

Discovering Oslo's Secrets

It took very few days for Mari to settle into a routine that was both soothing and unsettling. Whether Lise worked day, evening, or night shifts, the sisters adjusted their sleep schedule and arrived at the hospital early enough for Mari to organize her school work in that isolated little office. Before reporting to her duties Lise spent time explaining various medications and combinations that could mimic contagious diseases, even things as simple as measles. She provided a formulary manual for Mari to study, but reminded her that school assignments were the priority. Mari came to feel almost at home during her long days, uninterrupted or distracted from focusing on studying for eight to ten hours. It reminded her of the time before the invasion, when she was content to read alone for hours on end.

Even though several of Lise's co-workers, including Germans, knew that her sister was visiting, Lise varied their route to and from work and within the building itself. She avoided unnecessary encounters with authorities which could lead to extended conversations and questions. Mari was more confident finding her way through the streets, shops, and landmarks in the city center than she was in the maze of hallways and wards at the hospital. The few people she began to recognize on sight seemed satisfied with a shy nod while Lise flashed her charming smile and made some excuse for hurrying along.

Despite the brutal weather that winter, nearly every day before or after work they bundled up and headed out on some kind of excursion. These trips were an unsettling side of their routine. Everywhere they went Mari encountered uniformed Germans, but the city also swarmed with Quisling's special guards and with Unghird gangs marching, singing, and throwing their weight around. Gestapo headquarters was not far from the hospital and the sight of frightened or bruised citizens being dragged into the building in handcuffs was a

Mari's Hope- trip to Oslo to stay with Lise

daily occurrence, always tearing Mari's memory back to Mr. Meier on the mountainside.

Lise made it a point to introduce Mari to a few select people in various businesses or in ration lines, chatting casually but using language that reminded Mari of her coded reports about the BBC radio broadcasts. After returning home Lise would provide war updates and explain to Mari just a bit about the role each person played in black market trade, in producing or distributing the local resistance newspapers, in organizing religious or educational services in private homes, or dozens of other efforts to foil the Germans.

During the month Mari had been in Oslo Lise made sure that her sister viewed the vast German armada in the harbor, the ever-expanding airfield near the city limits, and even the dreaded Grini prison. Once after a night shift they arrived outside the prison grounds in time to witness morning "exercises". Mari was appalled at the hunched, scrawny bodies of men lined up in columns, sometimes supporting each other to keep their fellow prisoners on their feet. It was difficult to judge their ages, since all appeared withered and worn. Her eyes scoured each face and figure for anything recognizable, any telltale indicator that one of these struggling men might be Bjorn or someone else she knew.

The stark building with its barred windows and austere presence cast morning shadows across the yard and loomed over the men like a hulking monster. When the signal was given to return to their cells, they made their way in an orderly and dignified line, eyes straight ahead to avoid a beating. After the door clanged shut behind the prisoners Mari noticed people who had paused to study faces reluctantly slipped back into the rhythm of the city. Most were women or very old men; some dabbed at their eyes as they left.

When Mari was safely sipping tea at home she asked the question that gripped her heart like a snare on a rabbit's neck. "Bjorn isn't there, is he? They would tell Mama and Papa if he was a prisoner,

wouldn't they?"

Lise ran her index finger around and around the rim of her cup before answering. "No, Mari, they wouldn't tell." She lifted her open hand toward Mari in a sign to wait for more, but Mari's eyes were brimming with tears. "Mari, let me finish. No, Bjorn is not there, as far as we know."

"But you just said there's no way of knowing!" Mari was perched on the edge of her seat, her feet and legs as leaden and stationery as a statue in *Frogner Park*.

"Oh, we have ways of knowing who is there, what is happening to each one, and why. Believe it or not, there are actually a few of those you see in German uniforms who are double agents." Lise waited for Mari to respond, but the news left her speechless. Lise reached to pour more hot water in their cups. "It's true. Our sources go far beyond the BBC reports. Here in Oslo there are many "striped" citizens who cannot be trusted, but some who are working for Norway despite appearing to be our enemies."

