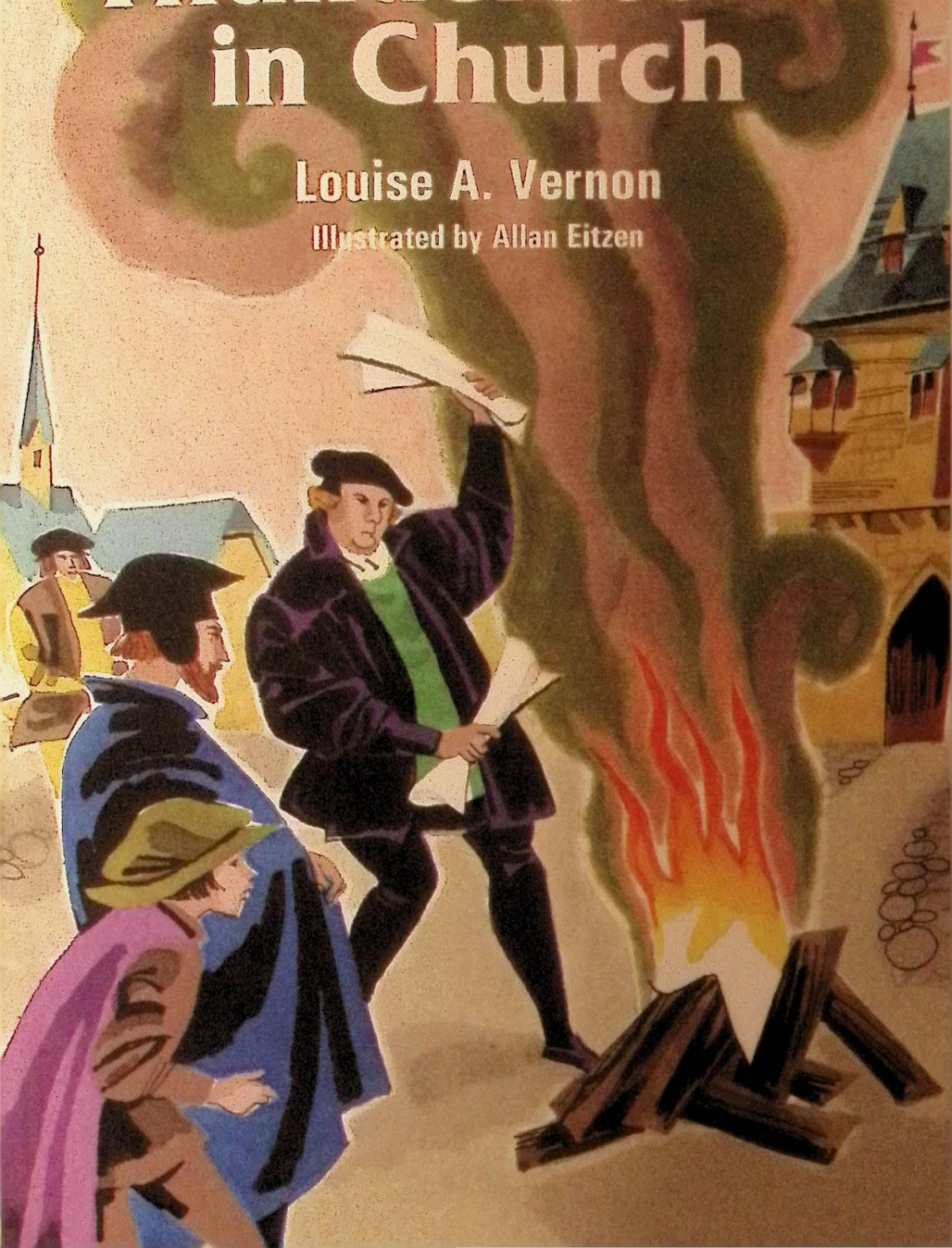


Thunderstorm in Church

Louise A. Vernon

Illustrated by Allan Eitzen



Thunderstorm in Church

Books by Louise A. Vernon

<i>Title</i>	<i>Subject</i>
<i>The Beggars' Bible</i>	John Wycliffe
<i>The Bible Smuggler</i>	William Tyndale
<i>Doctor in Rags</i>	Paracelsus and Hutterites
<i>A Heart Strangely Warmed</i>	John Wesley
<i>Ink on His Fingers</i>	Johann Gutenberg
<i>Key to the Prison</i>	George Fox and Quakers
<i>The King's Book</i>	King James Version, Bible
<i>The Man Who Laid the Egg</i>	Erasmus
<i>Night Preacher</i>	Menno Simons
<i>Peter and the Pilgrims</i>	English Separatists, Pilgrims
<i>The Secret Church</i>	Anabaptists
<i>Thunderstorm in Church</i>	Martin Luther

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Herald Press

Harrisonburg, Virginia
Kitchener, Ontario

I extend appreciative thanks to Professor Muriel B. Ingham, of California State University, San Diego, who acted as interpreter on our visit to Wittenberg, Eisenach, Wartburg Castle, and Eisleben, enabling me to use many details about Martin Luther's life that would not have been available otherwise.

