



A NOVEL
OF LOVE AND
REBELLION

LUTHER
AND KATHARINA

JODY HEDLUND

Praise for
Luther and Katharina

“Jody Hedlund’s *Luther and Katharina* is an absorbing and deeply researched look into the life and ministry of a figure in church history I’d previously known only from a few dusty facts. Jody breathes life into those facts with this fascinating and intimate portrayal of Martin Luther’s life. *Luther and Katharina* is a compelling tale of tested faith, tumultuous church history, and incredible courage against daunting odds—and one of the most unique love stories I’ve read in ages.”

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“My favorite Jody Hedlund novel to date! *Luther and Katharina* is a work of heart, showcasing a unique setting, a rich plot, and a shimmering romance drawn from two of history’s most beloved heroes of the faith, Martin Luther and his wife, Katharina von Bora. Well done!”

—LAURA FRANTZ, author of *The Mistress of Tall Acre*

“*Luther and Katharina* is a sweeping romance set against the turbulent background of the Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century. At times heartbreaking, at times breathtaking, readers will be swept away by both the love story and the historical details woven expertly through every chapter. Don’t miss this one!”

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“Complex and emotionally rich, *Luther and Katharina* gripped me from the very start and never let go. Not even when the final page was turned. The history, the love story, the depth of faith in this novel is masterfully woven by Jody Hedlund.”

—TAMERA ALEXANDER, *USA Today* best-selling author
of *To Win Her Favor* and *A Lasting Impression*

LUTHER
AND KATHARINA

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An Uncertain Choice

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AND LUTHER
KATHARINA

JODY MEDLUND



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*This book is for you, Dad.
As a Lutheran pastor you embodied Martin Luther in
so many ways: in personality, love of family, devotion
to the gospel, and passion for your flock.
You were well loved everywhere you served.
As you look down from heaven,
I hope you're proud of your little girl.*

MAIN CHARACTERS IN LUTHER AND KATHARINA



- Katharina von Bora**—a daughter of noble birth, but raised in convents from the age of five; also called Kate
- Martin (or Martinus) Luther**—once an Augustinian monk but excommunicated by the Catholic church; nailed his Ninety-Five Theses to the door of All Saints' Church in Wittenberg on October 31, 1517, sparking the Reformation; renowned minister and writer of the sixteenth century
- Abbess Margareta (Reverend Mother)**—at Marienthron, she disciplines Katharina for Baltazar; also Katharina's aunt
- Abbot Baltazar**—Abbot of Marienthron
- Amsdorf**—friend to Luther
- Aunt Lena/Aunt Magdalena (von Bora)**—remains at Marienthron after Katharina escapes; serves as a mother figure to Katharina
- Charles V**—historical figure, lived 1500–1558; emperor of the Holy Roman Empire 1519–1556
- Cranach family**—Lucas Cranach, one of the wealthiest men in Wittenberg, owns a printing shop and prints most of Luther's writings; a famous painter; his wife, Barbara, befriends Katharina
- Dr. Glatz of Orlamünde**—lives in Wittenberg; a rector
- Elector Frederick**—Luther's benefactor and protector, who has his home palace in Torgau; also known as Prince Frederick, or Frederick III, Elector of Saxony
- Greta**—maidservant to Katharina; escapes with her from the Marienthron convent; in love with Thomas

Hans Luther—father of Jacob and Martin; a smelter

Jacob Luther—Martin's younger brother

Jerome Baumgartner—friend of Elsa Reichenbach; comes to stay
and develops a relationship with Katharina von Bora

Johann von Staupitz—Augustinian vicar and a mentor to Luther

Justus Jonas—close friend of Luther's

Margaret von Schonfeld—a nun who escaped from the Marienthron
convent; a close friend to Katharina and is interested in Luther

Merchant Koppe—a supporter of Luther; helps the nuns escape

Pastor Johannes Bugenhagen—pastor of the Stadtkirche in Witten-
berg; a friend of Luther's

Philipp Melanchthon—friend of Luther's; father to little Anna

Reichenbach family—the family Katharina initially works for in
Wittenberg; Elsa is wife and mother; her husband is the mayor

Thomas—Merchant Koppe's servant; in love with Greta

Wolfgang—Luther's manservant at the Black Cloister

Zeschau sisters—Fronica and Etta; were tortured at Marienthron but
escaped with Katharina



ONE

Before dawn on Easter morning, 1523
Saxony, Germany

*T*ime to jump.

With trembling legs tangling in her scapular, Katharina crouched on the stone ledge of the window and peered down at the matted grass, still hard and untouched by spring. She blinked back a wave of dizziness and hoped the two-story drop wasn't as far as it looked.