Mari's legs sprang to life. She stood, then began to pace the small room, nearly bouncing from wall to wall. Her words tumbled out like a waterfall at spring melt. "It's not safe for you to know all this, Lise. With Erik gone you should come back to Bergen with me. If you don't know who is who and what they really believe, how can you risk helping the resistance at all? Did someone tell you Bjorn is safe? How do you get the news so quickly from around the country? Except for work you haven't left me alone like Papa does when he goes about his secret work."

She stopped mid-pace and stared at her sister, waiting for some response. Mari saw love and concern in Lise's eyes, but nothing to suggest things would change. She slumped onto the sofa and dropped her head onto her knees.

In a moment she felt Lise's arm drape over her shoulder. "It's hard, little one, I know. But you are not alone in feeling so confused and upset. We all feel the same at times, then we gather our wits and

Mari's Hope- trip to Oslo to stay with Lise

push forward. We all do what we can in our own way, including me.”

Mari sat up and looked into her sister's eyes. “Are there any women prisoners at Grini?”

Lise tugged Mari's shoulder so they leaned back into the sofa side by side, holding hands. “Women are arrested, interrogated, even tortured. At this time none are prisoners at Grini. Don't worry, Mari, my role in all of this is minor compared to those who take the greatest risks. *They* are the targets of the Gestapo, not me.”

Mari felt the noose around her heart loosen just enough that it began to beat again.

Lise used her free hand to rub her forehead. “I stay involved enough to learn the news from the rest of the country. Oslo is the hub of all train traffic in Norway, so messages move in and out of the city surprisingly well, at least for now. That's how we heard so quickly about Mama and Papa being safe at home, and about the teachers' refusal to join the union, and even about the arrests. It's also why I stay here.”

Mari wondered every day while working on her assignments just which teachers had been arrested and which were still waiting for school to reopen. Quisling did not expect the nearly unanimous rejections of his “Nazification” of the unions, so he had few enforcement options available.

Bestemor had been right about Hitler needing Norway's laborers and businesses to keep working, Instead, Quisling focused his anger on a single group, the most respected and beloved of all. Schools would reopen in March, but one thousand teachers were arrested and shipped to labor camps in northern Norway. Their classes would be taught by Germans. The other refusals— parents, physicians, tradespeople— were being ignored as if their confrontations had never occurred.

Lise interrupted Mari's dismal thoughts. “It was a long shift last night, and we both need to sleep now.” She stood and closed the blackout curtains to block the midday sun. “You'll be heading home in

Mari's Hope- trip to Oslo to stay with Lise

just a few days, but for now you're stuck with my crazy schedule, and that means it's bedtime!"

"I'll clear these things and be in to join you soon," Mari said. By the time she crawled under the covers Lise was breathing steadily. Mari expected to lie awake for hours, but within minutes she was dreaming of Bjorn, camouflaged in white, planting Norway's flag on a snow-covered mountain peak.

* * *

Several days later the sisters were washing dishes before Lise's new roommate arrived to meet Mari and bring a few of her things to the apartment. Until Mari returned home, Eva would deliver a bag or box of belongings each day to make the move easier. Her parents were required to house additional soldiers so she was eager to exit their home before the soldiers moved in. If they arrived before Mari's departure, Eva could sleep on Lise's sofa. She was more than grateful to avoid their attention.

Lise handed Mari a plate to dry and put away. "Eva's right to worry, you know. You've seen the way the German soldiers flirt and even bully the pretty girls to spend time with them. Eva is exactly what they're looking for— a blond, blue-eyed "Aryan" woman, a fine example of the superior white race! How anyone can believe in such idiocy is beyond me, but using those lies to destroy entire countries is madness."

Mari nodded, recalling the BBC reports of Jewish deportations in France and Poland. There were rumors of prison camps much worse than Grini, but even Lise couldn't confirm that. It was hard for Mari not to stare at the many girls who welcomed the German's attention. When she asked Lise about it she scowled and said each had her own reasons, many having to do with living an easier life. She said some at the hospital did it for better jobs and pay, or even to take part in glamorous events, parties, and German celebrations. The more "Aryan" a woman was, the better her chances of being courted by the most powerful officers.

