WHAT PEOPLE ARE SAYING

Sarah Baughman manages to weave a warm and engaging tale of family and community life during an extremely tumultuous time in history while introducing the reader to fascinating characters and details of what we know as the Reformation. With a powerfully descriptive pen, Baughman will break your heart and mend it again with topics of loss, shame, honor, depression, and the challenges of family life. As an avid reader, as a wife and mom, and as a mental health professional, I found insight and application in every page of this meaningful work.

Heidi Goehmann
author of Altogether Beautiful

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Sarah Baughman is a gifted writer who not only brings detailed history back to life, but who also quietly weaves profoundly human stories of faith and love.

Colleen Oakes
author of the Queen of Hearts Saga

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Reading A Flame in the Dark is like stepping back into Reformation-era Wittenberg, Germany. Sarah Baughman carefully crafts a believable tale with a fresh perspective. Readers are treated to vivid and historically accurate descriptions of merchant-class life during this time period. The true delight of reading this book comes from seeing the ripple effect Martin Luther’s teachings had on the faith of everyday people. Those who have wondered what it would have been like to live in Luther’s Germany will thoroughly enjoy how Baughman’s book skillfully portrays the rediscovery of the Gospel.

Sue Matzke
avid reader and pastor’s wife

***
Sarah’s wonderful gift of storytelling exhilarates me. Her characters in this heart-stirring story each endure various trials and tribulations in their lives, and it isn’t until they each assimilate God’s teaching and His love do they find healing, peace, and joy. Even though this story takes place during the Reformation, the message in A Flame in the Dark is nevertheless prevalent today, tomorrow, and well into the future. I learned a lot about my own shortcomings reading Sarah’s story, and I thank you, Sarah, for reminding me to seek God’s words and His forgiveness.

Adriann Harris
book reviewer

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With historical detail and intrigue, Sarah Baughman will take you back to the days of Martin Luther and the turbulent time after Luther’s Theses were nailed to the door in Wittenberg. If you enjoy historical fiction, be sure to add this one to your list!

Jamie Lapeyrolerie
Musings of Jamie
In memory of

Mary, my grandma who taught me to look for beauty in the simple and to serve others in Jesus’ name;

Frieda, my grandma who taught me perseverance and patience in the face of hardship, and to always cling to Christ;

and Adele, my godmother who taught me to cherish life and the Word.

All three were women of grace, faith, and light.
October 1517

Autumn’s morning fog swirled with each step he took, feet spurred on by the hope surging in his heart. Surely this would open the door for discussion, for debate. There were goings-on that he felt in his gut were not right and, further, that he found no support for in the Holy Scriptures. There must be a way to mend it, to repent and turn back to what was presented in the Word of God.

The more he read of that Word, the more certain he became. But years of training and thinking and believing did not simply dissipate like the mist about his feet. Steps forward were hindered by the mire of the past, of his past. Of the past of the church and the pasts of its people.

But he’d had a taste of mercy, and like the psalmist, he now saw that the Lord was good. And not only perfectly, condemingly good, but graciously good. Surely the bishops would see that too.

If he could but speak with them.

He’d reached the door of the Schlosskirche, just over an arm’s length before him, and stopped. Seeing few other notices posted, and those old and weather-worn, he knew his theses would be seen. That is, if people took the time to stand there and read all ninety-five of them. Either way, posting them should open the way for debate and discussion, which may pave the way for change.

Spurred on by what he was convinced to be the Spirit’s urging, he opened the roll of paper in his hand and stepped determinedly to the door.
Heinrich marched down Kollegienstrasse toward the University of Wittenberg, the scrap of paper crinkling in his hand and absorbing perspiration from his palm. The ink on it would soon begin to run from the moisture. His hands were cold and clammy in the crisp, autumn air, even as his ears burned, slowly spreading first to his face and up to his sandy hair, then seeping down his neck to the rest of his body. The missive, obnoxious in its brevity, could not even be termed a letter, as it held only one sentence.

*The Alscher family says I must leave by autumn, and unless I hear otherwise from you, I will proceed in my current plan to join a convent.* —Brigita

She must have had someone write it for her, with her name scrawled in her own hand at the end. Perhaps one of Alscher’s sons or the man’s wife. Brigita was only seventeen, much too young to be traveling alone to another city.

