

OSLO, 1943

by Samuel Best

The snaw wis blawin gey hard on the city but the cauld wis the least ae Rolf's worries. He moved quickly through the streets, his shoes skitin on the ice every few steps. Ahead ae him, across the park, wis his safehouse - a wee flat rented unner a false name - and aroon him towered the muckle buildings ae Norwegian bankin and government. But behind him, followin closely, were twa men. Rolf had seen them a few streets ago, caught in the reflection ae a shop windae. He'd kent instantly that he wis bein tailed. *The Gestapo*, he had thought, and he'd gone intae evasive mode. In the rucksack slung ower his shooder Rolf carried vital information aboot Nazi forces here in Norway. In his safehouse wis the radio he needed tae send that information back tae the UK. There wis nae way he wis goin tae lead the Gestapo back tae his hidey-hole though. He wis smarter than that. He had been operatin as a spy in Norway for near on a year noo and hadnae slipped up yet. He'd had some close shaves, mind you, but he wis canny and guid at his job.

Rolf hurried across the park. He took the loopin path tae his right and eventually came oot near the tram stop. He didnae dare leuk back in case his followers guessed that he wis on tae them. Instead he kept his heid doon against the fierce nizzer and sought oot a crowd ae office workers breengin oot ae a tram, clearly in a rush in case their pay would get docked for bein late. They leuked similar enough tae him - lang, thick jaikets and hats wi the brims pulled doon. Rolf fell intae step wi them and followed along back the way he'd came. He saw the twa men slow doon as he walked by. They were leukin left and right frantically, wan pointin tae a lone man further doon the road. The Gestapo men set aff at a sprint - as much as they could in the snaw - and Rolf laughed tae himsel as he peeled away fae the crowd and heided for his flat. He had always been gey proud ae bein a maister ae disguise.

He wis almost hame when the sodgers stopped him. Twa young privates appeared fae roon the corner. Rolf felt his hert sink. He kent their type jist fae the leuk in their een: young and crabbit and keen tae show aff their power. Sure enough they stopped him straight away and asked tae see his papers.

‘Ausweispiere,¹’ one glowered. His voice wis harsh despite his youth and he glared at Rolf wi hard een. The other sodger stood aff tae wan side. His rifle wis ready tae aim and fire at Rolf at the slightest cause. The gun leuked heavy for the sodger but Rolf had nae doot that he’d pull the trigger if he had a reason, and Rolf didnae fancy gettin shot the day.

Rolf paused afore replyin. He spoke Norwegian well enough (the benefits ae his Bergen-born faither) but his German wisnae great. He pretended no tae understand, tae see if the sodgers would jist gie up and let him past. It’d worked wance afore, Rolf minded.

‘Unnskyld meg?²’ Rolf said in Norwegian. ‘Jeg snakker ikke tysk. Beklager.’³

The sodgers glanced at each other. Rolf felt himsel tense. Sewn intae the left sleeve ae his jaiket wis a stiletto knife. He rubbed his haunds thegither, pretendin tae feel the cauld, ready tae pull the blade oot in and instant. In these moments time aye seemed tae slow doon for Rolf, and he became aware ae every second slopin by; each wan possibly his last.

‘Vis oss dine identifikasjonspapirer,⁴’ the sodger said, pure ragin at havin tae switch tae Norwegian.

Despite the radge tone in the sodger’s voice, Rolf felt himsel relax a little as he haunded his papers ower. They were such convincin forgeries that he kent the sodgers wouldnae hae any problems wi them. As expected, they gave him his papers back and motioned for him tae walk on. Rolf’s knife remained safely up his sleeve and he thanked the forgers back hame for gettin him oot ae trouble wance again. He’d lost count ae the nummer ae times he’d been caught up at a checkpoint or a random search fae sodgers and it’d been they gallus forgeries that had gotten him oot ae bother. Mair often than he’d had tae use his sgian-dubh, at least.

Inside his totie flat, Rolf lay his bag doon on the table in the room which doubled as baith a living room and a bedroom. He pushed the bookcase oot fae the wall and howked up the floorboards where it usually stood. In the hollow space wis a heavy black briefcase, about the same size as his satchel. He heaved the case oot and unlocked the clasp at the front. Built intae the case wis his radio. It wis an auld number, full ae dunts and dings fae its travels wae Rolf aroon Norway, but it did the job.

¹ Identification papers

² Excuse me?

³ I don’t speak German. I’m sorry.

⁴ Show us your identification papers.

Double-checkin that his door wis definitely locked, Rolf readied himsel tae transmit. This message would be the final piece ae information the Allies needed tae start the next wave ae attacks on the occupyin forces here. Rolf felt his fingers tinglin wae power and possibility.

He took a breath, tuned in tae the unique frequency, and tapped oot a wee message:

R here, ready tae spek.

He waited for the message tae be decoded and accepted afore sendin the information, but tae his surprise he received a different reply fae usual.

HQ here, dinnae spek jist listen. The Nazis huv gotten their mits on yer lest message. They're intae a fankle tryin tae owerset sae haud gaun wi the mither tung fae noo on. Oor ither chiels are gettin liftit aw ower the shop and we cannae be haein you gettin the jyle and aw. The darg you're daein is a muckle haunners tae us and we couldnae win this hing wioot ye.

Rolf let oot a laugh. He imagined some poor laddie fae Berlin ettlin tae get his lugs aroon aw the intercepted Scots messages. That'll show my auld school teachers, he thought. Tae think they aye telt me Scots wid never come in useful - we might jist win the war cause ae it.

Rolf tapped oot his reply.

Nae worries HQ. In that case, brace yersels for some gey useful info. Ah've got hunners tae tell yees.