Mari's Hope- trip to Oslo to stay with Lise

Lise continued. "I'll be off work for two days at the start of the week so we'll be busy organizing your new wardrobe,"

Mari was relieved to think about something else. Her many outgrown clothes from home had sold easily. The quality of the fabric and stitching were desirable, and they were in excellent condition. Supplies were scarce since raw materials like wool were diverted to make uniforms, blankets, and necessities for the German soldiers. Every scrap that could be recycled was highly valued. At one trading center a woman told of her sons all offering the back panels of their best shirts so she could make a pretty new dress for her littlest daughter's birthday. The boys said they'd wear sweaters over the shirts and no one would know— they would put up a brave front!

Lise's chatter and Mari's thoughts were interrupted by a knock on the door.

"I'll get it," Mari said, hanging the towel on a hook. "I'm excited to meet Eva." She hurried to the door, slid back the bolt and clicked open the lock. She swung the door open and nearly sang out, "Welcome, I'm Mari!"

Standing in the doorway was Leif, complete in Unghird uniform shirt and armband.

"I know that, silly, but I appreciate your cheery welcome. Oslo has been good for you."

* * *

Mari was anxious to see her family and friends again, but dreaded the trip home. When the sisters received word from Ytre Arna that school would reopen and someone was coming to travel with Mari, they assumed it would be Papa or Doctor Olsen. She would honestly prefer making the trip alone rather than being escorted for hours on end by Leif. She'd learned enough about looking contagious to assure she'd be on her own.

Lise's suggestion to switch the tickets to the night route meant she could pretend to sleep most of the trip and avoid conversation. Still,

Mari's Hope- trip to Oslo to stay with Lise

she dreaded spending even one minute in the presence of Leif's smug and pompous jabbering.

During his short visit to the apartment that evening Mr. Jensen's arrest was the first thing Leif reported. He feigned concern but insisted that it was for the good of Norway and necessary for Germany to maintain discipline and order. He followed that by handing Mari a letter from Papa, a letter telling her to travel home in Leif's company.

Mari fought the impulse to snatch an iron skillet from the drain tray and smash him on the head!

Lise noticed her sister's reaction and intervened. She shifted the conversation to the details of their departure and insisted that they switch tickets to the night train to allow time to finish fittings and sewing. Mari listened numbly and barely nodded to Leif as Lise ushered him out.

Eva stopped by soon after and settled two large boxes into a corner of the living room. Lise hurried her out, too, with the excuse of having a headache. Then she poured cups of steaming tea and allowed Mari to rant and rave, to question her parents' reasoning in sending Leif to escort her home. She interrupted only to remind Mari to keep her voice down.

"How could Mama and Papa do this to me? They know how much I hate Leif!" Mari reached to pour more hot water, but Lise held her hand and shook her head.

"You can ask them when you get home, Mari, but for now, we've got to stop this questioning and get busy." With that she set to work uncovering the sewing machine and brought the stack of second-hand clothing from the bedroom.

* * *

Lise grasped Mari's waist with both hands, tugging at the fabric. A row of pins pressed between her lips made Lise look like she had swallowed a hedgehog. Mari stifled a giggle and forced herself to stay

still. She was so tired of trying on clothes and standing for fittings while Lise tucked and pinned. It felt like they'd been at it all night. She twisted her head as far over her shoulder as she could without moving her torso to catch a glimpse of the wall clock.

"Mari, please," Lise said, pushing the pins into the edge of the pillow under her knees. "Just stand still for a few minutes more. We can't leave all these alterations for Mama to finish, she has too much to do as it is." She stood and began started to work on the shoulder seams in the dress Mari was wearing. "This one is especially good with your coloring. Shortages and physical labor have made you as thin as a reed, but this design suits your changing shape well."

Mari blushed. In the past months her ribs weren't the only things poking through her undershirt. Staying with Lise had been helpful, providing time and privacy to ask questions and learn more about many of the changes that came with being a teen. Changes in her body, her feelings, and in the way the world would view her. Lise insisted that they buy shirts, skirts, dresses, and even undergarments in adult styles and shapes, saying it was easier to take in inches for now and let them out again as Mari grew. Wearing less fashionable styles and keeping her hair in a long braid rather than a bob or more modern cut could help her reduce unwanted attention.

The kroner they earned from selling her outgrown clothes and other things from home produced a surprising fund to buy basic clothing for every season and a few needed pieces for the rest of the family. Mari had adequate sewing skills to raise and lower hems, move buttons, and even stitch down tucks. Mama or Bestemor would have to complete any seam work to make the clothes usable, so Lise was determined to do as much as of that as she could before Mari left the next day.