Crossing the courtyard of the university, Heinrich all but ignored the other young men around him, dressed similarly to his own black doublet and *Hosen*, his knee-length black cape billowing behind him as he moved. He was known to be a studious young man, with midnight blue eyes set in a serious face, and it seemed few of his peers noticed anything odd in his silence. He was cognizant enough of that
small blessing despite his inner turmoil.

Long strides carried him swiftly to the lecture hall. The large room was nearly empty, excepting the professor and a scattering of students. Doctor Luther, known to the parishioners of the Stadtkirche as Father Martin, was bent over his book, scalp glistening in the middle of his tonsure. He scribbled furiously in the margins, stopping only to dip the tip of his quill in ink. Heinrich absently wondered how the good doctor could write with such a badly trimmed pen.

Turning toward his place, Heinrich suddenly realized that he had only a folio of loose papers and had left his bound copy of the Letter to the Hebrews in his room. Could the day grow any dimmer? The autumn rainclouds threatening the area were nothing compared to his mood. Forcing his thoughts away from his growing melancholy, he shoved the crinkled paper into the bottom of his satchel and waited for the lecture to begin. With every breath he took, he felt the tension seeping from his shoulders as his mind began to focus.

This room was comfortably familiar, with its shiny wood panels and tidy arrangement of rows of slanted desks. He’d spent so many hours in it over the past several years as he worked toward earning his doctorate in law, and the familiarity of the place was a much-needed balm to his troubled spirit.

Before long, other students began filtering into the room. Luther’s lectures were wildly popular, and while punctuality at class was expected, students seldom showed such eagerness to arrive at other lectures as they did to this professor’s. Heinrich had studied the Letter to the Galatians with Luther last year and there witnessed firsthand the friar’s legendary skills in rhetoric and philosophy. His mind was astonishing and his humility even more so. When it was made known that Doctor Luther would be leading the students through the Letter to the Hebrews, Heinrich looked forward to it. If attending this lecture was not required for his course of study, Heinrich reasoned to himself, then further exposure to Luther’s skills in rhetoric could only aid his
own; never mind that when Luther read the Holy Scriptures to them, it seemed as though God Himself had delivered the messages they were hearing.

With a startling screech, Luther scooted back his stool and the assembly stilled; all sound in the room fell like leaves from a tree. His face appeared pale against the dark wood of the room and the brown of his habit as he gazed at his students, his eyes open, honest, and sparkling with eagerness. Heinrich reached for the quill resting in the inkpot at his side of the bench-like desk, ready to write and forget about the trouble with his sister.

“A few of you, who have been here an extraordinary length of time, will recall,” began Luther without preamble, “that when I lectured on the Psalms several years ago, we explored throughout the idea of God’s righteousness. Here, in the Letter to the Hebrews, we see a further exploration of the implications of His righteousness as well as our righteousness, in the way the author describes Christ as the great High Priest and the manner in which His all-sufficient sacrifice atones for our unrighteousness, our sins. Some would argue that a person can act rightly and somehow do what is in him to placate the righteous God. But here we see that the opposite is true. All the sacrifices of the Israelites were merely pointing to Christ, for it is He alone who saves. Listen to me repeat myself, for this is of great importance: Christ alone can save.”

Heinrich wrote as fast as he could. Thankfully, the lectures followed the book sentence-by-sentence, sometimes word-by-word, so he simply titled his notes “On Righteousness and Salvation.” He would need to take some time later to look over them again and transfer them from his loose papers to his book’s margins.

The lecture flew past, and before Heinrich knew it, Luther had dismissed them. With the dismissal, reality came crashing back on him. Heinrich stood numbly and began shuffling his papers into the folio. He almost didn’t hear when someone spoke to him.
“Heinrich, will you come to the tavern with us?” asked Romauld, who had sat beside him. “Karl has a copy of Doctor Luther’s Theses; we’re going to discuss them over a tankard and bowl of stew.”

“Not tonight,” Heinrich declined. Any other day he’d have gladly accompanied them, but he was in no mood to fraternize at the moment. “I forgot my book and need to copy my notes while the lecture is still fresh in my mind.”

Romauld nudged him with a good-natured grin upon his ruddy face. “The most studious Heinrich has forgotten his book! What will become of us average students?”

Heinrich managed a small smile and watched his classmate’s energetic exit. With a shake of his head, he placed the borrowed quill into its inkpot and closed his folio, embossed with his family name. His father had commissioned it from a Lederer near their home in Braunschweig only months before his death last year. The death that caused Brigita, eight years his junior, to be sent to live with neighbors while he finished earning his doctorate in law. Neighbors whose protection she had left weeks ago. To an unknown convent.