I am grateful to her and to Helen Farr, teacher of German at California State University, San Diego, for translating Ernst Kroker's book, *Katharina von Bora*, specifically for my use.

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MARTIN LUTHER AT HOME

THIRTY men, women, and children waited in the large dining hall of the Black Cloister in Wittenberg, Germany, for the ten o'clock breakfast, the first of two daily meals. University students, houseguests, cousins, and the Luther children with their beloved Aunt Lena had watched Frau Luther and the hired help put platters of food on the table. Everyone was hungry.

"Where is Dr. Luther?" a student asked in a plaintive voice.

"In his tower room," someone answered.

"Frau Luther, has your husband forgotten to eat?" another groaned.

Laughter rippled through the group.

Frau Luther laughed, too, then sighed. "I'll send one of the children after him. Hans, you go this time."

At the stairway, Hans felt a pat on his shoulder. A visiting preacher beamed at him.

“If you grow up to be as famous as your father, someone will have to remind you to eat,” the preacher said.

Hans flinched. Intended as a joke, the words hurt a secret, precious place inside himself — his sense of self-worth. It was bad enough to be teased by his older cousins living at the Black Cloister, but to have outsiders begin to kid him about his father really hurt.

As he climbed the steep, winding stairway to the fourth floor, Hans felt himself growing smaller and smaller somewhere inside. How could anyone be as famous as Martin Luther, his father? Father was the man who said that only God forgave sins, not the church. He had been called a heretic, threatened with death, and excommunicated. But Father kept on preaching and writing that the church had no right to take people’s money in exchange for telling them their sins were forgiven.

Because of Father, thousands of people in Germany and other countries worshiped God with joy instead of fear. Hundreds wrote to Father and thanked him for helping them understand God’s Word. Dozens came to the Black Cloister to discuss how to run the new church that had sprung up from Father’s writings and preaching.

“Everybody asks me for advice,” Father sometimes complained, “but I don’t know whether they really want to learn from me or if they are spying on me.”

The visitors called the new church *Lutheran*.

“Don’t use my name for the church. I’m a bad Lutheran.” Father laughed. “What is Luther? What have I done, poor stinking sack of worms that I am,

that Christ's children should be called by my unholy name? The teaching is not mine. Let's call ourselves Christians, after Jesus whose teachings we follow."

But his protests were useless. People kept on calling the new church by Father's name. The membership grew larger every day, and many of the men who felt called to preach the Word visited the Black Cloister to talk to Martin Luther.

Father is a famous man, Hans thought, *and I'm just a nobody*. Of course, he was only a boy, but that thought did not help. People expected him to be someone special. But what was he supposed to be?

Filled with these thoughts, Hans stood outside the closed door of his father's study, afraid to knock. Was Father reading, writing, praying — or was he sick again with one of his headaches, stomachaches, or dizzy spells?

Hans heard someone coming up the stairs. Lenchen, his younger sister, appeared twirling a fresh rose. Behind her, Töpel, Father's beloved dog, scampered across the bare, wooden floor, his toenails making sharp clicks at each step. Töpel nosed his way between Hans and Lenchen, sat down, and thumped his tail expectantly.

"Did Father answer?" Lenchen asked.

"I haven't knocked yet."

"Well, hurry up. It's almost ten o'clock, and everybody is waiting."

Everybody included Mother, Aunt Lena, the three smaller Luther children — Martin, Paul, and baby Margarete, together with the eleven older cousins living with the Luther family, the university students boarding at the Black Cloister, the hired

help, and the usual houseguests, who changed from time to time.

"I don't think Father wants to be disturbed." Hans was not ready yet to confide in his sister about his feeling of worthlessness. "Maybe he wants to fast today, like the time he locked that door and didn't have anything to eat or drink for three days."

Lenchen stopped twirling her rose. Her eyes widened. "What did Mother do?"

Hans laughed, remembering. "She hired a workman to remove the door."

"And then what?"

"All Father said was, 'What harm am I doing?' So maybe we'd better not disturb him."

"We have to," Lenchen exclaimed. "We can't eat until he leads us in our prayers."

