

Martin Luther, I presume?
By Deanna Smid

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Characters:

Morton Lufer
Lufer's wife
Martin Luther
Katie Luther
Assassin 1
Assassin 2
Pub patron 1
Pub patron 2
Pub patron 3
Pub patron 4

The year is 1521, and Martin Luther has been condemned as a heretic by the Holy Roman Emperor. The Edict of Worms has allowed any person to kill Luther without penalty, and it is a crime to give him food or shelter. One common German shoemaker, though, seems oblivious to the political and theological upheavals in his country. This man is Morton Lufer, who leaves his wife at home (once again) to visit the pub after a long day of work. At the pub, Lufer is constantly bothered by strangers who mistake him for some other person: a man by the name of Martin Luther. All he wants to do is drink and gamble in peace at the pub, but poor Lufer has a very different evening in store for him. Will he ever return safely to his wife? And does he want to?

Scene 1: Outside Morton and Helga Lufer's house. Morton is alone on stage, and Lufer's wife is heard from off stage.

Morton: Wife, I'm off to the pub!

Lufer's wife: Again? Morton, why don't you stay home tonight?

Morton: And do what? I want to drink lager and play games with my friends.

Lufer's wife: We have lager at home.

Morton: And games?

Lufer's wife: We could play a round of pochspiel.

Morton: Nah, I think I'll be off to the pub.

Lufer's wife: Why don't you take me with you?

Morton: Who will take care of the children?

Lufer's wife: Hansel and Anna are asleep. They will be fine on their own for an hour or two.

Morton: That doesn't sound safe to me. You should stay with them to make sure that brigands and ne'er-do-wells don't have a chance to break into our home.

Lufer's wife: We have nothing of value to steal!

Morton: [*walking away*] I couldn't catch that, my dearest.

Lufer's wife: Take me with you!

Morton: See you in the morning!

[*Morton exits the stage*]

Lufer's wife: Morton Lufer, either come back here or take me with you!

[*Morton re-enters, onto a pub scene*]

Morton: Well, well, there are a lot of strangers in the pub tonight. No matter, I'll start with a lager. A man can drink lager with any man, friend or stranger. [*He sits at a table, next to Pub Patron 1*]

Morton: It's a chill night tonight, stranger. I will be happy to let a lager warm my bones.

Pub Patron 1: And so it is, sir.

Morton: The name's Morton Lufer.

Pub Patron 1: Martin Luther! What an honour to meet you! I've been following your bold call for reformation in the Roman church. Ever since you nailed those theses to the church door, the Roman church has been quaking in its heretical boots.

Morton: Theses? Reformation?

Pub Patron 1: All of Germany, nay, the world, has been stirred by your courageous actions.

Morton: Well, I'm just a cobbler. I make incredible leather shoes, but I wouldn't call that a courageous action.

Pub Patron 1: Ah, Martin Luther, you are too modest.

Morton: I see the problem here. My name is Lufer, Morton Lufer. I am cobbler from this town, and certainly not some theses-writing hero.

Pub Patron 1: Sure, sure, Mr. Lufer. I know all about the Edict of Worms.

Morton: The Edict of Worms?

Pub Patron 1: Yes, the Emperor has allowed anyone to kill you, without consequence. How you must suffer, Martin.

Morton: No really, my name is Morton. And I'm a cobbler. Look! I made these shoes myself! I can make this sort of shoe in many different styles and colours, and for a modest fee, I can add laces, a buckle, or a taller heel. Whatever you like.

Pub Patron 1: Don't worry, Mr. Luther. I can keep your secret.

Morton: I have no secrets to keep, and my name is Lufer. Lufer!

Pub Patron 1: [*To Pub Patron 2*] Friend! Come and join us.

Pub Patron 2: I would be happy to share a lager with you.

Pub Patron 1: Never mind the lager. Look at who is sitting with me.

Pub Patron 2: I don't think we've met.

Morton: My name is Morton Lufer.

Pub Patron 2: Martin Luther!

Pub Patron 1: Exactly!

Morton: No, no. Listen carefully: Mor-ton...

Pub Patron 1 and 2: Mar-tin...

Morton: Lu-fffffer.

Pub Patron 1 and 2: Lu-thththther.

Morton: Argh!

Pub Patron 2: What an honour to meet you, Mr. Luther.

Pub Patron 1: That's what I said to him, too.

Morton: And I'll say it again, my name is Morton Lufer.