Heinrich swallowed frantically against the knot in his throat, suddenly finding it nearly impossible to breathe.

“Young Ritter, are you well?” asked Luther, who was also gathering his books and papers.

“Yes, Doctor Luther. I’ve just received some news from home is all.” He debated confiding in his professor.

The concern on the man’s face was sincere, but it twisted something in Heinrich’s gut and suddenly he could not give voice to his fears. “I must hurry, or there may not be any supper left for me,” he joked half-heartedly. “Good evening, sir.”

While it would have been quicker to avoid Kollegienstrasse and walk directly to Johann Diefenbach’s shop, Heinrich instead walked westward along the bustling street until he came to the Marktplatz. He
needed time to compose himself before meeting with the others.

The Markt Platz felt more like home to Heinrich than nearly any other place in Wittenberg. Located just across from the City Church, Stadtkirche Sankt Marien, the Markt Platz teemed with activity as the craftsmen sold their wares. Several of Heinrich’s friends found the place to be too noisy and busy for their liking, but it put him in mind of Braunschweig, the much larger city where he had spent his formative years. Not every memory of his life with his father and sister was pleasant, but it was still his home.

Swallowed up by the Markt, Heinrich allowed the activity of the waning day to soothe his nerves. Some of the craftsmen had already packed up, but many of the small wooden booths were still filled with various goods made from fabrics, metals, wood, and foodstuff. The feelings of home that washed over him, the sounds and smells, calmed him and allowed his mind to focus clearly on his situation. Brigita’s situation.

The note was not dated, but if she was to have left the Alscher family by autumn, she had left weeks, possibly even a couple of months, ago. He might be able to make a search for her, but that was only if he happened upon the correct convent. It had been his business, his burden, to care for his sister since their mother’s death shortly after Brigita’s birth and their father’s subsequent melancholy. Hanz Ritter had saved carefully over the years, but for an education for his son rather than a respectable dowry for his daughter. It was the reason for Heinrich attending the University of Wittenberg, that he would take up law, earn a good living, and provide for his father in his old age, as well as contribute a sizable dowry for Brigita. Thankfully, if she truly did desire to enter a convent, her lovely voice would make her an asset to the choir, and they would likely overlook that he could not provide an endowment for the convent with her entry. But he didn’t want her entering one because she saw no other options for herself.

By the time he emerged from the booths of the Markt and turned
right on Jüdenstrasse, Heinrich felt ready to face Diefenbach’s apprentices. Then, a left turn onto Bürgermeisterstrasse and he was there in a matter of minutes. This street, too, put him in mind of home; the narrow structures, packed tightly together, housed many of the town’s master crafters. He greeted a metalsmith and a weaver before reaching the shop of Johann Diefenbach, the candlemaker. As he neared the building, unremarkable among a dozen others just like it, two men stepped from the door, locking it behind them.

Matthäus and Sïfrit were two very different men. While Matthäus was tall and broad, Sïfrit was of average height and slender. Matthäus’s hair was dark, his beard a shade lighter, and his eyes were a kind, pale brown. Sïfrit’s red-blond hair was shoulder length and wavy, his eyes a cold hazel, and his face clean-shaven, if he had anything to shave. Matthäus wore practical clothing that was sturdy, if a bit worn, in browns and grays. Sïfrit wore Hosen and a doublet with slashing, made from a fine green wool with yellow showing through the slashes. Matthäus wore an older style felt hat—a wide, circular thing with a stuffed band wrapped with cording and a single plume being the only decorations. Sïfrit wore a fine woolen hat with a tall crown and no brim that allowed his shoulder-length hair to hang free. The style had become popular throughout Germany recently, but just scarcely reached the small city of Wittenberg.

“Good evening, Matthäus, Sïfrit.” Heinrich offered a strained smile to the younger of the two. He did not enjoy Sïfrit’s company as much as Matthäus’s, but tried to behave civilly toward him. “Did you sell well today?”

It had been Sïfrit’s first day in the booth, and he had been speaking all week of how he would sell more than Matthäus, who had been manning the booth for more than two years and had served nearly his entire apprenticeship to the candlemaker. Sïfrit, barely more than a lad at nineteen years old, nodded his head. When he did not expound upon his excellent take for the day, Heinrich supposed he did not do so
well as he'd boasted he would. Sifrit moved ahead of the other two, so Heinrich offered to carry one of the crates Matthäus was hefting, and they fell into step behind Sifrit.