"There, that should do it. Just watch for the pins as you step out." Lise eased the dress off Mari's shoulders and over her head. "Now get dressed and get back to work packing while I get busy on these."

* * *

She laid her folded clothes out on the bedspread, then turned to organize the special items. She fingered the book Lise gave her, hollowed out like the doctor's and packed securely with small envelopes containing chemicals, dried plants, and other ingredients for Mari to use with her recently acquired training. There were also a few treats, including small rounds of cheese, a kilo of real flour, and some letters from Lise to their family and to Doctor Olsen.

After Leif's short visit that night Mari argued with Lise that these contraband items should be left in Oslo. Her sister understood the fear of discovery, but eventually she persuaded Mari that Leif's presence served as a guarantee of safety and freedom from searches. He would probably carry her bags himself, since he was traveling with only a small backpack.

Mari turned suddenly and perched on the edge of the bed, burying her face in her folded flannel nightgown. The thump-hum-thump of Lise steadily pumping the treadle of the sewing machine reminded Mari of Poe's ***Tell Tale Heart***. In year six Mr. Jensen read it aloud to her class, suggesting that Hitler might well be hearing the heartbeat of Norway, beating out a demand for justice even though buried by the oppressive invaders.

A shudder of anger traveled down her spine. School would reopen with most teachers in place, unpunished. Their unanimous refusal to join the NS union and teach German propaganda was being unofficially ignored by Quisling, but not entirely. The only legal newspaper was ironically named FRITT FOLK. Calling it FREE PEOPLE did nothing to hide the act that it was utter propaganda. It reported "rounding up" one thousand "treasonous" teachers from around the country. They were arrested and shipped to hard labor camps in the north.

The underground papers made it clear that the teachers detained were those who had spoken out as Mr. Jensen had so often done. This was just the latest example reinforcing Mari's comparison of

Mari's Hope- trip to Oslo to stay with Lise

Hitler to Poe's hateful murderer. As the treadle thumped away in the next room Mari pictured their class of only eleven, a small trusted group who had been together since year one. She focused in on Leif sitting in that safe classroom, smiling and nodding as Mr. Jensen spoke in defense of freedom and justice. While she felt safe in his company last year Leif must have been making mental notes to run home and report, marking their teacher as a prime target when an excuse arose.

* * *

Mari jolted to attention, feeling as if she were tumbling down a steep hill. After a moment of confusion she realized she had dozed off sitting at the bedside and woke just in time to prevent landing on the floor. The steady thump-hum-thump of Lise's sewing machine continued while Mari checked the clock near her pillow. Their clothing makeover had begun a little after seven o'clock and it was nearly midnight. The blackout curtains confused time and made Norway's long winter nights feel darker and more depressing than nature ever could. She yawned and resumed packing, rolling contraband items into sweaters and skirts then surrounding them with additional layers of clothing. She clicked the bag shut and turned the small key in both locks. She had witnessed enough violence from the Germans to know that fragile locks wouldn't stop anyone interested in checking the contents. She heaved it off the bed and lugged it to the living room, setting it at the end of the sofa.

Lise looked up and the treadle stopped abruptly. "That took a while. Was there a problem?" She massaged the back of her neck and rolled her head forward, then from side to side.

The shadows under her sister's eyes weren't only from overhead lighting. Mari was flooded with love for Lise who never seemed to feel fear or confusion, never seemed to doubt that this madness would one day end. She reached her side in two long strides and wrapped her in a hug.

"What, Mari?" Lise hugged her sister back and whispered in her

Mari's Hope- trip to Oslo to stay with Lise

ear, "Tell me, little one, what's wrong?"

Mari sighed and stepped away. "Nothing. And everything. Let's get some sleep for now and talk in the morning."

* * *

During a quick breakfast Mari convinced Lise to send the remaining garments home unfinished. Enough of the clothes would fit for spring and she intended to master the sewing machine for herself. She craved more time with her sister, so they spent much of the day on a final tour of Oslo, ending up at the park. There was little wind that day and the sun baked their faces, penetrating layers of wool clothing.

Mari loosened the scarf around her head and dropped it to her shoulders. "The best weather of the winter arrived just in time to to see me off."

