

The Reformation of Wolfshausen Teil Vier, 1521

Vater Karl left his appointment with Gretchen unaware of the great events now set in motion. He considered Brother Luther, the Augustinian monk who had recently been condemned. The selling of indulgences had made refugees before Luther.

Albrecht Von Hohenzollern, the second son of Brandenburg's prince had seen his older brother advance to their late father's power. Incompetent at poisoning, Albrecht had taken the alternative route to power of education and the Church. Through devotion and bribery, Albrecht had risen at a very young age to become Archbishop of Mainz. The position came with much power and many honors, the least of which was that Vater Karl now owed Albrecht fealty.

Albrecht owed debts from his ascent. Pope Leo, tenth of that name, needed money to rebuild Saint Peter's Basilica. Germans needed a lot of redemption. An industry, an era and a nation found one another, under the auspices of two great Church leaders. The selling of indulgences, forgiveness of sin in exchange for coin or credit, became a great enterprise.

Vater Karl had been a diligent priest. He loved to hear the confessions of the poor folk in Marburg whose sins were so small and felt so large, like a pebble in the shoe. He loved to drink beer in the evening in the brewhouses down Pilgrimstein road and return to his cell to read the Holy Scriptures by lamplight until dawn.

In 1518, the year Albrecht became a Cardinal, Phillip turned 14 and took power as the Landgraff of Hessen. Phillip was as magnanimous as Albrecht was greedy. The generosity of Marburg and the greed of Mainz met at St. Elizabeth's. To Karl it felt as if they met in his chamber.

For two years, the government nurtured the wealth of the people and the agents of the Archbishop tended to their sins, offering forgiveness to donors. So great were the sins of the people, that as much as Phillip offered, Albrecht received.

A year before, a man had come into the confessional to expiate a terrible sin. Karl recognized the voice as that of Ernst Schüldenschild, a prosperous merchant well loved by the townsfolk and especially his cheerful wife, Hildegard.

Between sobs, Herr Schüldenschild explained that he had been drunk the night before and seduced a barmaid. When their adultery was complete, he had come to his senses and seen the sadness in the barmaid's eyes. He fell in love then and there and had been unable to speak a kind word to his wife. He begged for Vater Karl to pray that his soul be cleansed.

“You must clean your own soul,” Vater Karl had answered. “But if you pray to Mary fifteen times, God will forgive your sin. Heaven is open to you if you repent, but the door to your home will close unless you repent. And the door to the brewhouse is always open, but maybe pretend it is not for now.”

“Thank you,” Herr Schüldenschild cried, said his assigned prayers and left for home.