"Maybe he has one of his headaches —" Hans began, but a glance from Lenchen stopped him. He made a fist ready to pound the thick oak door. Then he dropped his arm. "I — I can't," he said in a hoarse whisper.

"Why, Hans Luther, I do believe you're *afraid*." Lenchen's eyes widened again, this time with scorn. "Who could be afraid of Father?"

Lots of people, Hans wanted to say. Kings and princes and even the pope in Rome. Bishops and priests. Medical doctors. Church doctors, like Father himself. Lawyers. City councils. Yes, lots of people were afraid of Father. *Including me*, Hans admitted to himself.

His two brothers, Martin, Jr., and Paul, were too little to know the strange fear of being sons of a famous father. And of course baby Margarete didn't

have to worry about such problems, nor Lenchen, either. Girls had nothing to worry about, anyway. All they had to do was learn how to keep house. They didn't have to worry about making a name for themselves.

But it was strange to be afraid of Father. *Then why am I afraid?* Hans asked himself. Didn't Father laugh, sing, and play with his children every night before they went to bed? Didn't he joke and make up little poems to amuse them? Didn't he tell exciting stories from Aesop about cunning foxes and mean wolves? Yes, but Father was also the most famous man in Europe. *Does everyone expect me to become famous too?* Hans wondered. It was a question he knew he'd be living with for a long time.

Still, he wouldn't want to be a girl. His teenage girl cousins giggled all the time and chattered a lot about getting married. Boys had more adventures. Hans and his friends, Lippus Melanchthon and Jost Jonas, sons of Father's good friends, could explore the town wall, go to the market square, walk along the Elbe River, play in the barn, or examine the fruit trees in Mother's orchard.

Lenchen shook his arm. "Hans, quit daydreaming. Go tell Mother and Aunt Lena we're coming. I'll call Father myself." Over her shoulder she hissed, "Coward," and tickled Töpel's nose with the rose.

The word *coward* seared Hans like the hot, three-legged iron kettle base in the kitchen fireplace he'd once touched on a dare from one of his older cousins. But he pretended he hadn't heard Lenchen and lingered at the door.

Lenchen knocked.

Hans heard Father's muffled voice. "Come in."

Hans regained his courage. He reached for the handle and opened the door.

"Father, it's time to eat," he announced.

Standing in the doorway, Hans suddenly saw Father as others saw him: the broad shoulders, the plump face with a deep dimple in the chin, the brown hair and deep-set, piercing brown eyes. Behind Father the table, windowsill, chair, and stool were covered as usual with lecture notes, letters, books, petitions, and galley proofs. Every day that Father wasn't sick or on a journey, he answered letters, prepared lectures and sermons, or checked galleys.

"Time to eat?" Father echoed. "What a bother. I have so much work to do I don't feel like eating. Tell the Morning Star of Wittenberg to go ahead without me."

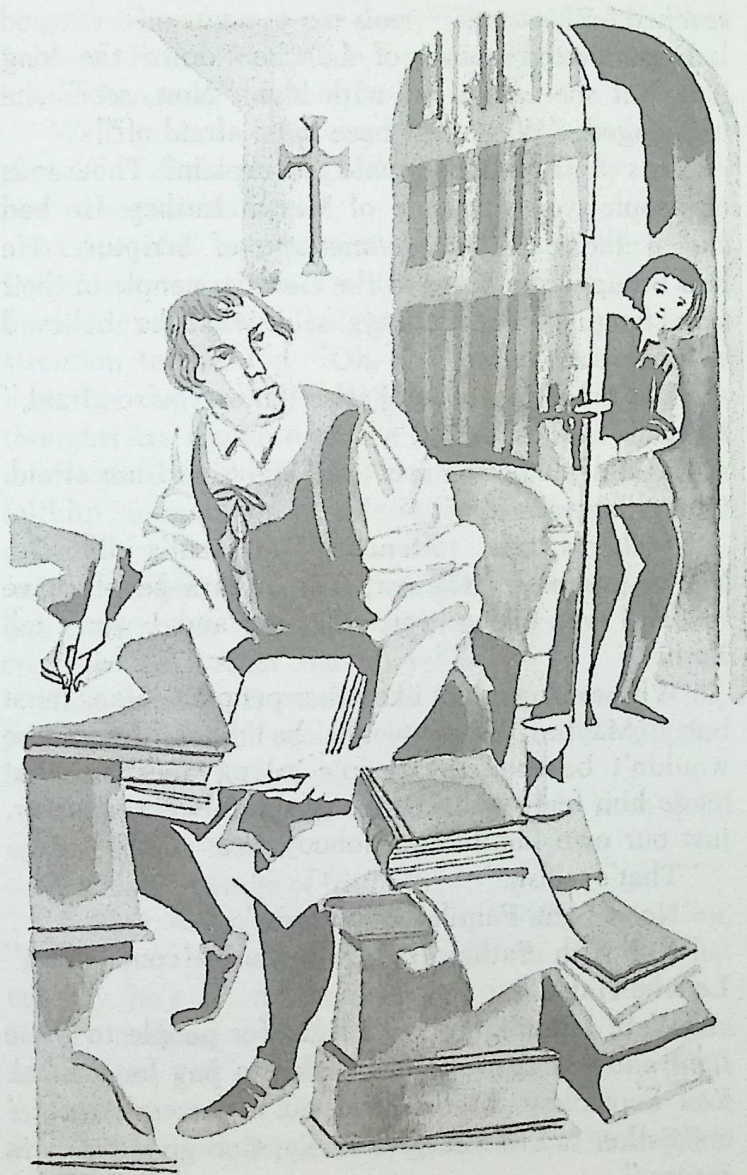
Father had many pet names for Mother. Sometimes he called her *Herr Kathe*, as if she were a man. Sometimes he called her his rib, and then he and Mother would laugh.