Lise lifted her face to the sun's warmth and breathed deeply. "It's always colder here than on the coast, but this winter has been brutal." She wrapped an arm around her sister's waist and leaned her head on Mari's shoulder. "Just remember that the worst winter is always followed by spring, even when you can't feel it coming. It's inevitable, and we can't give up hope."

They sat silently for several minutes. Mari clung to Lise, wishing she could stay. A train ride with Lief was bad enough, but she had come to rely on her sister's advice, her medical training, and the solace of uninterrupted hours to escape into academics.

On the other hand it felt more like a year than a month since she'd seen Bestemor, Mama, and Papa. Despite the elaborate network of underground messages, very little could be learned about individuals and families. Her dread at the thought of returning to school was the opposite of her feelings before the invasion, but she feared pressure to join the girls' youth group. The resistance newspapers reported that

Mari's Hope- trip to Oslo to stay with Lise

Quisling was ignoring the refusals of parents across the country and dropped his demands, but Mari was feeling desperate to hear that from Mama and Papa and see for herself.

The sound of boots approaching interrupted her thoughts.

“Guten Tag, **Fräü Olmsted**. You have no work today?”

A German officer stood before them, blocking the sun, and addressed Lise. Mari squinted up at him and then dropped her eyes without speaking.

“Hilsen, Doctor Braun. My sister returns home tonight so I arranged my schedule to be free today.” Lise stood to speak to him, but barely reached his shoulder so she was staring up into the sun.

“Wunderbar! I have a free afternoon as well. May I treat you both to a farewell dinner?” He offered his arm to Lise and extended his hand to Mari.

Mari struggled to hold still, fighting the impulse to bolt. She didn't dare lift her eyes because even a glimpse of his uniform might trigger an attempt to escape.

“Nie, takk, Doctor Braun. I'm afraid we've wasted most of the day enjoying the weather and have very little time to finish packing.” Lise bent over to collect her bag and tugged at Mari's elbow. Mari's impulse to run was suddenly replaced by a desperate need to remain frozen on the bench, as immovable as one of the many sculptures surrounding them.

“Surely you have enough time for a bit of sweets? Come along to the hotel dining room and I'll have them pack a little box of treats for your journey.” Mari felt his hand on her elbow and clamped her jaw tight to prevent herself from shouting NEI.

Lise squeezed her other arm and urged Mari to her feet. “It's a very kind offer, Herr Doctor, and it is on our way home. If you insist, we'll stop with you for just a few minutes.”

The shock of Lise's words left Mari half stumbling along with her sister's arm linked with hers and the doctor's hand holding the other. Her mind raced, searching for possible reasons why Lise would agree.

Mari's Hope- trip to Oslo to stay with Lise

It wasn't until they reached the end of the block stepped through the lobby entrance that she realized *they* were now two Norwegian girls walking through Oslo along side a German officer. It was all she could do not to wretch on the royal blue carpet.

She felt herself being guided to a small glass table where the officer pulled out two chairs. "I'll only be a moment, I promise." By the time she dared to look up he was out of sight.

Mari leaned toward Lise to demand an explanation but her sister squeezed her hand, smiled brightly, and whispered, "Not now. At home." Lise sat back in her chair and seemed to be examining every inch of the hotel.

Mari concentrated on breathing normally and glanced around. She felt like an injured elk surrounded by a pack of timberwolves. Soldiers and officers hustled in and out of the elevators, seldom pausing for conversations. To her relief, none seemed to even notice them.

Sooner than she expected, the doctor returned. He placed a small bakery box on the table. "It's only some sandwiches and sweets, but you said you were in a hurry. I hope you'll have a safe and easy journey home, young one."

Her sister stood and Mari quickly did the same. Lise picked up the box and shook the doctor's hand. "Danke, Doctor Braun. It is one less task to tend to before time to go." He nodded his head and smiled. Without the sun glaring behind him Mari saw that he was considerably older, perhaps Papa's age, and his eyes looked surprisingly kind. "We appreciate your generosity, don't we, Mari?"

"Ja, takk," she managed to say, ignoring his extended hand. She pushed in her chair and turned onward the doors.

"It's nothing, but I hope you'll find it helpful." He followed them across the lobby and tipped his hat as they left. "Auf Wiederhesen."