The blackness of the barren cloister yard spread before her — the neatly trimmed hedges, the gardens, and the thick stone wall beyond. Nothing moved. No one was in sight . . . although anyone could be hidden in the thousands of shadows the April moonlight couldn't reach.

"Jump, my lady." Greta nudged her. Her tight wimple framed delicate features showing the strain of anxiety. "We've waited long enough."

"You must help lower me." Katharina clutched her maidservant's arm to steady herself. She took a last deep breath of the familiar mustiness of the abbey, then swung her feet over the edge.

"No," came Margaret's strained whisper behind her. It echoed against the bare walls of Katharina's cell, gripping her and threatening to immobilize her. "We mustn't leave without Sister Ruth."

"We've been back from the vigil too long." Greta spoke urgently. "We can't wait anymore."

In the scant moonlight Margaret's thin face was as pale as the plain white band wound around her forehead. Her narrow nose and pointed chin were pronounced and severe but belied by the kind worry in her eyes. "Something must have happened to Sister Ruth—"

"It doesn't matter," Greta said, nudging Katharina further to the edge.

Katharina glanced over her shoulder to the other sisters, some huddled against the wall shivering, others resting on her straw-filled pallet. She had the feeling they were shuddering more from fear than from the frosty air that had swept into the narrow, unheated cell.

If she delayed any longer, she'd put everyone at greater risk and possibly ruin their chance of leaving undetected.

"Just a few more minutes." Margaret's fingers quivered against Katharina's arm. The tall woman, who was like a sister to Katharina, had one fault — too much compassion.

Through the barred aperture on the cell door, Katharina glimpsed the outline of Aunt Lena's head. But there was no sign of anyone else and no sound — just the utter silence required both day and night. Katharina prayed that all the other Marienthron sisters were sleeping heavily, especially after staying up much later than usual celebrating the Vigil of Easter with the consecration of the Easter fire outside the church. It was the one occasion each year that changed the routine of their carefully prescribed worship hours, the one occasion when they were permitted to stay up late, the one occasion when escape might be possible.

Katharina's chest tightened with agony. She didn't want to abandon Sister Ruth, but they had run out of time. "I'm sorry, Margaret." She squeezed her friend's cold, bony fingers. "But Greta's right. We need to be far away by the summoning for Prime. We must leave now."

Katharina tugged up her habit and gripped the rough stone. Did she dare jump? Did she really think she could sneak all nine of them out of the abbey without getting caught?

She'd prepared for this moment for days, considered every detail, from the time they would leave to the exact route. She'd even spent days prying loose the lattice window in her cell so she could remove it soundlessly on the night of their escape.

In spite of such careful planning, something could still go wrong. Anything could happen between her window and the cloister wall. And if they made it over the outer wall, Abbot Baltazar would hunt them down like hares.

The skin on her back prickled at the memory of Abbot Baltazar's whip whistling through the air and slapping against the bare flesh of the Zeschau sisters. Only yesterday he'd beaten the young women because of a letter he'd discovered hidden in one of their pallets. Communication with the outside world was severely limited to help maintain their proper focus on God. But lately the abbot had restricted their visitation rights and missives even more. He was no fool. He knew the rumors about Martin Luther and his writings had begun to make their way into convents. And after intercepting the Zeschau sisters' letter, the abbot was well aware of just how much Luther's teachings had infiltrated Marienthron.

Of course, through the beating, the abbot had hoped to discover who had given the Zeschau sisters the letter and how. But the young women had remained silent, much to his frustration.

Katharina's stomach lurched. If a mere letter could incite him to violence, what punishment would he devise for their attempting to run away?

Fingers squeezed her shoulder tenderly. She pivoted on the ledge and found herself looking into the tear-filled eyes of Aunt Lena. The thick cell door stood open, and another one of the nuns stood guard.

"God will be with you, child," Aunt Lena whispered. Her black veil shadowed the tiredness and sadness that always seemed to etch her plump face.

"Come with us." Katharina knew her request would do little good. Aunt Lena had insisted that at age forty she was too old to leave the convent, get married, and start a new life. And now Katharina had run out of time to convince her otherwise. She stroked the woman's fleshy cheek, knowing if she escaped to freedom, she wouldn't see Aunt Lena again.

Aunt Lena cupped Katharina's chin and pointed her face toward the plain wooden cross, the single adornment allowed in the barren cell. "Don't forget to pray."

"I won't."

She pulled Katharina's head against her ample bosom and pressed a kiss to her temple. "I love you, Katharina von Bora."