"But Father, we're your *family*," Lenchen reminded him, crowding in ahead of Hans. She held out the rose. "I picked it for you just this morning."

Father was delighted. He loved flowers. "A glorious work of art by God Himself," he exclaimed. "If a man had the capacity to make just one rose he would be given an empire. But," he added as if to himself, "the countless gifts of God are esteemed as nothing because they're always present."

"We're present, too, Father."

Tölpel wriggled past Lenchen and jumped up on



Hans suddenly saw Father as others saw him.

Father. He laughed, patted Töpel's head, and reached for his coat.

Hans darted ahead of Lenchen down the long hall, but she caught up with him. "Now, see?" she challenged. "What was there to be afraid of?"

Hans winced. How could he explain? Thousands of people weren't afraid of Martin Luther. He had shown them the joyous message of Scripture. He had brought the Bible to the German people in their own language. He always said what he believed without fear.

"You'd better not let Father know you're afraid," Lenchen murmured.

Hans clenched his fists. "All right, so I am afraid. Quit talking about it."

Lenchen's face softened. "Oh, that's different. You've confessed, the way Father says people have to do. I won't tease you anymore, and I won't tell Father."

"Why can't we live like other people?" Hans burst out. "Maybe things would be different." There wouldn't be so many people asking questions that made him feel small. "If we could only eat together, just our own family and nobody else."

"That's selfish."

"No, it's not. Families come first."

"Not with Father. He says charity comes first," Lenchen said.

"Well, I don't think it's right for people to come here and eat and not even offer to pay for a meal. You know how Mother tries to make ends meet."

"Father says if you give freely, God gives freely in return."

"I suppose that's why Mother always feeds the beggars who come to our door," Hans reflected, "but I heard Father say some beggars are more proud inside than some rich men he knows."

"Well, just so our dog Töpel doesn't become proud." Lenchen laughed. "He certainly knows how to beg for his food."

At breakfast everyone ate with hearty appetites. Töpel sat near Father with open mouth and motionless eyes. Father laughed and called everyone's attention to the dog. "Oh, if I could only pray the way this dog watches for a scrap of food. All his thoughts are centered on the next bite." He dropped a bit of food into Töpel's mouth. "The dog is a faithful animal. No wonder they are held in high esteem."

In good humor, Father changed the subject. "Did you ever notice that girls begin to talk and to stand on their feet sooner than boys?"

Hans winced. It seemed as if every remark lately jabbed at his self-worth. His girl cousins giggled across the table at him.

"But weeds always grow more quickly than good crops," Father teased.

Hans felt a twinge of triumph.

"I don't worry about the boys," Father went on, "because a boy supports himself, no matter what country he's in, as long as he's willing to work." Father nodded toward Hans' boy cousins and then toward the girl cousins. "But the poor girls — that's a different story. They must have a staff to lean on." With mock seriousness he recited a little poem from memory:

*"A red apple may look good and inviting,
And yet worminess hide.
So a girl with the worst disposition
May be pretty outside."*

The girls giggled.

"Oh, Father, stop teasing us," Lenchen exclaimed.

The meal continued with much laughter and talking. After breakfast Father took tiny Margarete in his arms and nuzzled her until she crowed with delight. When she needed her diaper changed, Mother took her out.

