

Very early attempts: Husker Du

Clank, clank, clank... cough. Nils heard Knut's signal and instantly disconnected the radio. In the dim, cramped space of the tiny attic, he worked as swiftly and silently as possible to arrange everything exactly as it should be to avoid suspicion. The radio and its antenna wires were lowered into the space below the floorboards. Sheets of yellowed newspaper were placed on top, edges fitted carefully among layers of newspaper used as insulation between the joists.

Nils gently reset the floorboards in place. Tugging on a small woven rug, he slid a heavy, carved chest across the space, making sure not to disturb the dusty surface. As he backed out of the low crawl space, he placed his feet on the worn runner leading to the trap door, leaving no footprints in the dust and allowing many large cobwebs to remain undisturbed. This was no small feat, since the windows facing the road were hung with heavy canvas, blocking the light from the late evening sun.

Nils was sitting near the parlor window reading the newspaper when Knut stepped through the kitchen door. While Knut scrubbed the garden soil from under his fingernails, Nils called out to him, "So, brother, who is winning the potato war, you or the beetles?"

"The potatoes are in their foxholes and I'm still mounting a good defense," he laughed. Don't worry, we'll have enough to keep your belt fitting tight!" he teased.

Hours later, the two young brothers sat fishing in their small skiff on Sørfjord far from the homes lining the shore and mountainside of Ytre Arna. In the semi-light of the clear mid-summer night, only their silhouettes could be seen, heads bent close together. All was still, but even with no one visible on the roads or near the shore, they kept their voices as soft as the murmur of the waves slapping against the sides of the boat.

"It was 'The Rat' tonight," Knut said.

News from England was broadcast at the same time each evening. All too often, it was at about the same time that a German soldier or officer would appear to stroll down the road to the edge of the fjord. The occupying army had been there only a few months, but the neighbors had already given many of

them nicknames. The young corporal they called 'the rat' had a long, sharp nose, with a bristly mustache above his thin lips.

"There wasn't much time to listen before he showed up, so there is little to tell," Nils reported. The brothers had worked out a pattern of taking turns tending their garden and listening to the radio in the evening at the time when they could receive broadcasts from England. The "garden watch" would signal when a German was spotted at the crest of the road, scraping the shovel three times on a rock, followed by a single cough. Their picturesque road was named Sjøbrotet, meaning "down to the sea", and a soldier seen on the hilltop could be expected to continue his stroll to the water's edge, leading him right past their door.

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Since the earliest days of the German invasion, newspapers and local broadcasts had been under Hitler's control. All news was censored, altered, or simply fabricated. The content was sheer propaganda. The brothers had one of the only undiscovered radios on their side of the fjord. Everyone in the area relied on them for news of the war's progress.

The brothers knew the risks involved. When the German army arrived in Norway on April 9, 1940, they claimed to come as friends, to offer "protection" from the Allied Forces (England, France, and many others). They had expected no resistance, and there were some in Norway who believed it to be safer or wiser to cooperate with Hitler's forces.

Quisling, a minor politician in Norway, led the attempt to hand over the capital without a fight. As dearly as Norwegians may have desired peace and neutrality, no true patriot would accept the loss of their king, their government, their resources, or their freedom without a fight.

The allies lent support to the five Norwegian divisions offering armed defense in the southern half of the country. This forced Hitler's hand, and he promptly issued a declaration of war against Norway. Within only a few weeks the Allies and the army of Norway were in retreat, but not without achieving some remarkable successes.

King Haakon and the chief cabinet officers escaped the country and were able to relocate to England, taking with them their nation's gold reserves. From there they participated fully with the Allies in the continuing efforts to defeat Hitler. The massive Norwegian merchant fleet sailed to Britain to join that effort, depriving the German's of the ready-made naval resources they had expected to claim. It was only through remarkable courage and ingenuity that these accomplishments were achieved.