“Think he’s hurrying to go bother Marlein?” asked Matthäus quietly, an undercurrent of humor running through his words.

Heinrich forced a chuckle, though he found little amusement in the younger man sniffing around the Diefenbachs’ eldest daughter. Besides being young, he was also entirely too full of himself. “She knows better than to listen to his self-absorbed overtures.” The two watched as Sifrit turned off onto a different street. “I suppose he plans to stop at the tavern on his way to the Diefenbach house.”

Heinrich and Matthäus continued on their way, passing the monastery and university as they headed east on Kollegienstrasse, then along the road that led to Elster. In no mood for idle chatter, Heinrich was grateful for his companion’s quiet and steady presence; Matthäus was never one to fill silence merely for the sake of filling it. Moving through the city gate, they turned northward, their booted feet taking them from the gravel road of the city to the dirt road outside of it. The ground had dried since the last rain, so rather than circumnavigating puddles, they walked easily on their way. As they went, Heinrich’s thoughts swirled in a pattern of note, sister, convent.

Note, sister, convent.

Note.

Sister.

Convent.
Heinrich was so lost in his thoughts that the Diefenbach home was in sight before he knew it. The house stood about a twenty-minute walk from the edge of Wittenberg. The longer sides of the rectangular structure were lined with windows and squat to the ground, the steeply sloping roof meeting the walls at about the height of a man’s head. The front and back walls were taller, angling up with the slope of the roof. As the men drew nearer, the contrast between the stone facing of the walls and the wattle and daub of the upper portion of the walls sharpened until the individual stones were discernible.

To the right of the house spread the stubby field, barren until spring. The corner of the garden was visible from the side of the house, between the building and the field. Every so often, a small figure of some size or shape, a child, would dart out from the garden to the edge of the field, only to be chased back by another of the children. Despite his worry, a smile pulled at Heinrich’s lips as he thought of Marlein out there with the children. She was likely in the garden to fetch some last-minute addition to the meal.

At the thought, though, his smile slipped downward until it was a frown. Marlein shouldn’t be preparing the meal with four or five children, none of whom were hers, clinging to her skirts. Not without anyone to help. With a huff, he scraped his boots against the pebbles spread along the path near the house in an attempt to knock off most
of the mud before entering the house. He knew Marlein had more than enough to occupy her time without the added nuisance of dirt from the road. Not that she would ever say such a thing.

The two men stepped onto the flagstone floor that served as a base for the entire house, even in the entrance alcove at the front of the house. The double doors nestled into the recessed space, sheltered from the elements. Wide enough for even the horses and cows to walk through when both were opened, the doors were made of thick, strong wood.

“Here,” Matthäus said as Heinrich struggled to grasp the right door’s carved handle with a few fingers extending from his hold on the crate. “Give it to me, then you can manage the door.”

Heinrich nodded silently. He stacked his crate on top of the one Matthäus held and yanked on one of the doors, probably harder than necessary, if the way it swung violently open was any indication.

“Thanks,” he managed gruffly.

“Of course,” Matthäus responded, stepping past him into the house. Heinrich followed, closing the door more gently than he’d opened it. A black horse nickered and stuck his head over the half door of his stall, greeting his master with a whinny and a shake of his glossy mane.

“Hello, Jäger,” Heinrich said to the animal, patting the white star in the center of the horse’s face. “I promise I’ll ride you tomorrow.”

He hurried to catch up to Matthäus, who was already halfway across the Diele between the stalls that housed the family’s animals. Chickens were opposite the stalls of Jäger and one of the Diefenbachs’ horses. After the chickens came the cow, then the storage stall for their cart and saddles, and last, closest to the living area, was the more enclosed stall where the servant, Steffan, slept. Horses and the room storing winter feed took up the stalls along the left side of the house. The Diele was wide enough to tie a horse in while grooming or saddling, which they did on occasion, or to bring in the wagon the family owned
when the weather turned bad.

“The air is almost cool enough to make me appreciate the heat of this hearth,” Matthäus commented as he and Heinrich approached the living area of the house. Matthäus set both crates against the wall of Steffan’s stall, and Heinrich realized he’d forgotten to take his crate back from the other man.