As soon as they were out of sight of the hotel, Mari demanded, "What were you thinking?"

Her sister's expression warned her to wait until they reached the relative safety of her apartment.

* * *

While Lise did the supper dishes Mari took one last survey of the bedroom, making sure she wasn't leaving anything behind. It was a struggle to focus on anything after her sister explained the decision to join Dr. Braun. Details were few, but Dr. Braun had gone out of his way to help her several times since he arrived at the hospital in the fall. He was one of the few German staff who knew where Mari studied at the hospital and even obtained a visitor's identification card for her in case someone questioned why she was there. He had shown Lise pictures of his two daughters, close in age to Mari. He missed them terribly. Lise believed he was a genuinely kind man and had observed him treating all patients with equal skill and medications, whether they were Germans or Norwegians or even prisoners.

That did little to remove Mari's objections to being seen with him, to accepting his gifts. She wondered what would be expected of Lise in return for such generosity. When they opened the box at home they found two sandwiches with ham, cheese, and real butter along with four small of cakes. Tucked in the side of the box were a dozen or more extra ration tickets for meat and vegetables. They divided the food and Mari insisted that Lise keep the ration tickets. She was on her own in the city now and had no canned garden foods tucked away in a basement cold storage room as Mari did at home.

Lise stepped in the bedroom. "All set? Leif could be here any minute and you don't plan to sit around and visit, do you?"

Mari moved to the living room and made a half-hearted attempt to look around the tables and shelves for anything of hers. "Not at all. I just want to get this trip over with as soon as possible and get back home."

Lise followed her and tapped her on the shoulder. When she turned Lise handed her a science lab notebook. Lise exaggerated a scolding expression but slipped into a grin despite herself. "I thought you checked the bedroom? Are you giving up science studies?"

Mari took the workbook and tucked it into her backpack. "I just can't seem to think straight. How am I going to get through all those hours with Lief?" She took a moment to rearrange the items to cover the secret lining holding messages and other documents.

"You might change your mind and take the sleeping powders once you are on the train. You still have them, don't you?"

Mari's hand slipped into her pocket and she patted a slim envelope. "Yes, but I won't use that if I can help it. I can't take a chance on being muddy-headed around him. It would be even worse to sleep so deeply he could go through my bags." She tugged the two overloaded cases to the door then walked to the window. "Where is he? It will be dark soon. I really don't want to be out on the street with him past curfew."

She felt her sister's arm around her shoulder and leaned into her arms. She fought back tears and whispered, "Tusen takk for everything. I'll miss you so much. When will I see you again?"

"I'll be going to _____ more often now to see Erik, so I won't get back to Ytre Arna. Perhaps at the holidays again if my schedule permits." Lise stepped back and brushed a tear from Mari's cheek. "You'll be spending time with Doctor Olsen, and you can ask him anything. Even if Mama, Papa, and Bestemor are busy or tired, they want you to tell them when you need help or have questions." She stepped back further and looked at Mari from head to toe, then directly into her eyes. "You're just a young girl, Mari, not even a teenager yet. This invasion has pushed you into chores and worries and secrets only an adult should have to carry. You may look and feel older than you are, but you are always our little one.

* * *

Lief handled the two heavy suitcases with ease, even maneuvering down flights of stairs. Mari followed, clinging to her backpack and the bakery box. In the lobby Lief retrieved his duffle bag and slung it over his shoulder before again hoisting the cases.

Mari's Hope- trip to Oslo to stay with Lise

Near the end of the block Mari glanced back at Lise's window and saw her sister wave, then close the curtain. Mari stayed a half-step behind Lief to ease their way through the evening crowd. When they paused for traffic at intersections Lief turned to her and pointed out various locations and offices he'd visited during this and a previous trip with his Unghurd unit. Mari was relieved to realize that he would rattle on about his adventures and contacts with powerful people whether she responded or not. The most she offered was a slight nod, keeping her gaze focused on the slushy streets. Daylight hours increased gradually as spring neared, but early dusk and blackouts made walking a high-risk activity to avoid stumbling on icy patches and loose cobbles. They reached the station safely with time to spare after confirming their tickets and identifications at their departure platform.

When there were no empty benches he approached a family and nodded toward his armband. The father and two boys stood up and stepped aside. Lief told Mari to sit next to the mother and he sat at the end of the bench.