Katharina's throat constricted with an ache that rose from her chest. When had she last heard anyone speak those words? Certainly not in all the years she'd lived at Marienthron, where stoicism was commanded and affection forbidden.

Aunt Lena stepped back, her features reflecting embarrassment at her bold words. Although none of the nuns were supposed to show favoritism, Katharina had always known that her aunt cared about her. But this was the first time she had spoken words of love.

Katharina wished she could express her feelings for the woman who had replaced her mother. But even if she found the words, they couldn't slip past the tightness in her throat.

Go. Aunt Lena motioned in the sign language they often used. *No more good-byes.*

Please. Come with us. Katharina signed back.

Aunt Lena shook her head and pointed at the window.

Katharina hesitated. As the nun on night watch, Aunt Lena would

be questioned about the escape. Eventually Abbot Baltazar would guess her aunt's involvement in aiding them and would discipline her. How would she survive his wrath, the beating he would surely give her?

Greta gripped Katharina's arms, her fingers digging through the layers of her habit to pinch her skin. "My lady, we're wasting time." Panic laced the servant's whisper.

Katharina nodded. The time for thinking was over.

She turned back to the window, and then with Greta's assistance she hoisted herself over the ledge so that she was hanging down the cloister wall, her cheek brushing against cold stone. Her soft leather shoes dangled just above the arched window of the first floor.

After Greta released her hold on Katharina's arms, she clung to the rocky edge for a moment, the jagged ledge scraping the tender skin of her fingers. With a whooshing breath she closed her eyes and let go.

In an instant she found herself slamming against the hard earth, the air forced out of her lungs. For a long moment in the darkness, she gasped for breath. At a thud and grunt next to her, she lifted her head to see Greta crouched beside her, struggling to catch her breath too.

"You should have waited for my assistance," she softly chided her servant as she pushed up from the ground. Pain jarred her legs and radiated to the rest of her body.

"Time is running out," Greta rasped, staggering to her feet. But the moment she straightened her petite frame, she clutched her stomach, bent over, and retched.

"What's wrong?" She touched the maidservant's arm. "Did you hurt yourself with the jump?"

Greta shrugged off her hand and spit into the grass but not before dribbling on herself. As a servant, her plain, colorless habit and wimple were not so finely woven as the habits worn by Katharina and the other nuns. But that was the only difference. They were all attired alike, their

shorn hair was tucked securely out of sight, and their womanly curves were well concealed. Every bit of flesh that could be hidden was.

Only Greta's pretty face distinguished her, except now it was twisted with pain. "I'm not hurt, my lady." But the moment the words were out, she bent over and retched again.

"Something ails you." Katharina cringed as her whisper echoed in the air around them. The first-floor windows of the common room in front of them were dark. Now that the nights were not so severely cold, she and the sisters had less need for the abbey's only heated room.

Nonetheless, Katharina rebuked herself to remain quiet and to communicate with signs as they'd planned, lest she alert one of the gatekeepers the abbot had charged with keeping the keys to the main gate. Even if she knew what ailed Greta, she could do nothing to help her servant now. She would have to tend Greta's need later, after they were secure.

Once again her gaze flitted to the shadows that cloaked the cloister yard. A cool breeze lifted the length of her veil. The air slithered underneath and sent chills up the back of her neck. The full moon that marked the coming of Easter hid behind a thin mist of clouds. They would be safer if it stayed there.

Greta wiped her mouth on her sleeve and turned to the window where several others stood, their white wimples gleaming too brightly against the dark building made of unevenly chiseled rocks cut from nearby hillsides. The rough stones lent an austerity that was appropriate for their Cistercian order, which affirmed poverty and banned all luxuries, including statues and colored-glass windows. Even their church was unadorned and indistinguishable from the other buildings in the complex.

Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee. Katharina lifted the silent prayer to the Virgin Mother, the Latin words as familiar as breathing. They would need a special measure of divine help if they were to reach the walls without detection.

With quiet urgency she and Greta assisted the others being lowered from the window. All the while Katharina watched the other dormers, waiting for a flicker of candlelight. Faces seemed to lurk in the diamond lattices of each one. But every time she looked closely, she saw nothing.

When everyone was finally down and clustered around her, she motioned them to follow her. With the soft tread she'd perfected over the years, she ducked along the path between the hedgerows and led the women under the brick archway in the wall that opened into the convent's three main gardens. They kept to the outer edge and passed the latrines positioned near the vegetable beds.