As Matthäus stood from his task, he turned and extended a hand to shake Johann Diefenbach’s. The older man sat in his usual chair, a sturdy thing draped in several furs and soft wools, situated near the fire. “The shop is secured and prepared for the morning,” Matthäus said to Diefenbach.

“Very good. And how are you fellows this evening?” he asked.

Heinrich allowed Matthäus to answer, not really listening to the conversation, but attempting to contrive an excuse to absent himself from the family that evening; he wasn’t up to pretending all was well and did not feel equal to the task of explaining what was upsetting him. It would not be easy, unless he kept in his room; the house offered little privacy. The Diele opened up to the living area, which boasted a large, freestanding hearth at the place where the Diele and the Flett met. The hearth separated an area for sitting and talking near the side door that led to the garden from the other side, where the large table used for preparing food and eating sat. A window sat squarely on the far left wall, larger than those in the bedchambers or stalls, and was outfitted with glass as opposed to the simple shutters on the other windows. It provided a point of anchor for the table on the left side of the Flett, illuminating it with sunlight until day’s end. Besides the window and the doors along the back wall leading to each of the four bedchambers, every place on the walls was hung with useful items: a metal tub; shelves with dried foodstuff, dishes, and mugs; tools and utensils hanging from pegs. Large candleholders suspended from the ceiling lit the area after the sun set. Crocks and barrels lined the walls between the four doors to the bedchambers, except for the few places occupied by
seats. A bench sat between the two doors to the right of the hearth, and several chairs, including Johann Diefenbach’s, sat opposite the bench that abutted the wall shared by Steffan’s stall.

“I see you are still trying to become my apprentice,” Diefenbach teased Heinrich. Heinrich had no answer, and so simply shrugged and attempted a grin. “I suppose your attention wandered and you didn’t hear Matthäus admit that you helped to carry the crates of candles.” Diefenbach shook his head, concern deepening the furrows in his brow. “Sifrit will need to carry his own weight when you graduate.”

Diefenbach was both kind and honest and treated guests, apprentices, and servants with respect and dignity. He had earned the status of master candlemaker some years ago and become a guildsman after he established himself as a man with an eye for the business of selling his candles and a leading resident of the small town. His unassuming appearance reminded Heinrich of a quiet, calm, cloudy day—bushy gray beard, soft gray eyes, and modest but quality gray clothes surrounding a round, open face—and reflected the quiet honor with which Diefenbach lived his life. In his wooden chair, covered with plush animal pelts, he scribbled in a small book with a nubby quill that Heinrich would have stopped using ages ago.

He clasped the older man’s gnarled hand before going to store his satchel in his room, the farthest to the right and closest to the side door. The space was small, but cozy. The bed was built into the left wall, and a window opposite the door lit the space with sunlight, helping to warm the room in the winter. A small, oft-used desk allowed a place for Heinrich to attend his studies, and a chest occupied the right corner of the room and held his belongings. The room was lately occupied by the younger Johann, Diefenbach’s son and firstborn, who was away serving an apprenticeship with a candlemaker in Magdeburg. Despite it being only a two-day walk northwest, the younger Johann Diefenbach was not able to leave his apprenticeship for even holy days, and so he had little use of the room while he was away. It served Heinrich
well while he attended the University of Wittenberg.

Upon his arrival in the city, Heinrich had not been at all acquainted with the family, but his father was apprenticed to Diefenbach's father years ago. When Hanz Ritter wrote to his old master's son, applying to him to host Heinrich, Diefenbach's affirmative reply arrived with expediency. Hanz insisted upon forwarding payment for his son's keep, though he was told it was unnecessary. Due to his stringent mode of living, it was easily afforded and sent. Now, though, it all seemed to Heinrich such a waste of resources in the wake of his father's death and the possible loss of his sister.

Heinrich emerged from his room and found himself nearly knocked over by the four young girls scampering into the house from the side door, a blur of varying shades of pale hair, dark dresses, and undyed woolen aprons. Their chatter and giggles coaxed a small smile from him as he quickly closed his door behind him before any other people came through the side door that sometimes blocked his.

"Vati!" squealed four-year-old Maria, clapping her hands and sending up a puff of dust and dirt. She ran to Matthäus and wrapped her grimy arms around his legs, smudging the hem of his knee-length tunic.

"Meine Tochter. How has your day gone?" Matthäus lifted her in his arms, smiling broadly.