"Our Lord God has to put up with many a murmur and stink from us," Father mused, "worse than a mother must endure from her child. But just as a mother's love is stronger than the filth on a child, so the love of God toward us is stronger than the dirt of sin that clings to us."

While Mother was in another room with Margarete, a visitor at the Black Cloister looked slyly at Father. "Dr. Luther," he said, "I have heard that you rely on your wife more than on Christ."

At first Father frowned, then he burst into laughter. "In family affairs, I defer to Kathe. Otherwise, I am led by the Holy Spirit." He added with a chuckle, "If I should ever marry again, I would hew myself an obedient wife out of stone; otherwise, in desperation I obey all women."

The students still lingered at the table, as always encouraging Father to talk. One of them asked what the Luther boys would do when they grew up. Hans ducked down. Why was so much being said about growing up?

"I intend to send my children away when they're grown," Father replied. "Any of them who wants to be a soldier, I'll send to Hans Loeser. Dr. Jonas and Philip will have any of them who want to study, and if one wants to work with his hands, I'll turn him over to a peasant."

"What about the law as a profession?" another student asked.

"Law?" Father spat out the word. "If I had a hundred sons I wouldn't let one of them become a lawyer. No lawyer honors God. They're only interested in themselves."

Father was working himself into one of his rages. He glared at Hans, Martin, and Paul. "If any of you became a lawyer, I'd hang you on the gallows," he thundered.

Mother tried to soothe him. "Now, Doctor," she began.

"A good strong burst of anger refreshes the system," Father interrupted.

"Do be careful," Mother went on. "You may bring on one of your headaches, and then we'll have to send for a doctor."

Father didn't like medical doctors any more than he liked lawyers.

"Aren't you a doctor?" little Martin asked.

"Yes."

"Can't you put bandages on yourself where you hurt?"

"I'm a church doctor," Father explained. "A medical doctor heals the body and a church doctor heals the spirit." He smiled at little Martin. "You must be a preacher when you grow up and baptize, preach,

administer the sacrament, visit the sick, and comfort the sorrowful."

Calm once again, Father prayed with the household before going to his study. "Dear heavenly Father, You have given me the honor of being a father. Now grant me Your mercy and bless me that I rule and nourish my dear wife, children, and household in a godly and Christian manner. Give me the wisdom and strength to bring them up well. Give them also the heart and desire to follow Your teaching and to be obedient. Amen."

After Father left the room, the visiting preacher who had talked to Hans before took him aside. "Does your father get upset very often?"

Hans thought a moment, then nodded. Father frequently *did* get upset.

"Strange," the visiting preacher murmured. "Why would God use a man with such a quick temper?"

"But he laughs a lot, too," Hans said in defense of Father. His own problem of being a nobody dissolved in a strong feeling of family loyalty. Besides, Father prayed every day for guidance.

"Father knows he has a temper and he prays about it. God guides him. He guides us all."

And Hans knew that was true.

TROUBLE AT THE MARKET SQUARE

IN THE afternoon Mother decided to show Lenchen how to market. Little Martin clamored to go along.

"Hans, you come, too," Mother said.

Hans was glad to leave his Latin lesson and Jerome Weller, his quiet, moody tutor. He followed Mother, Lenchen, and little Martin out the door. As they walked along Hans began to feel uneasy. It wasn't just the overcast sky. An unpleasant incident had happened the last time he and his two friends, Lippus and Jost, had visited the market square.

Three peasant boys had thrown rotten cabbage heads at Hans and his friends. Not only that, the peasant boys threatened to toss all three town boys into the stinking, open ditch that ran the length of the street. The ditch carried garbage and raw sewage. How awful to be pushed into it. Hans shuddered, remembering. How Aunt Lena would scold! And with reason. It would take many washings

to remove the stench of rotting garbage — and worse — from their clothes.

As if in answer to his thoughts, Hans spied the same three boys, about his own age, standing behind a cheese stall. When they saw him, they stuck their tongues out at him. Thank goodness Mother hadn't noticed. She was busy teaching Lenchen how to shop. Little Martin tugged at his mother's skirt. Mother bent down and gently pushed Martin toward Hans. "Please take care of your brother. I'm too busy with Lenchen to watch him."

Hans sensed trouble coming. What if a fight developed with the peasant boys? Still, they probably wouldn't throw him in the ditch with Martin there. Grown-ups could always be counted on to come to the aid of small children.

"Stay right here," Hans whispered to his brother. But Martin, bouncing in excitement at his first trip to market, swung out of Hans' grasp and darted toward a stall where live geese waddled and honked.

"Let's buy a goose," Martin called. "Father likes them."