She stayed as far away from the Predigerhaus as they could get but continually scanned the narrow windows of the priests' house, waiting for a flicker of light to appear behind one of the leaded panes, the signal that the two monks who lived at the convent as confessing fathers had heard them. Abbot Baltazar was still visiting and was staying in the Predigerhaus too. Although he oversaw the Pforta monastery, where the two monks had come from, he was the spiritual supervisor over Marienthron and visited regularly.

Every nerve in Katharina's body stretched tight as she willed the windows to remain dark. If nothing else alerted the monks to their presence, the pounding of her heart would. It was loud enough to awaken the saints in the graveyard.

She reminded herself again, as she had a hundred times that day whenever fear or doubt had assailed her, that she had no choice but to escape from her empty life. Of late, the desire for marriage and a family had grown so strong she was sure God Himself had put the longing there. Even stronger was the desire to know the truth about her purpose in life. She'd always been told that becoming a nun was the surest way to get to heaven. But Luther's writings that had been smuggled in spoke of faithful women, even the Virgin Mary, who had served God outside

of convent walls. Luther claimed that cloistered life wasn't necessary for their souls' salvation. His words had resonated deeply within her, unearthing long-buried questions she'd never dared to ask before. Like some of her sisters of the cloth, she'd begun to ask those questions, unable to deny them any longer.

The chill in the air nipped her cheeks and nose, and the dew on the grass seeped into her shoes, stiffening her toes. Behind her the sisters moved as silently as angels. These sisters who had been her closest companions felt the same desires and pondered the same questions. They too were willing to risk everything to get what they had been denied.

She could not fail them.

When they reached the physic garden, Katharina allowed herself a breath of relief. They crept behind the low hazel fences that supported the raised herb beds, each woman slinking through the maze, following Katharina's steps. She knew the garden better than anyone. Every new bud carried her touch; every tender plant of cumin and fennel and comfrey and dozens of other herbs had seen her hand.

A sweet waft of blossoming cowslip lingered in the air as if it had come to say good-bye. Who would tend her herbs once she was gone? No one would be able to take care of them the way she had.

She wanted to linger, but she slipped by silently, past the well, until they finally reached the safety of the orchard with its canopy of apple and pear trees. Once they were concealed among the tangled branches with their tiny buds to shield them, Katharina stopped and held up a hand.

She stayed motionless like the others and hardly dared to breathe, straining to hear any indication they'd been noticed. Next to her, Margaret shifted and cracked a twig underfoot. Her cold fingers found Katharina's, and Margaret squeezed them as if to say, "Almost there."

Only the grove stood between them and the outer convent wall.

The guard at the rear gate would be breaking his fast with the beer

that Merchant Koppe had given him. She hoped he'd be too busy imbibing to hear them. But they would need to be wary of the extra watchmen the abbot had appointed from among the laborers who lived and worked at the convent. Although the abbot had tried to keep their Marienthron community ignorant, they had heard whispered rumors and bits of smuggled news about other monks and nuns who'd left their convents, giving them hope they could do the same. Katharina had no doubt the abbot had increased his vigilance at both his monastery and the abbey, especially now that he'd discovered the Zeschau sisters' letter.

"This way," Katharina whispered, giving Margaret's fingers a return squeeze before letting go to sweep aside a low twig. She led them deeper into the orchard, winding through the trees, thankful most of the winter's windfall had been raked away, leaving only moist earth and moss and the scent of damp soil. She ducked under limbs and dodged low branches until they reached the thick stone wall that surrounded the cloister.

She peered up at the patchwork of stones, despairing that the wall rose higher than she remembered. A distant bark of a hound echoed in the eerily silent morning. And she crossed her arms to ward off a shiver.

Greta edged past her and pushed aside a tangle of currant vines and brush to reveal a small mound of earth. "Here," she whispered. "We climb the wall here, my lady." Greta had managed over the past week to form a hill with brush and dirt. If they worked together, they could scale the wall aided by the small mound. Greta motioned she would go over first and assist with the descent on the other side.

Standing on the mound, Katharina linked hands with Sister Margaret, and they formed a step and hoisted everyone up, first Greta and then the others. She tried not to think about the dangers that awaited them on the other side — wild boars and foxes, thieves, and unfamiliar terrain. Instead she reminded herself of the future — the real lives

they would be able to lead, the noble men they would marry, the children they would bear, and the families they would finally have after so many years without.

When they finished helping everyone else, Katharina signed to Margaret. *Your turn.*

Margaret shook her head and stared into the orchard, her eyes widening to the size of Gulden coins.