In the months since then, there were tireless and daring efforts from within the country to resist, subvert, and in every possible way defeat the Germans.

The massive invading force had moved in like the well-oiled war machine that it was. Homes were searched on the slightest whim, or with no excuse at all. People were detained, questioned, and confined in forced-labor camps. Some were even tortured and killed.

On the surface the Germans claimed that the local citizens could keep their way of life "normal". According to Hitler's warped and dangerous beliefs, people of Scandinavia were, after all, members of the "superior Aryan race"- blonde, fair-skinned, blue-eyed. Hitler publicly claimed the people of Norway as "brothers", much to the disgust of Norwegians. This belief made for a less severe occupation than that of other countries, like Poland. But the Norwegians were no more free than the Poles, and the Germans were no less hated there than in southern Europe. Daily life in Norway only offered a façade of "normal".

Much of the charming city of Bergen on the Southwest coast reflected its medieval roots as a trading hub. Although smaller than Oslo in the east, Bergen had developed extensive business, industrial, medical, and cultural facilities. Located on the North Sea coastline, nestled in a ring of seven sloping mountains, Bergen provided access to the many deep fjords stretching into Norway's interior. Tempered by Gulf Stream winds, the west coast climate is milder than the rest of the country, making it an ideal site to headquarter the German occupation forces. Stretching across the back slopes of the seven mountains are small villages. One of those, Ytre Arna, hugs the north shoreline of Sør fjord , South Fjord.

It's on this mountainside looking down on Ytre Arna that our story resumes.

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Nils and Sonja sat on a blanket on a sunny slope of grass. They had been riding bikes, hiking, and skiing together on Saturday afternoons since they were in grade three. Over the years they gathered lupines and wild berries, exploring and chasing throughout the timberline above their village, Ytre Arna. Since those long-ago schooldays Sonya's blonde braids had matured to a honey-brown pageboy bob, her cherubic face had transformed to the beauty of a lively, lovely young woman. What had not changed were her wit, curiosity, intelligence, and gentle nature. Nils, on the other hand, looked like a taller version of his boyhood self. Maturity had transformed his teasing, trickster nature into a real talent for numbers, problem-solving, and responsibility. His clever and light-hearted humor still revealed themselves in his eyes and smile.

It surprised no one when Nils and Sonja grew to be more than friends. Saturdays on the mountainside, after skiing, biking, or sharing a picnic lunch, they also shared their hopes and plans for the future. Looking over the red-tiled rooftops at Sørfjord stretching deep inland and back to Bergen and the North Sea, their prospects for happiness seemed unlimited.

Until the German invasion several months earlier. Since then, planning for the future, for them and for their countrymen, involved thoughts far from idyllic.

During those early months of occupation, Sonja had missed many Saturdays, working extra hours of duty at the hospital in the nearby city of Bergen. Her schedule had often doubled after many of the medical staff had been reassigned to serve at German military camps throughout the southwest coast of Norway. Compared to that, working extra shifts was no reason to complain. At least she could return to their village on some weekends to see Nils and help her parents at home.

On this day Sonja was happy to be home on the mountainside, fussing with the lupines she had gathered. She arranged and wrapped them protectively before tucking them into her backpack.

Nils brushed a strand of hair back from Sonja's face, smiling. Then his expression changed, the look in his eyes suddenly as bleak as a winter storm.

"What is it, Nils," she asked.

"What do you think?" he muttered. "What is it always?"

"Out of bounds!" Sonja forced a laugh. "You know we've agreed not to let the Germans occupy our Saturday afternoons when we are lucky enough to even have them."

"That's just it," Nils spoke quietly, tearing fiercely at the grass with one hand. "As things look now, we may not have any days together. The Germans only get stronger, the Allies are barely holding on. We should have been married in June, and now we're ending summer still unable to make any plans for a real wedding. They've not only stolen our country, they're stealing our lives, our future!" Nils dropped back on the blanket and pulled his arm across his eyes.