Pub Patron 2: I can understand that you would want to hide your identity. You are certainly unpopular in some circles. Why, the Emperor has made it a crime for anyone to feed or shelter you.

Morton: That sounds quite incredible, but it wasn't me! I make shoes. And to be honest, I'm not even all that good at it. My wife is constantly telling me that I should have been a farmer.

Pub Patron 2: Haha, Mr. Luther. You have a reputation for being a man of high humour.

Pub Patron 1: Your wife? Do you mean Katherina von Bora?¹

Pub Patron 2: Oh, I have heard great things about her. Wasn't she a nun who escaped her abbey by hiding among fish barrels on a covered wagon? And didn't she refuse many offers of marriage because she wanted you, only? And doesn't she run all of your business operations at the former monastery where you live? Doesn't she breed and sell cattle, operate a brewery, and run a hospital? Isn't it said that she wakes up every morning at 4:00 am because of all of her duties?

Morton: No, my wife's name is Helga, and she's the daughter of a stable master. She's nothing special, really.

Pub Patron 2: Nothing special?

Morton: No, I mean, all she does is take care of the household. She buys goods for the children and I, she makes warm clothing for winter, she wakes up early to make food for the family, she knits blankets and sews quilts, she makes shirts that she sells in the market, and she takes care of our real estate transactions. She also hosts a Bible study in our house. But I'm the one who works.

Pub Patron 1: Katherina von Bora does all of that? So the stories are true!

Morton: Helga. And it's not much at all. Look, I make shoes! [he shows his shoes again]. Have you ever seen leather stitching so precise? And look at the quality of the leather! I only use the best. My prices are very reasonable, too.

Pub Patron 2: Yes, yes. We will keep your secret. Wink, wink, right Mr. Luther?

Morton: Lufer! [he pushes back from the table] I think I shall find my lager elsewhere. [He walks to another table. While he is in the pub, Patron 1 and 2 follow him with their eyes, looking proud, and whispering to each other from time to time]

[Morton sits at a table, alone, until Patron 3 approaches him]

¹ Martin and Katharina married in 1527.

Patron 3: Is this seat taken?

Morton: Please, sit.

Patron 3: I've been travelling for hours this day, and it's a pleasure to stop for a drink, conversation, and maybe a game.

Morton: Do you play Pochspiel?

Patron 3: Indeed I do!

Morton: Then shall we play?

[Patron 3 and Morton roll dice, and Morton wins]

Morton: Aha! And the first round goes to Morton Lufer!

Patron 3: Martin Luther!

Morton: Morton Lufer, and shall we play another round?

Patron 3: Indeed not! I never play this game at all, and I'm surprised that you would try to trick me like this.

Morton: Trick you?

Patron 3: To think that I am playing Pochspiel with Martin Luther.

Morton: It's Morton Lufer, and why would that be a problem?

Patron 3: Aren't you opposed to gambling of all sorts?

Morton: We haven't laid a wager yet, and why do you think I'm opposed to gambling?

Patron 3: Didn't you say, "Money won by gambling is not won without sin and self-seeking sin"?

Morton: That doesn't sound like me.

Patron 3: I'm sure that I read that in one of your books.

Morton: Books? Friend, you seem confused, I haven't written any books. I'm a cobbler.

Patron 3: So you didn't write, condemning someone, "He had been absent from sermons for a whole month, and held, as it were, an open mart of gambling and dissipation"?²

Morton: I'm quite sure I didn't.

Patron 3: But....Oh right! Of course you didn't! That second one must have been John Calvin.

Morton: John Calvin?

Patron 3: Yes, Mr. Luther. I'm sorry I confused you with him.

Morton: It's Lufer, and you don't have to call me mister. Morton is fine.

Patron 3: Oh, I wouldn't dare to call you Martin, Mr. Luther.

Morton: It's Morton Lufer. I'm not much for writing. I prefer making shoes, playing Pochspiel, and drinking.

Patron 3: Oh, you do have quite a reputation for drinking. Didn't you say, "Whoever drinks beer, he is quick to sleep; whoever sleeps long, does not sin; whoever does not sin, enters Heaven! Thus, let us drink beer!"

Morton: I'm sure I didn't, but that sounds like it was written by someone I would like to meet.

Patron 3: Oh Mr. Luther, you are so funny.

Morton: I'm not finding any part of this funny. In fact, I think I shall move on to find others who might be more interested in Pochspiel. [*He moves to another table. Patron 3 keeps following him with his eyes, as Patron 1 and 2*]

Morton: [*to Patron 4*] Sir, are you going to say anything about theses, about a woman named Katherina, about my interest in gambling, or about John Calvin?