Whenever Father saw the geese in the courtyard of the Black Cloister, he was sure to say something about swans. He had a stone swan in his study. "If you burn a goose, from its ashes rises a swan," Father would tell visitors. They would explain to each other, "Oh, he means something greater arises from ashes. He's referring to the great Bohemian martyr, John Huss, who was burned at the stake for his religious beliefs. *Hus* means goose, you know."

Little Martin squatted down and talked to the geese. Hans eyed the three peasant boys wriggling

through the crowd and coming closer. He and his friends had avoided a fight the last time, but Hans expected a showdown someday soon. Not today, he hoped. Not without Lippus and Jost. Hans was sure the three of them together could lick their weight in peasants.

Hans did not dare turn his back or edge away, and he certainly would not dare get into a fight. Not with Mother here. If Aunt Lena had come, it would be different. She knew how to overlook certain things boys felt they had to do.

Such thoughts were of no help now. Hans saw the peasant boys slip with seeming innocence past townspeople bargaining at the various stalls.

There was one hope. The overcast sky promised one of the frequent sudden showers Wittenberg was accustomed to. When thunder and lightning came with these quick storms, peasants believed the devil was loose, and they would hide until the storm let up.

An ear-piercing shriek rose above the chatter of buyers and sellers. A peasant woman with arms upraised ran up to Mother and shook her fist in Mother's face.

"I know who you are, Katharina von Bora, you sinful, fallen woman. Go home to your den of iniquity. You don't belong with decent people."

Mother moved away, but the peasant blocked her path. Townspeople, gasping and muttering among themselves, formed a semicircle around the two women. Shocked, Hans watched. What would Father say when he learned about this incident?

"Aristocrat or not, you had no right to marry,"

the peasant woman stormed. "You broke your vows. You are Christ's bride, not man's."

Mother, whose tongue was usually as nimble as her fingers, clasped one hand over the other and in total silence let the woman rage on. At last the peasant woman allowed her friends to lead her away, still shouting and waving her fists.

The townspeople backed off in little groups, talking and nodding toward the Luthers.

Little Martin looked up at Hans. "Why are people pointing to us?"

"Because they know we're Martin Luther's family."

"Don't they like us?"

"Not everyone."

"Why not?"

"Because of what Father did about the church. Stop asking questions and come on." He guided Martin out of earshot of the gossiping people. He wished the summer storm would hurry up and soak everybody. To these people Father had been like a storm. A thunderstorm in church.

The people at the stalls went back to work, calling out their wares in singsong voices. Behind Hans, two women started talking. The three peasant boys had disappeared. "So that's Frau Luther," a woman exclaimed. "I do believe she's buying cheese."

"You seem surprised," the other woman laughed.

"Is she too lazy to make her own cheese? She has cows enough at the Black Cloister, I understand."

"Oh, she's not lazy. No one can ever accuse her of that, I must say in all fairness. So many people live at the Black Cloister she has a time feeding them all."

"Surely the five Luther children don't eat that much," the other woman sniffed.

"Five children! There are sixteen."

"But that isn't possible."

"Well, eleven of them are relatives. Most of them are Dr. Luther's nephews and nieces. Then, of course, students and visitors stay there, too."

A third woman joined the other two. "You're talking about Frau Luther, aren't you? They say she runs a house, a hotel, and a hospital there at the Black Cloister."

A man leaning on a cane had been listening. He, too, had something to say. "An odd assortment of young people, students, young girls, widows, old women, and children live in the doctor's home. Things never really settle down there, and many pity Luther because of it."

Another man spoke up. "Yes, you do well to pity Dr. Luther. Imagine being a bachelor for forty-two years and then marrying! Now he has all those people to feed. He's ill so much himself he should have been a medical doctor instead of a church doctor."

"You have to admit he has courage, though," a woman said. "He didn't leave Wittenberg during the plague nine years ago — said his Bible protected him."

"That may be," the man with the cane retorted, "but I hear that some of his followers want to become Catholics again. Dr. Luther won't even let them buy their relatives out of purgatory. He and his Reformation. To think that he's living in that monastery and he's not even a Catholic."

"But Elector John Frederick gave it to him, you know, and the city lets him have his water free."

"He's no better than a thief, if you ask me," the man snapped.

"Be careful what you say. There are people here in Wittenberg who will fight if you say one word against Dr. Luther."

Someone called Mother's name. Hans clenched his fists. Was the name-calling going to start all over again?

"Frau Luther!" Mother's new maidservant from nearby Coswig hurried up, worry lining her young, plump face. "I must talk to you."

"Yes? What is it?" Mother showed Lenchen a round cheese on the counter of a stall.