While the little girl chattered on, her dark-blonde head contrasting with her father's brown mop of hair, Heinrich heard someone close the side door behind him. He knew it was Marlein, but didn't turn around. Instead, he adjusted his stance subtly to stand a little more in her way, watching as Matthäus carefully set his little Maria on the ground.

"Vati," she said as she reached for the hand of five-year-old Aldessa Diefenbach, "we want to pet the horses. May we, please?" They moved off toward the horses as he began a story about what mischief the horses might have gotten into that day.
“Ahem,” said a firm voice behind Heinrich.

Heinrich turned to raise his eyebrows expectantly at her. “Yes, Marlein?”

“May I get through?” she asked after a moment of returning his expectant smile. “Or are you determined to behave like Sïfrit?”

Heinrich grunted, knowing she had put him in his place for attempting to tease her; he stepped back. Trying to keep the mood light—lighter than he felt—he followed her and asked, “Rough day?”

“Hm?” She was already headed to the table, the seven-year-old Leonetta trailing her closely. “What do you mean?”

“Your head is uncovered. Did you lose your *Steuchlein* somewhere?”

She looked upward, as though she’d be able to see the top of her light-brown hair to determine whether he was telling the truth. After reaching up to lightly touch the top of her head, she shrugged. “It appears I did. Oh! I remember. Herlinde,” she explained, referring to the youngest of the Diefenbach girls, a chubby little child of three years, “threw a fit at the end of the midday meal, and I had to wrestle her into bed for a short sleep; it must be on the floor in the girls’ room.”

Marlein’s smile was broad, causing her hazel eyes to sparkle before she turned to help Leonetta chop the herbs they had brought in, nearly the last of the garden’s offerings. “Keep your fingers curved and pointing down, or you’ll cut off the tips.”

“And I don’t want that!” answered Leonetta, shaking her head and grinning up at the young woman who was almost more mother than sister to her. Leonetta, carefully curving her fingers, finished chopping the herbs under her sister’s watchful eye.

Marlein lifted her head, grinning in Heinrich’s direction before she shooed her sister away. “You can go listen to Matthäus’s stories, if you wish. I will clean up today.”
“Really?” Leonetta didn’t wait for her sister to answer before she pulled off her apron, tossed it haphazardly onto its peg, and took off for the front room.

The relief on Marlein’s face once the girl was gone was almost comical.

“Has she been helping much today?” Heinrich asked, hiding his laughter.

“Yes. And she spilled barley. All over the floor.” Marlein pushed some strands that had escaped her braided hair away from her face before turning to step through the door farthest to the left, near the table. She returned shortly with her Steuchlein dangling from her fingers. “She wants so badly to help with everything, but she is still so young. The barley bag was too heavy for her, the table too high for her to easily control the knife while chopping, and I won’t even try to understand how she thought of trying to get to the pot that had been hanging out of her reach this morning.”

Taking the seamed center of the fabric and settling it over the middle of her head, Marlein pulled it snug over the braided crown of her hair before beginning to slowly twist the ends of the cloth, wrapping them about her head as she went. “Needless to say, it’s been a long day.”

“She will grow,” Heinrich attempted to comfort her, as the slight crease between her dark eyebrows remained. “I remember when Brigita started trying to help with things . . .” but he stopped himself, suddenly remembering the note, the uncertainty, the fear. His stomach lurched and twisted, his breath stuttered, and his heart felt like a stone sinking in the depths of his gut. He gritted his teeth and swallowed again. “How is your mother today?”

Heinrich held back a grimace as the easy smile on Marlein’s face dissolved and her hands stilled, hovering over the Steuchlein she’d just wrapped. He’d escaped his pain by mentioning hers and despised himself for it.
“She is as she always is,” Marlein’s voice was hushed, as her father sat ten paces away by the fire. She lowered her hands and briskly stepped up to the table to chop some of the larger pieces of herb that Leonetta had left behind. “This morning she was working so intently in the garden that I hoped it would be a good day. After lunch, though, she grew lethargic and has been in bed since.”

He nodded, unsure what to say. Since before his arrival almost four years ago, Keterlyn Diefenbach had struggled. Lately, though, it seemed to be worsening. Marlein looked remarkably like her mother, with similar height and features. But where Marlein was hearty and hale, Keterlyn was sickly and wan. Where Marlein’s hazel eyes sparkled with light and life, Keterlyn’s were dull and listless. Where Marlein’s hair was shiny and healthy—the few times he had seen it unbound—Keterlyn’s frequently hung limp and thin just past her frail shoulders.