Sonja rested her head on her knees for several minutes. When she finally spoke, her voice trembled. "We agreed in June to wait for the war to end, so that our wedding day could be a true celebration. I know that Hitler will be defeated one day, and we will all be free again. But I admit that my hopes for a swift conclusion to the war have faded. I want us to marry, and I don't want to wait for the war to end."

Nils sat up and put his arm around her, brushing a tear from her cheek. "We'll marry, Sonja, we must! But with travel limited and food rationed, we'd only have a simple ceremony with our two families. That would be enough for me, but you deserve a traditional wedding, a day to remember!"

"The day we wed will be special, no matter when, where, or how it happens, Nils. Let's go tell Mama and Papa that we're going ahead with it!"

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In minutes they packed up the rest of their things and began making their way down the rugged trail, trotting alongside their bikes whenever possible. As soon as they reached the gravel road at the edge of the village, they hopped on their bikes and launched a downhill race to Sonja's family home at breakneck speed, arriving breathless and giggling.

Soon Sonja and Nils found themselves in her family's tidy, cozy kitchen. There were hugs and tears all around when Sonja's parents heard the news. For the rest of the afternoon they sat together at the table over many cups of coffee, discussing possibilities and making plans. Family wedding photos were examined and memories plumbed, retelling interesting details of those earlier joyous occasions.

"I want Sonja to have a beautiful wedding day, too," Nils argued, "but we may as well just have a private service with no guests. Even if we could *somehow* save or collect the supplies for the almond cakes, smørbrød, wine, and rømmegrøt for guests, no one could even wear their bunad or wave the flag. You know that even on Constitution Day no gatherings or games took place. I've heard reports that people who dared to raise the flag at their own doorstep were detained and investigated. We have not been free to fly our own flag since the invasion."

"Except where those brave resistance fighters hiding in the mountain forests keep raising our dear flag. No matter how often the Germans remove it or search for them in vain, it always ends up flying somewhere again," chuckled Sonja's papa, standing at attention and covering his heart with his hand. Everyone at the table responded with wide grins, raising their cups to salute his phantom flag.

Sonja said, "I just had a letter from our cousin in Fana. She attended a wedding in July and said many there wore their bunads without a problem from the Germans. In fact, she said the whole town turned out, with everyone feeling quite smug about their good excuse to show their national pride."

Mama smiled, fingering the lace trim and fine stitching on the apron covering her lap. "Ja, so now maybe we can show our resistance with needlework as well as with rifles, I suppose." As the others smiled and offered another toast, Nils stood and walked to the window. There he stared outside, away from the rooftops toward the mountaintops reaching off into the distance.

Sonja followed quietly, resting both hands on his shoulder. "What is it?" she spoke quietly in his ear.

"I should be using my rifle, joining the others to put an end to this war as soon as possible," he insisted, his jaw clenched as tightly as his fists. "You know I've won first place in marksmanship in the Rifle Club contests every year since I was fourteen! And no one skis faster or stronger than I do!"

"No!" Sonja snapped. Then she rested her forehead on his shoulder, took a slow breath, and continued more calmly. "You know I wouldn't try to stop you without a good reason. Since my brothers Rolf and young Bjørn joined the resistance we have heard nothing from them in months." Tears were filling her eyes. "You and Knut *must* stay here. You are the only source of reliable information we have in this area."

"Anyone can operate a radio," Nils grumbled.

"But with your job at the bank, you have a reason to communicate with many towns and districts, and you can even secure passes to travel around the country." Taking his hand, she continued. "And Knut's work for the railroad allows him to pass and receive messages from here to Oslo and beyond. Your work is *vital* to our district, and to all of Norway. You *are* in the resistance!"

Mama and Papa, well aware of Nils' frustration, steered the young couple back to the table. Mama poured more coffee and patted Nils on the shoulder. "Son, we'll make this wedding a time to celebrate, and that will be *our* resistance to this awful occupation by the enemy."