

Web of Wyrd

(Part 1 of 4)

A Fateful Visit

By Pete Planisek

Norill's back involuntarily straightened as the front door swung open moments after the hasty knock that preceded the action.

“Guten morgan, may we come in?” one of the Nazi soldiers politely inquired.

The three had already begun to file inside so there was little point in protesting. Norill retreated to the nearest stool lest one of them try to sit next to her on the sofa. She would have offered her companion a look of wariness but to do so would have been pointless. Besides, Vinni could probably already sense her discomfort, even if she couldn't see it.

“And what can I do for you gentlemen today?” Vinni smoothly asked, betraying no fear.

“We heard you playing just now. Mein freund, here ist interested in lessons, like your sign says,” one of the soldiers stated as they all carefully studied the small front room.

“Piano I assume,” Vinni smiled.

Norill shifted uncomfortably and attempted to busy herself so as not to make eye contact with any of the soldiers, especially the one supposedly interested in lessons. Ever since the Nazi's unwelcome arrival in Norway and the town's occupation, it had become very clear to her that he took an active interest in her activities. She was both infuriated and terrified that he now sat in the same room with her.

“Of course, I took lessons as a boy and I’d like to take playing up again,” the soldier asserted.

“Certainly. Norill is one of my more advanced students and volunteers as my assistant sometimes when she is free,’ Vinni explained.

Norill nodded but did not meet their eyes.

“Yes, of course,” her unwanted solicitor replied.

“A most charming companion,” another added, seeing her uneasiness.

“Please describe your role here,” the eldest soldier said, his face passive but his voice leaving no doubt that the “please” was perfunctory. This was an order, not a request.

Norill shuffled some papers, hoping they did not take note of the paperclip on the lapel of her coat. This symbol of Norwegian unity was common enough but under the soldiers’ gaze she still felt abundantly aware of its presence.

“My brother is also blind so I learned braille as a child. I translate music to and from braille for Mrs. Naess,” Norill calmly said as she momentarily met each of their eyes. “I also work at the local book shop.”

“A blind piano teacher,” the eldest soldier remarked as his smug visage regarded Vinni Naess.

The older woman turned back to her piano and began to play; her fingers tracing the braille sheet music.

“Chopin was French,” the eldest soldier scolded.

“Actually he was Polish by birth but I suppose you want something by a Germanic composer,” Vinni noted as she switched effortlessly to Bach.

“It is more fitting given Vidkun Quisling’s cultural decrees for loyal Norwegians,” the eldest soldier commented.

For a few moments, they all simply listened to Vinni as she played. Norill weighed her options. Should she claim that no lesson times were currently available? They might come back more often then. At least if she scheduled a day and time they would know exactly when the Nazi would return. Still, allowing him here was very dangerous. The soldiers civilly clapped as Vinni finished playing.

“Will you be paying in kroners or Reichsmarks?”

Vinni negotiated a reasonable price for her services and instructed Norill to schedule the Nazi soldier, named Gerntz, for 4:00 P.M. on Tuesdays. Their business concluded, the Nazi’s left and both women breathed sighs of relief in the silence that followed.

“Are you crazy,” Norill finally asked. “We can’t have that officer coming here.”

Vinni sat back heavily against the keyboard and shook her head.

“It’s the web of wyrd. Our fate was fixed the moment they set foot inside this house. Send them away from a blind woman offering piano lessons empty handed and the questions will begin. Questions we can’t have them asking. Not unless you want them discovering what we’re truly doing. At least this way we can watch them.”

“And he can watch us ... watch me,” Norill bitterly countered.

“Do you think he suspects you?” Vinni demanded.

Norill reflected on this question.

“I can’t be sure. Maybe. His friends certainly aren’t the trusting type. No, his interest in me is more ... personal. I’ve seen him watching me for several weeks now.”

Norill knew other girls, some of who were once friends, who’d begun romances with occupying soldiers. Once they were fully trusted by the Nazis, they were granted extra rations, privileges, taken to expensive parties, and loathed by their fellow Norwegians for they had forsaken all that their loyal countrymen fought and died for.

Norway may be occupied but her spirit remained indomitable and that was something the Nazis and their puppet government under Vidkun Quisling could not stand. They wanted to insidiously reshape all of Norway into a state filled with fascist collaborators. It was seeing this attempt day in and day out that inspired Norill to channel her anger and efforts into supporting the Milorg, the Norwegian resistance; even though exposure with such activities would mean either imprisonment or more likely execution. Vinni had joined the resistance not long after the government tried to force teachers like her to embrace a pro-fascist curriculum for their students. So far, the government’s efforts were failing but no one knew what the ultimate outcome would be.

“We can use that,” Vinni said, leaning forward.

“What?” Norill recoiled at the idea. “He’ll kill me if he finds out we’re using him.”

“If he’s as persistent as you think, we can’t afford not to allow him to think his advances are working. Think of the intelligence we could gather from him.”

“No,” Norill flatly declared, shaking a blonde curl away from her eye as she stood and crossed the room to study the street outside. Only empty windows greeted her gaze.

“Looks like we’re clear,” she said. “Hopefully he got a chance to finish transmitting.”

“Well just consider what I said about Gerntz.”

Vinni played a short sequence of notes—the signal to the radio operator hidden in the attic that the downstairs was safe. They heard the normal muffled sounds as Haktor extracted himself from the cramped transmission room in the attic and made his way downstairs.

“Tell me what happened,” the bald man demanded.

“We had a customer,” Vinni informed him as Norill helped her up from the bench and to a more welcoming chair. “A Nazi with a taste for piano lessons, among other things, and a few of his friends. They’ve gone but he’ll be back Tuesday for a lesson.”

Haktor was a fisherman by trade and Norill noticed whenever he received bad news the weathered lines of his face seemed to grow more pronounced.

“Are we compromised?” Haktor asked, ready to clamber upstairs to destroy the radio equipment.

“It seems my future student is enamored with my current protégé and that is what brought him here,” Vinni explained.

“Then we need to get her out of here,” Haktor decided. “Don’t give him a reason to return. Let it be known that you fired her or that there was a falling out.”

“Suddenly. So soon after their visit? No. That’s far too suspicious behavior to be considered coincidence. A week or two and we may be able to send Norill away to a safe house under the pretense of visiting family without arousing questions,” Vinni let her hands fall into her lap.

Haktor was noticeably displeased but he said no more.

“Were you able to finish securing today’s signals?”

Haktor hesitated a moment before handing the messages over so Norill could begin to encode it as sheet music, which she would then safely convey to the resistance newspaper for decoding and printing.

She studied the messages.

“Oh God, not again. The Germans have eradicated another resistance cell,” she told Vinni.

The old woman closed her eyes.

“Slaughtered. That’s the fourth one in as many weeks,” Haktor reminded them. “The only way they can be having this kind of success ...”

“Is if they’ve inserted a double agent,” Vinni finished as she reopened her eyes.

“That’s what did a lot of cells in during the early days of the resistance,” Haktor bitterly shared. “We thought we’d solved that problem.”

Norill wondered which of her friends could now be on the run, imprisoned, or dead. No one spoke.

“Hopefully someone survived this time,” Vinni finally said.

“If this continues this entire section of Norway could see the resistance crumble,” Haktor darkly mused.

“A bit bold but our operations are being impacted. I wonder how long the British will continue to trust us with intel if this goes unchecked?” Vinni wondered aloud.

“I’ll be in the signal room encoding this if you need me,” Norill announced before quietly ascending to the dark, dimly lit confines of the attic.

Story continues in Part 2



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