“Tell me, though,” Marlein spoke up, changing the subject, “where is Sïfrit? He made a point of telling me he would be at supper when I brought Emnelda’s beeswax to the shop earlier today.”

“I can’t say; he should have arrived before us,” he replied. Undesirous of discussing Sïfrit and realizing he oughtn’t eat supper in his school clothes, Heinrich murmured, “Excuse me, I should go change.”

Focusing on the task of undressing, of performing another part of his usual routine, helped keep his worries at bay for a brief time. The students’ garb was not necessarily uniform, but it did distinguish them from the people of the town. His cape he hung on its peg on the wall, beside the door to his room. Then he removed his doublet and the shirt under it. The collar, the trim, the stockings—all indicated his status as a student. While the demarcation did not bother him most days, today he found himself frustrated with the reminder that he was not free to simply pack his things and go search for his sister. He could leave his studies to find Brigita, of course. But at what cost?

Quickly re-dressing in a simple shirt and jerkin and pulling on
brown breeches over his stockings, he tied the laces in the front of the jerkin, adjusted the billowing sleeves of his shirt, and stepped back into his shoes. He was almost completely resolved; he would not leave now. But as soon as lectures recessed after this term, he would take his horse, Jäger, and head for Braunschweig, searching every convent along the way.

When he opened his door, he saw that the children had migrated from Matthäus and were now gathered around Diefenbach. As he passed them, he heard the man describe a knight’s dangerous journey in a foreign land. On the other side of the hearth, Sïfrit was trying to corner Marlein behind the table. Relief smoothed the features of her face when she glanced in Heinrich’s direction and saw him approaching.

“There you are, Sïfrit!” he called. “We were just wondering where you’d got off to.” He strode over and clapped the younger, slightly shorter man on his shoulder.

“Heinrich.” He stepped back, allowing Marlein to move out from behind the table with the roughly carved wooden bowls she had gone there to retrieve. “Well, if there’s nothing I can do to help,” Sïfrit said, “I’ll go and visit with your father, Marlein. Someone’s got to keep those rascals from bothering him.”

Heinrich felt a smirk tilt his lips as he met Marlein’s eyes. They both knew how her father adored the children and cherished his time with them.

“Heinrich, would you pull the chicken pies from the oven?” she asked as she picked up a knife. “I made bread earlier—when Netta spilled the barley—and need to cut it now; I’d ask you to, but you nearly destroyed the last loaf you cut.”

“Of course,” Heinrich laughed. He helped her on occasion, when she couldn’t quite manage the children and the food at the same time. He was mildly heartened by the knowledge that she had grown com-
comfortable asking him for help when she needed it; she so seldom did. With little difficulty, he managed to pull the golden pastries enveloping pieces of chicken onto the paddle and remove them from the low oven. Two years ago, Marlein had been so excited when the stone mason completed the small, dome-shaped structure. It now felt as much a part of the rectangular fireplace as he felt of the family.

Marlein had just finished cutting the hearty bread into chunky slices when he carried the paddle with the chicken pies over to the table. Heinrich learned upon moving to Wittenberg that while the Diefenbach household indulged more than his spendthrift father had, the finer, more costly wheat flour was still reserved for special occasions. Barley and oat breads were most commonly found on Marlein’s table.

Everyone sat at the table, listened to Diefenbach recite the obligatory blessing, and began eating. Several of the family’s wooden bowls had been broken or lost over the years, so the children shared two to a bowl, and the servant, Steffan, ate balancing his food on a piece of the hearty bread. Keterlyn still did not come out. Instead, Marlein carried a bowl into her parents’ room and returned with little Fridolin on her hip. She sat and began to eat too, handing her brother, who’d turned a year old in the summer, pieces of food from her bowl. The toddler chortled happily with each bite, clapping chubby hands and bobbing his white-blonde head merrily. Lively conversation swirled around Heinrich, the food warming and filling him until he felt mostly content with his decision to wait for word from Brigita—for the time being. Wishing he could pray as Luther encouraged them to—as children to their dear father—he instead merely hoped. He felt that he could bear any circumstance so long as his sister had not taken any lasting vows; he did not wish to be alone in a world where his only relative was cloistered far away from him.