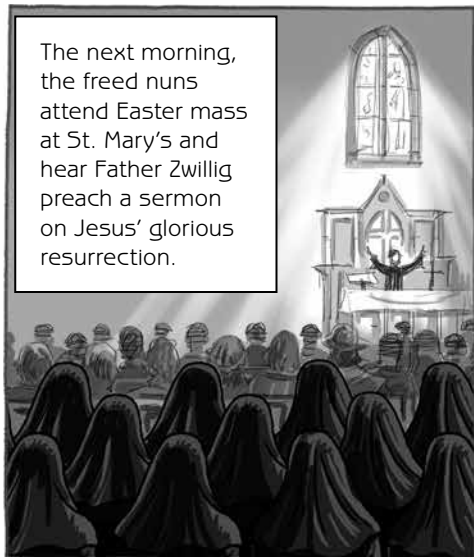
Protected by the dark of night, Koppe, his nephew, and a third man lead the fugitives away from the convent and on toward Torgau and freedom. The journey was difficult because the roads were rough and the night was cold, but ...

they were free.





The next morning, the freed nuns attend Easter mass at St. Mary's and hear Father Zwillig preach a sermon on Jesus' glorious resurrection.



Aided by sympathizers and generous townspeople, the nuns are given changes of clothing and food.

We don't know what will become of us, sisters, but at least we are free!

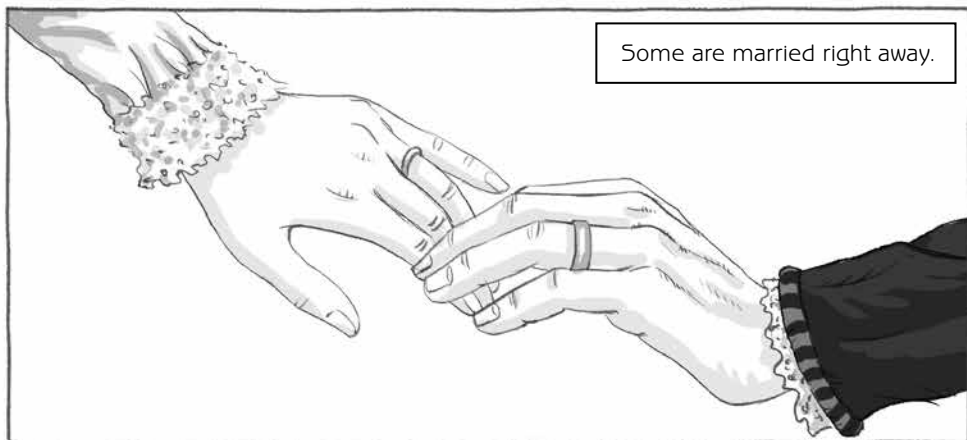


Two days after Easter, on Tuesday, the nuns are back on the road. This time to Wittenberg, where Dr. Luther has agreed to oversee their next move.

Some of the nuns return home to their families.



Some are married right away.



Some, like Katie, are employed by friends of Luther and others who support the Reformation. The former nuns help with housework and children.



As she settles into life in Wittenberg, Katie moves in with the Philipp Reichenbach family. Master Reichenbach is a lawyer and a university professor who goes on to become the mayor of Wittenberg in 1530. When Katie becomes a member of his household, beginning in the spring of 1523, she helps Mrs. Reichenbach run the house and care for the Reichenbach's young child. While living there, she meets Jerome Baumgartner, a wealthy young man from Nuremberg. Jerome and Katie soon begin a courtship, fall in love, and plan to marry.