Mari embarrassment at being his companion kept her from apologizing to the family. She knew what they must think of her because she made the same judgments herself. Lief was never short of words, and he demonstrated that while they awaited arrival of the night train.

All the while Lief's eyes swept the massive station like a lighthouse beacon, probing from one end to the other and back again. Mari followed his gaze and her clenched jaw ached at the sight of propaganda posters on every wall. She nearly gagged at the smells of damp wool uniforms and boot polish mingled with hissing steam and grease. She occasionally muttered "uh-huh" or nodded as Lief rambled on, but she struggled to soften the focus of her vision and hearing until the gray, black, and metallic images blurred into an impressionistic haze.

"Right on time," Lief crowed, standing abruptly at the sight of their

Mari's Hope- trip to Oslo to stay with Lise

approaching train. "Let's go."

Mari's focus returned and she found herself staring at the massive iron wheels grinding to a noisy stop alongside their platform.

"That's German efficiency for you," he said, working his way toward the line that formed. "Come on, Mari, I've got everything."

She wanted to kick him in his booted shin. Norway's trains had always been efficient, as reliable as the men who operated them. Men like her Papa. Germany had NOTHING to do with Norway's trains or any other resources, except to hijack them for their own purposes.

"Mari, what's wrong with you?" Lief had returned to the bench where she stood alone, fuming silently.

She gnawed at the lining of her cheeks to keep from sharing her thoughts, but her glare must have said more than words.

Lief leaned toward her and whispered, "If we're last on we could be separated. If you really want to sit with a soldier for seven hours, suit yourself." He turned on his heel and marched to the line.

Mari caught up and slid into the line beside him, forcing herself to ignore his smirk.

* * *

Mari jolted awake and sat upright. She had been sleeping on Lief's shoulder, but her sudden movement didn't wake him. His head lolled against the seat back, jaw slack, snoring lightly. The train was lit with soft glowing floor lights, blackout curtains secured at every window. She had no idea what time it was or how far they had traveled.

While settling in, Lief had introduced her to several other soldiers and Unghird members he knew, speaking fluent German and exchanging banter. His possessive attitude implied that he was her boyfriend, but she managed to avoid responding by acting confused, shy, and ill. Once they were in the narrow seat she shifted as far from him as she could, clutching her handkerchief and claiming to have motion sickness. Eventually his chattering diminished. Within an hour of departure the lights were dimmed and passengers settled as

comfortably as possible to attempt to sleep. She had not taken the sleeping powders, even when Lief brought her a seltzer water to help settle her stomach. She urged him to nap, insisting that she was fine. She had every intention of staying awake, but the rhythmic sound and rocking of the warm train car was as hypnotic as the roll of a boat on summer water. When she felt her eyes drooping she had bundled her scarf against the window and rested her head. How, then, had she shifted to his shoulder?

She scanned the rest of the car, saw that everyone else was asleep, and attempted to settle in a better position. She reached under her seat for her backpack, but it wasn't where she had left it. She groped frantically beneath her seat and the one in front, snagging a strap. She tugged, but it wouldn't move. Crouching over her lap to find the problem, she felt Lief's hand on her back.

He leaned down and whispered, "What's wrong, Mari, are you sick? Do you need help?"

"Nei, nei. It's my backpack, it's stuck on something."

She fought back her rising panic as Lief stood in the aisle. He knelt and reached under their seat, sliding his duffle out. "That should do it," he said.

She tugged the strap again and her backpack slid out and lifted onto her lap easily. Lief stuffed his bag under the seat and plopped down beside her.

"What do you need from that in the middle of the night?" He patted her bag and grinned at her, adding, "What's in there, gold?" He made a half-hearted attempt at taking the bag from her, but she was too fast for him.

"I'm just trying to get more comfortable," she said, wrapping her scarf around it then wedging the bundle between her shoulder and the window. "I'm sorry I woke you, just go back to sleep."

He scowled and said, "I'm not a thief, Mari. I thought you knew me better than that. A simple 'takk' would be polite, don't you agree?"

