

Kitty, My Rib

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by
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Dedicated with love to my husband,
Carlton H. Mall, Chaplain (Captain),
U. S. Army

Preface

TOGETHER, Martin Luther and his wife established the Protestant parsonage. The great number of *Who's Who* personalities who have come from Protestant parsonages indicates the tremendous influence which the parsonage has had.

There are many volumes written about Dr. Martin Luther, the great Reformer. On this great man, what he did, what he said, what he thought, there is an abundance of material. There is, however, little material on his wife, Katharine. Often in my research for *KITTY, MY RIB* I had to sift through pages and pages of material in order to find one golden nugget — a line about Katharine Luther. In this book I have tried to picture the life and heart of a woman who married a famous man. It is incidental, in this fictionalized biography, that the man she married was Martin Luther.

I wish also to express my gratitude to the Editorial Department of Concordia Publishing House for its help in keeping this book historically accurate.

E. Jane Mall

chapter one

THE FADING EVENING SUN reached dusty fingers of light through the high windows of the Nimbschen convent chapel. Twelve nuns stood in a row in front of a massive altar. Their hands were crossed on their breasts, their heads bowed low. Before them stood the abbess of the convent. Her eyes traveled along the row of down-cast heads.

"This is truly heresy," she said.

The row of heads bent a little lower, and the abbess continued. "I have had most of you under my care for the better part of your lives, and you have been obedient nuns. However, this heresy shall not go unpunished. The general of the order was here only a few weeks ago, and I told him in all honesty that this convent was secure against heresy." She stopped and folded her hands. On her face was an expression of deep sadness.

"You know the rules," she said softly; "now go."

The twelve nuns obediently dropped to their knees and crawled to the penitents' bench, where they sat in an attitude of desolation for the remainder of the vesper service.

Katharine von Bora, one of the wayward nuns, looked up once during the service and shivered involuntarily. She remembered back to the first moment when they had dared to hope for freedom. Sister Magdalene, Katharine's aunt, had suggested to the little group that they write to their parents and relatives asking them to release them and take them home. Katharine wrote a letter to her brother Hans, but she did so with little hope that he would respond favorably.

Katharine's mother had died when Katharine was about five. Later her father remarried, and Katharine and her step-mother didn't get along. In those days it was common practice to send poor, helpless females to a convent; so when Katharine was nine, her father sent her to the Nimbschen convent because his sister Magdalene was a nun there and the sister of Katharine's mother was the abbess of the convent, and he felt that these two good women would keep a loving eye on their niece.

Katharine, growing up in the convent, was an obedient nun and never caused any sort of trouble or disturbance among the sisters. However, she finally realized that not their beloved church but a few of the power-grasping people of the church were bringing dishonor and corruption to the holy institution, and it made her long for freedom.

When the nuns heard of the monk Martin Luther and of what he was doing to free the church of the poison that had seeped into it, they saw a ray of hope. Quickly they smuggled letters to their relatives begging them for release from what they felt had become corrupt.

The reply Katharine received from her brother was kind. He told her he would like to help her, but he could not see how a helpless woman who had lived nearly all of her life within the confines of a convent could possibly get along in the outside world. Therefore, he wrote, he felt it would be safer for her to remain in the convent.

The other eleven nuns, who had written similar letters, received answers which were on much the same order. They told one another of the answers they had received, and they would have given up then had not one of the other nuns discovered what they had done and reported them to the abbess. Now they were being punished for their crime of heresy.

For four days the nuns sat in their lonely cells. Once a day bread and water was brought to them.

In her cell Katharine knelt by her cot. "Dear God," she prayed, "grant us a speedy release." She pondered on her sin of heresy but couldn't feel convinced of the severity of the sin. Her narrow cell was gloomy and dark, relieved only by a few colorful pictures of saints. She lighted a lamp, sat down on her cot, and picked up her sewing.

Katharine was not a particularly beautiful person, but her dark eyes, set like glistening jewels in the almost ghostly pallor of her face, gave her an appearance of fragile beauty. She was twenty-four years old, and in her face was character and wisdom. Her small, slim body bent earnestly over her sewing, and her firm chin jutted out as she concentrated on her work.

The heavy door of her cell opened, and another nun stood in the small circle of light. "Sister Katharine," she exclaimed, "did you finish embroidering the altar cloth? It was to be ready for High Mass tomorrow."

Katharine looked up. "Yes, Aunt Magdalene, I finished it." With a sigh she picked up the folds of velvet and handed the cloth to her. "Will you see that the abbess gets it?"

Sister Magdalene held the cloth in her arms. "What's wrong, Katharine?" she asked. "Lately you have been acting so weary and so — so sad."