Patron 4: I'm just here to drink, and maybe sing some songs later in the evening.

Morton: Excellent. I will join you in the drinking and the singing.

Patron 4: Delighted. I'm a stranger to this town, so it's a pleasure to share my drink.

Morton: A stranger, eh? There seems to be a lot of strangers in town today.

Patron 4: It must be because of the meeting of the peasants.³

² From a letter to Farel, 1539.

³ Before the Peasant's War.

Morton: I don't know anything about that. I once went to a meeting of the cobbler's guild, but I mostly mind my own business.

Patron 4: And what is your name, new friend?

Morton: My name?

Patron 4: Yes, your name.

Morton: It's...Morton.

Patron 4: Morton! How nice to meet you.

Morton: It's Morton!

Patron 4: Yes, I heard you the first time, Morton.

Morton: Oh. Ha. People have been mishearing my name all evening, and confusing me with some other fellow.

Patron 4: Oh? Who do they think you are?

Morton: I'd rather not say.

Patron 4: Fair enough. Shall we get back to the drinking? [*They drink in silence for a moment*].
Morton! Where have I heard that name before?

Morton: Oh no, not again.

Patron 4: I think my uncle has a good friend named Morton.

Morton: Really?

Patron 4: Yes, he is a butcher, or cooper, or cobbler, or something.

Morton: I'm a cobbler!

Patron 4: I wondered about that. I noticed your shoes immediately. Could you be my uncle's friend? What is your surname?

Morton: It's Lufer.

Patron 4: Martin Luther?

Morton: Morton Lufer.

Patron 4: Martin Luther, I am so pleased to make your acquaintance. Wow, will my wife be impressed when I tell her that I shared a drink with Martin Luther.

Morton: You've shared a drink with lowly Morton Lufer, a cobbler from this town.

Patron 4: I guess I shouldn't be surprised that you're here. After all, you must be on your way to the peasant's meeting.

Morton: Nope.

Patron 4: Tell me, what are you going to say to the angry peasants?

Morton: Look, I don't know this Martin Luther chap, and I'm sick of hearing his name. Didn't you say that you wanted to sing?

Patron 4: Of course, Mr. Luther. I didn't mean to offend you. Why don't you sing *your* song?

Morton: Do you know my favourite song?

Patron 4: Of course! We all do. It's becoming quite a classic.

Morton: Huzzah! [*he stands on his chair and addresses the whole pub*] I'll start the singing, and you can all join in. Even though the pub is full of outsiders tonight, I'm sure all German lager-loving people know this one!

[*He begins "Ein Prosit," but the rest of the pub starts murmuring and looking uncomfortable*]

Morton: [*notices the awkward silence and falters to a halt*] Why aren't you singing along?

Patron 4: Ah, Mr. Luther?

Morton: Lufer.

Patron 4: That isn't your favourite song.

Morton: Oh really? And what is, pray tell?

Patron 4: We'll sing the first verse. [*Patron 4 starts singing "A Mighty Fortress," and he urges the rest of the pub patrons—and the audience—to join in*]

1. A mighty fortress is our God,
a bulwark never failing;
our helper he amid the flood
of mortal ills prevailing.
For still our ancient foe
doth seek to work us woe;

his craft and power are great,
and armed with cruel hate,
on earth is not his equal.

Morton: I don't know it, but it sure is catchy.

Patron 4: You are too modest, Mr. Luther.

Morton: That's it! I am going home. I've had enough of this Martin Luther business. [*He strides to the door, but Martin and Katie are entering and blocking the doorway*].

Morton: Please stand aside, strangers, I'm leaving this pub.

Martin: Already? The night is yet young.

Katie: And there's no need to call us strangers. I'm Katie and this is Martin Luther.

Morton: MORTON LUFER! My name is Morton Lufer, not Martin Luther.

Martin: Of course, because that's my name.

Morton: Martin Luther? You're Martin Luther?

Katie: He definitely is.

Morton: You're the man who called for reformation in the Roman Catholic church, who nailed theses to some door, who is under sentence of death by the Edict of Worms, who has some amazing wife, who is opposed to gambling, and who wrote a catchy hymn.

Martin: You are too kind.

Morton: And you, you must be Katherina von Bora.

Katie: Please, call me Katie. And do you have a wife?

Morton: Yes, Helga. I'm going home to her now.

Katie: She isn't here with you?