For as long as she could remember she thought she knew Lief

well. Now she didn't know him at all, not since the Germans came. But it would be a mistake to upset him. "Of course, Lief, takk for the help. I'm just a very bad traveling companion." She shifted her head toward the window and closed her eyes, willing him to sleep. The train rumbled on endlessly, it seemed, but she didn't hear his rhythmic snore. Finally she turned her head toward him and opened her eyes.

He was watching her with a half smile. He raised one eyebrow, leaned toward her, and whispered, "Having trouble sleeping?"

She was so startled the pack dropped into her lap and her scarf fell to the floor. When she reached to retrieve it she felt the bakery box and lifted it to her lap. She had planned to take the treats home to her family, but perhaps she could distract him from trying to have a conversation. "I guess I'm a bit hungry. I didn't eat before leaving to avoid getting sick, but I think my stomach has adjusted now. Would you like to share?" She kept her focus on the contents of the box, unwrapping and dividing the sandwich. It was made of the softest, freshest bread she'd seen in more than a year, and the ham and cheese portions were generous, smeared with butter. Her mouth began to water despite the drying effects of worry, so she extended half to Lief before she could stuff it all in her mouth.

Lief took it and began eating eagerly. "This is wonderful! Where did you get this? It's as fine as the food they served us at our banquet Sunday evening!"

She noticed that he had stopped chewing and was examining the sandwich carefully, then stared at her intently. Her mouth went dry and her appetite disappeared. She decided to say nothing, instead covering her face with her handkerchief.

"Are you sick again? You really should try to eat. You get little enough decent food. Would some seltzer water help?"

She nodded.

"I'll be right back. If the dining car is closed the porter will get it for me."

What was she thinking to give him food from the hotel? Before she could find a plausible explanation he was at her side, pouring out a tumbler of seltzer and pressing it into her hands. She sipped it between long slow breaths and felt grateful that he didn't press for answers.

He was beaming at her. "It's helping. I thought it would! Now try a bite of that sandwich. It's delicious."

She welcomed an excuse to nibble at her portion as slowly as possible. All the while Lief leaned in, watching her. Suddenly he reached out and pressed the back of his hand against her cheek.

When she pulled away sharply his expression shifted from concern to irritation. "Your face is flushed, Mari, and I wondered if this might be more than motion sickness. The train is warm, but you seem to have a fever. I was worried about you. Why do you treat me like an enemy?"

She chewed slowly, swallowed, held the cloth to her mouth. For all the times she'd struggled to hold back tears in the past two years, this time she worked at producing them. She inhaled the cloth and squeezed her eyes shut until a tear rolled down her cheek.

"What, Mari, what's wrong?" His voice was clipped, sharp, hard to interpret. Anger? Worry? "If Per were sitting here you'd tell him what's wrong, wouldn't you? I've been your friend as long as he has, why won't you trust me, too?"

Why not indeed. She stared into his steel gray eyes, searching for the classmate she had known for years. She bit her tongue, but her eyes gave her away when they shifted to his armband. He noticed and covered it with his other hand. Despite her better judgement she looked again into his eyes and the truth spilled out. "I'll never trust you again."

He spoke through clenched teeth, his face close to hers, his voice barely audible. "Grow up, little girl. Things are not always what they seem. I thought your time in Oslo had taught you what is needed to survive in our new nation." He swatted at the bakery box. "Your sister

Mari's Hope- trip to Oslo to stay with Lise

knows how to make the best of the situation. We never asked for all this," he waved his hand toward the sleeping soldiers surrounding them, "but it's our life now. Some choose to side with power, and they reap the benefits. Others fight it, and suffer the consequences."

Mari pictured the prison yard at Grini.

"Then there are those who lack the courage to choose. Like your family. You eat better than others, your lives are safer than many, and you make the Germans right at home in your house, cooking meals, doing their chores. Yet you feel superior, judging others. Judging me. Look at you. You're not yet thirteen, yet you could pass for sixteen. Inside you're still a baby. Only a baby would think as you do."

When his speech ended he stood, snatched his duffel, and left the passenger car.

Mari sat in stunned silence in the dark, sorting out her fears and anger. She was furious at his accusations, but recognized nuggets of truth in his rant. There were so few things in her present life that were certain, except for one thing: she had made an enemy of someone who could harm her and her family.

Lief didn't return.

When the train pulled into Ytre Arna station about an hour later she saw him exit from the last car and glare at her window before walking away.