"It's your husband. He's sick," the maidservant panted, her eyes round with distress.

"Don't worry about it. It's just his way. He was all right when I left home." Mother asked the peasant woman the price of the cheese. The woman quoted a price that made Mother back off. "That's much more than we can pay," she told Lenchen.

"Frau Luther, your husband —" the maidservant ventured timidly.

"Oh, yes. You said he was sick, didn't you?" Mother turned to another stall and looked over the cheeses there. "He's probably working on a sermon, and you heard him groaning."

"Frau Luther, your husband is ill. Don't you even care?"

Hans smiled. When Father was really sick, Mother was right there nursing him back to health. Other times, when Father was worried or under pressure

while preparing lectures, sermons, or answers to letters, he complained of aches and pains so much and so long that the whole family simply waited until he ran out of breath, and then Father would discover that he felt fine.

The new maidservant could not be expected to know Father's ways. She twisted her apron with nervous fingers. "He is all doubled up on the floor of the lecture hall."

For the first time, Mother looked alarmed. "Not in front of the students, I hope."

"No one is there, Frau Luther. He's all alone in that great big room. I heard him groaning, and —"

"Did he ask for me?"

"Frau Luther," the maidservant burst out, "how could he ask for anyone? He's *dying*."

Mother cocked her head as if to hear better. "What makes you think so?"

"Frau Luther, he *said* so."

Mother sighed. "We'll never get our marketing done this way. Perhaps I'd better go home."

The maidservant wrung her hands. "Frau Luther, that's what I've been saying all the time." She rolled her eyes upward. "What kind of family is this?" Her voice rose hysterically. "My family warned me. 'The Luthers,' they said, 'are different. They're not like other people.' But did I listen to my own family? No, and now I bitterly regret it. I've a good mind to go back to Coswig." She burst into tears and flung her white apron over her face.

Now Mother was really alarmed. "Don't say that, my good girl. We need you. The children need you. Come along with me. I'll tell you about Dr. Luther,

and then you'll understand." She took money out of the little bag at her waist, spoke quickly to a stallkeeper about a cheese, and motioned to Hans. "Please carry the cheese home for me. Lenchen, you take Martin, and all of you come back home right away."

Mother hurried off, talking in her usual fast and earnest way to the new maidservant.

Hans hugged the cheese to his chest and started home with Lenchen and Martin. Because of Martin they had to walk slowly.

At the edge of the market square they came face-to-face with the three peasant boys.

"What's your name?" a dark-haired boy demanded.

"Hans. What's yours?"

"Blacky. What's her name?" Blacky jerked his head toward Lenchen.

"Magdalena," Lenchen said.

"Your mother called you *Lenchen*. How come?"

"It's her nickname," Little Martin blurted.

"Be quiet," his sister warned. "No one asked you, and don't tell your name."

"You'd better tell it." Blacky nodded toward the garbage-filled ditch. "You know what we could do to you? We could throw all three of you in there. How would you like that? So what is his name?"

"Martin Luther," little Martin blurted out.

"*Martin Luther!*" Blacky gasped. "That couldn't be your name. There's only one Martin Luther in Wittenberg, and my father says he ought to be run out of town."

"Martin Luther is my father," Martin explained innocently.

The three peasant boys looked at each other with sly grins. Blacky's eyes gleamed. "So you're the ones! You think you're smart because Martin Luther is your father." His mouth twisted in a sneer. "Imagine! A monk for a father and a nun for a mother. Monks and nuns aren't supposed to get married."

"Yeah," another boy chimed in. "Your parents can never go to heaven."

Lenchen gritted her teeth, clasped little Martin's hand, and pushed past the boys, her head high. "That's not true."

The three boys stepped in front of her with arms folded.

"Your father is nothing but a runaway monk," Blacky chanted.

"He is not."

"Yes, he is. And he married a runaway nun."

"He did not."

"Yes, he did, and your mother escaped from her convent in a big old fish barrel with some more nuns, and your house is nothing but an old broken-down monastery."

Little Martin burst into tears.

Lenchen comforted him. "You don't even know what a monastery is, so why are you crying?"

"I don't want to live in an old, broken-down monastery."

"It isn't broken down. Mother is having it all fixed up. Would you rather live here in the market square?"

"No." Martin cried louder than ever.

"Come on, Lenchen," Hans urged. "Don't pay

any attention to these boys." He hoped the bluff would work.

"I'm not moving until they get out of our way. They'll see that we're not afraid of them or anyone else."

Hans could have hugged Lenchen. His sister, always so calm and reasonable, would not let the peasant boys bully her.