Morton: Of course not. She never goes out with me at night, even though she wants to sometimes. She's too busy making clothing, knitting, quilting, reviewing her business transactions, preparing food, and studying the Bible. But why are you here? Why is a famous theologian in a pub?

Katie: Sir Doctor is living at Wartburg Castle right now, translating the Bible into Greek. But he doesn't hear any "real" people speaking German. He wants the Bible to be in the German that ordinary people speak at home, in the market, and in pubs.⁴

Morton: You're translating the Bible?

Martin: Yes, I am. I believe everyone should be able to read the Bible in his own language.

Morton: The whole Bible?

Martin: The whole thing.

Morton: How far are you now?

Martin: I've just finished with Proverbs.

Morton: That's my least favourite book, along with Ruth and Esther.

Katie: Why?

Morton: It's a book for girls. All that stuff about the godly woman? Bah.

Katie: I'm not sure that our friend Philip...

Martin: Philip Melancthon

Katie: ...Would agree. He wrote a lovely commentary on that chapter: He says, "Faith can never be idle, and in male and female does the work proper to each...Peter enjoins [women] to be of a modest and gentle spirit, that is, to be chaste and yet not peevish, serious and not irritable. Virtually the same duties are taught in [Proverbs 31]: to have the fear of God and faith, to be chaste, diligent in taking care of the household, and generous toward the poor."⁵

Morton: Who could find a woman like that? I mean, take my Helga for instance... [*he stops and thinks. Martin and Katie are silent while they watch him with amused and encouraging smiles. Morton eventually comes to the realization that Helga is, indeed, a woman just like the one described in Proverbs 31*]

Morton: [*to Martin and Katie*] Excuse me. I must go.

Katie: Where are you going?

⁴ Luther lived at Wartburg in 1521.

⁵ From Melancthon, *Nova Scholia*. Translated by Al Wolters.
<https://macsphere.mcmaster.ca/bitstream/11375/13603/1/fulltext.pdf>

Morton: [*already on his way across stage, calls over his shoulder*] To my wife! [*He takes a few steps away from the pub, humming the tune of "A Mighty Fortress", and just then two assassins emerge from hiding and stand in front of him*].

Assassin 1: Martin Luther?

Assassin 2: Prepare to meet your Maker.

Morton: What? Why?

Assassin 1: We have been sent by Mary to kill you for the havoc that you have wrecked on the Roman church.

Morton: Mary? Do I know her?

Assassin 1: Mary, by the Grace of God, Queen of England, France, and Ireland, Defender of the Faith.

Assassin 2: I thought we were sent by Emperor Charles V.

Assassin 1: Is that right?

Assassin: I'm quite sure.

Morton: Either way, you've made a mistake. My name is Morton Lufer.

Assassin 1: Exactly! And killing you is our mission, Martin Luther.

Assassin 2: Ready your soul! [*he rushes at Morton. In the struggle, Morton relieves him of his sword and knocks him down*].

Assassin 1: You may have defeated my comrade, but you shall not be lucky with me. [*He rushes at Morton, but Morton knocks him down as well. As he is sinking down to the ground, Assassin 1 groans to Assassin 2*]: We should have attacked him together.

Morton: You won't take Morton Lufer for granted again.

[*Martin and Katie, noticing the struggle, rush out of the pub and join Morton*]

Martin: Morton, what happened?

Morton: They were sent for you, Martin.

Katie: By whom?

Morton: Mary of England or Emperor Charles V. They weren't quite clear on that point. I think it was Charles V.

Martin: But Morton, how did you manage to defeat them? From the look of your shoes, I thought you were a cobbler.

Morton: That's right, I am a cobbler. I am a wizard with a needle [gestures to the sword].

Katie: And you are sure that you are unharmed?

Morton: Yes, and so are these men [*gestures to the assassins*]. They might have sore heads for a while, but they will be fine.

Martin: You are a good man for sparing them, Morton.

Morton: I am a good man.

Assassin 1: [*groaning and reaching out to Morton*] Martin... [*Morton pokes him with the sword*].

Assassin 2: [*groaning and reaching out to Morton*] Luther... [*Morton pokes with the sword*].

Martin: [*giving Morton a reprovng look*] Blessed are the merciful...

Morton: I only stabbed them lightly! I guess I'm a work in progress. But Martin, you must be careful. There are those angry enough to want you dead.

Martin: I have friends in very high places, Morton.

Katie: And weren't you going somewhere?

Morton: Of course! [*He runs off stage, calling*] Helga, I'm on my way home!

Exeunt.