Katharina followed her friend's gaze, and at the rustling and crackling of branches, her body tensed. *Holy Mary, Mother of God . . .* Someone was after them. With a burst of panic, she yanked Margaret toward the mound. "Quickly. I shall boost you over. Then you must lead the others north along the river."

Margaret's thin face pinched with worry, and she clutched Katharina's arms. "I can't leave you."

Katharina steered her toward the wall. "You must."

"We won't make it without you."

"I shall stall them and give you time."

"Wait," came a low, urgent call behind them. "It is I, Sister Ruth."

Through the tangle of branches and budding leaves came the stooped figure of a broad-girthed nun. She moved clumsily and was dragging something with her.

It was indeed Sister Ruth, the one she'd thought they must leave behind for want of time. Katharina barely had a second of relief before she recognized the burden Sister Ruth brought with her. The Zeschau sisters clung to the nun in their effort to walk, their faces ashen, their bodies trembling.

The two girls were young, hardly more than novices, having taken their vows of obedience, poverty, and chastity just the previous Lenten season. How much had changed in a year so that they were now forsaking those vows.

Katharina reached for Fronika and Margaret for Etta. Sister Ruth,

although as strong and wide as any peasant farmer's wife, relinquished her hold on them and staggered backward, her knees buckling. Katharina slipped her arm around Fronika to hold her up, and her fingers felt the stickiness of blood oozing through the girl's habit. She reeked of the mold in the cloister prison and the sourness of urine. Her glazed eyes met Katharina's, reflecting pain and confusion, just as they had when Abbot Baltazar had forced her to kneel in the courtyard, then had bared her back and lashed her mercilessly.

Katharina swallowed her frustration at feeling helpless, just as she had when she'd been required to watch the beating. She could do nothing to assist the Zeschau sisters then. And she could do nothing now, although everything within her demanded that she do so.

"Once we are free," she murmured against Fronika's ear, "I shall take good care of you. I promise."

Under the weight of the girl, Katharina stumbled toward the wall. "How did you get them out without being seen?" she whispered to Sister Ruth.

"I don't know," the woman said, her chest heaving.

Dread pricked Katharina. She suspected Sister Ruth had not used enough caution during her trek through the cloister grounds.

"I couldn't leave without them," the older sister said, as if reading Katharina's thoughts. She sagged against the wall and mopped her brow beneath her damp forehead band.

"Everything will be all right," Margaret whispered, tenderly kissing Etta's bent head. "If we have compassion on others, surely God will have compassion on us."

Katharina couldn't answer. Even if the abbot didn't know, they all were aware of who had been smuggling the Zeschau sisters the forbidden writings of Martin Luther: Prior Zeschau, their uncle who resided in the Augustinian monastery in nearby Grimma. Most of the time during his visits, he'd only been allowed to speak with his nieces

through a lattice window that was too finely meshed to permit the passage of any documents. But on several occasions he'd brought them gifts and had slipped the manuscripts and notes inside.

Of course, the Zeschau sisters had then secretly passed the documents along to others. If not for the two young women, none of them would have dared to dream about leaving the only way of life they'd ever known. But how could they expect their escape to succeed with Fronika and Etta slowing them down?

Greta's hoarse whispers from the other side of the wall urged Katharina to action. Whether or not they reached safety, Katharina couldn't abandon these sisters. For better or worse, she would help them. And if the two couldn't keep up, then she would stay behind with them and send Margaret ahead with the others.

Katharina was the last one over the thick stone wall. When her feet touched the opposite side, relief surged through her. She fell to her knees and signed the cross. *Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit.* She bent her head into the long grass until her lips connected with solid earth. The freshness of the recently thawed soil filled her senses with promises.

Her father had taken her away from her home when she'd been only five. For the first time in nineteen years, she was outside cloister walls. She took a deep breath of freedom, but along with the breath came a tremor of fear. An unknown world spread before her with its way of life so foreign to all that she knew.

Greta tapped her shoulder and with a jerk of her arm motioned for her to hurry. Her fair, unblemished face flashed with worry as she peered at the severe stone wall, the only thing that separated them from recapture. "Someone's awake," she whispered.

Katharina stood and listened intently. In the distance, from inside the convent, came an urgent shout. Her heart slammed against her ribs, and Greta's gaze met hers with a gravity that confirmed her worst fears.

Their escape wasn't a secret any longer. Abbot Baltazar would gather a search party. They would have horses. And they would scour the countryside for them.

How far could she and the others get before they were caught?



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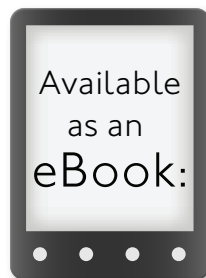
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