A faraway clap of thunder hushed everyone in the market square. Stallkeepers hurriedly flung their wares into big sacks.

Blacky looked frightened. "It's the devil," he breathed. He and the other two boys turned quickly and ran off.

"The devil is loose," the stallkeepers told each other.

"Either that or it's Martin Luther preaching," a man called out. "Only his thunderstorms are in church."

Hans and Lenchen, with Martin between them, raced down the street toward the Black Cloister. Better a thunderstorm than a dip in the ditch!

A FIGHT FOR THE RIGHT

THE STORM had not broken yet, and Hans led the others to the Elster gate near the cemetery. "Let's stop and say hello to Elizabeth," he suggested.

Little Martin looked around. "Elizabeth who?"

"Our sister."

"Where is she?"

Hans pointed to a small gravestone set in the wall at the left of the entrance.

"What's she doing in there?"

"She's not there. She's in the cemetery, stupid."

"Don't say *stupid*, Hans," Lenchen chided.

"Why not? Father does. I've heard him call lots of people stupid, like the pope, Dr. Eck, Erasmus, Elector George, and —"

"That's enough."

Hans thought so, too. He didn't like to have Lenchen annoyed with him. She was the only one he could talk to. Their cousins were too old, and

Martin, Paul, and the baby were too young.

“What do those words say?” Martin asked.

Hans had studied Latin since he was four years old and he translated the plaque. “‘Here sleeps Elizabeth, Martin Luther’s little daughter, in the year 1528.’”

“Mother named Elizabeth after the mother of John the Baptist,” Lenchen said.

“And she was born just after the pestilence in 1527,” Hans added.

“Pest-i-lence?” Martin looked puzzled. “What’s that?”

“It’s the plague. People can be well one day and dead the next. No one knows who will get it and who won’t. Lots of people leave town when it comes.”

“Will there ever be another one?”

“No one knows that, either.”

They started toward the Black Cloister. The rain still had not begun.

“Look! There’s Blacky,” Lenchen exclaimed. “He followed us.”

Blacky swaggered up. Hans could see that his curiosity was stronger than the fear of the coming storm. “Do you live in that big building over there?” Blacky pointed to the four-storied Black Cloister rising above the walled courtyard.

“Yes.”

“What’s it like in there?”

“Oh, it’s just a house.” Hans knew Blacky had never seen a house like that, but Hans didn’t want to brag.

“You think you’re smart living in such a big

house. Your father has lots of enemies, and they all wish he was dead."

"Not anymore."

"Oh, yes they do. He's working hand in hand with the devil. My father says so. And your mother is nothing but a runaway nun."

That clinched it. Hans had heard more than enough. No one was going to say things like that about Mother and get away with it.

"Here, Lenchen. Hold the cheese." Hans pushed the cheese wheel toward her. Then he faced Blacky, but before he could duck, Blacky grabbed him around the neck and threw him to the ground. Hans wriggled loose and caught Blacky around the knees, pulling Blacky on top of him. Both boys rolled in the dirt, kicking and clawing. Neither one could gain an advantage.

Blacky's elbow caught Hans in the stomach. He gasped, pulled back, and heard a rip on the back of his short coat. Lenchen shrieked and shoved the cheese wheel into Blacky's ribs. He went over backward. Martin grabbed hold of Blacky's leg.

Rain pelted downward in a sudden burst drenching everyone and stopping the fight. Blacky sprang up, shook Martin off his leg, and for the second time that day ran away from the Luthers.

Hans' clothes were now muddy as well as torn. Blood dripped from his nose, but he looked at Lenchen in triumph. At least no one could say he was afraid to stand up for his family. He still burned, remembering Blacky's insulting remark about Mother.

Aunt Lena met the three Luther children at the passageway. At the sight of Hans, her eyebrows

Thunderstorm in Church



Martin Luther's son has a problem. What should young Hans Luther do when he grows up? How can he ever do anything important when he is constantly overshadowed by his famous father?

Hans struggles with his Latin lessons. He fights with a peasant boy in the marketplace, listens to the wise advice of his Aunt Lena, observes his father lecturing to university students. Hans plays with his brothers, little Martin and Paul, and has thoughtful conversations with Lenchen, his sister. Gradually he discovers who he is and how God wants him to live.

Through Hans' eyes you will learn to know Martin Luther—not only as the great Reformer-preacher, but also as a father with a sense of humor and as a friend.



HERALD PRESS
WWW.HERALDPRESS.COM

ISBN 978-0-8361-1740-0



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\$10.99 USD

YOUTH & CHILDREN / Children's Fiction-Christian