

8

Farewell to Kharkov

Many questions arose when comparing Alexandra's exhaustive account of Quisling's unusual proposal and of the agonizing last few weeks in Kharkov with the story told by the archives. Alexandra was unequivocal about her personal experience of this period. Dated documents, for their part, tell an equally clear story. Therefore, it is not a question of choosing between two "truths," but of discovering what may have been behind Quisling's repeated insistence that he was in a critical situation, as well as the reasons he cited—first, the imminent expiration of his leave of absence from the General Staff and, second, the threat of diplomatic rupture between Russia and Norway.

Quisling had neglected to tell his young, inexperienced bride that on June 26, 1922, he had written to John Gorvin in Moscow saying that since his leave of absence from the Army was due to expire on July 26 and his present position on the General Staff was due to end in the second half of September, he intended to leave Russia around July 20. Nor did he tell Alexandra that Nansen, according to a telegram dated July 6, wanted Quisling to stay in the Ukraine a while longer. Nansen sent another telegram on July 26 telling his Riga office to let Quisling know for certain that his leave had been extended to September. In the meantime (July

22), Quisling himself had declared himself willing to stay at his post for another six weeks.¹

Despite the granting of this extension, Quisling's behavior in front of Alexandra and her mother gave no hint that he was no longer desperate to leave Russia—quite the contrary.

It goes without saying that he had much to see to before leaving Kharkov and the extensive distribution apparatus he had organized. Besides, the famine was far from over. Cannibalism still occurred; at the end of June, cholera was still raging, with a 40-percent mortality rate; and, in an interview Quisling gave in Helsinki to the Stockholm newspaper *Dagens Nyheter* on his way home early in September, he stated clearly how serious he thought the situation still was.² Just the same, neither his professional duties nor what we know about Norwegian-Russian relations during this period explains his excited secretiveness. Did he merely want to appear interesting to Alexandra and prevent her from changing her mind about the marriage, or did he truly perceive his position and his freedom of movement as threatened?

As a reason for an impending diplomatic rupture between Russia and Norway, Quisling repeated to Alexandra his story that the Soviet authorities had confiscated lumber that was to have been shipped from Arkhangelsk to Norway, but which the Russians now intended to sell in England instead. This actually agrees well with news reports that summer and autumn concerning such confiscation and a subsequent protest from the Norwegian to the Soviet government. These same reports also make it clear that the key person among the Norwegian businessmen in Arkhangelsk who had suffered losses was Captain Frederik Prytz. In

1. NB, Nansen Archive, Ms. fol. 1988, RUO₁.

2. H, ARA Russian Section, box 80, folder "Nansen" [Report from Mr. Ramseyer in ARA about an inspection tour to Melitopol together with Quisling and Gorvin]; article in *Dagens Nyheter*, September 3, 1922; *Morgenbladet*, September 5.

September of that year, he was in London negotiating, and he apparently managed to salvage the stumps because not many months after that the consortium “Russnorvegoles” (Russo-Norwegian Onega Wood Company, Ltd.) was a reality.³

Quisling, during his time in Helsinki the previous year and also in Moscow later in the 1920s, had helped Prytz with the latter’s many complicated business arrangements in Russia—in Moscow, with potentially grave consequences for himself. Thus, it is reasonable to ask whether, in 1922, he had also aided the lumber merchant Prytz through his own Moscow connections and now feared that this activity might backfire on him, regardless of his diplomatic passport.⁴ For one thing, Nansen had promised the Soviet authorities that none of the people working for him in Russia would engage in any kind of business activities without express permission from the government. That aside, Quisling was naturally aware of the accusations the Polish authorities had made in May about his being too much in the Bolsheviks’ camp. These accusations had continued to fester in the Norwegian Department of Foreign Affairs throughout the summer, although the head of the Norwegian Trade Legation in Moscow, Johan Fredrik Winter Jakhelln, had reported back to Oslo as early as in June that Quisling was very well regarded.⁵

As late as August 29, Nils Ytterborg (the Norwegian *chargé d'affaires* in Warsaw), wrote a confidential letter to the Depart-

3. See, for example, articles about Prytz’s negotiations in London in *Morgenbladet* (Oslo), September 14, 15, 16 and 20, 1922; Vogt, *Mennesket Vidkun*, pp. 63–64.

4. Alexandra never met Prytz, and Quisling never so much as mentioned him to her. Later, she thought that somewhat strange since the two men already had been close for a number of years.

5. NB, Nansen Archive, Ms. fol. 1988, RUO₁ (letter from F. Jakhelln, June 23, 1923, in which he also makes it clear that Quisling was informed of the Polish complaints.) The same archive contains the draft of a letter Quisling wrote to Nansen more than a week earlier, in which he expresses anger at the Polish accusations.

ment of Foreign Affairs saying that there was no basis for accusing Captain Quisling either of having meddled in Soviet Russian politics or of having sold Nansen supplies to the Red Army. But he also noted that according to the Norwegian chargé d'affaires in Kharkov, Berenson, Quisling's demeanor in Kharkov was not sufficiently diplomatic—he was seen mainly in the company of Bolsheviks and did not seek contact with anti-Bolshevik circles.⁶

Berenson would, nevertheless, have been aware that Quisling's position in the latter regard was very difficult. It was with the local Bolsheviks he had to work, not with their opponents. Furthermore, in connection with his work for Nansen, Quisling regularly went to Moscow to confer with the Soviet Russian authorities there, at the same time keeping up his connection with the Norwegian Trade Legation, as Alexandra's further story also makes clear. The head of this legation, Jakhelln, was vacationing in Norway just at the time that Alexandra and Quisling married and set out for Norway themselves. *Morgenbladet* obtained some sort of interview with Jakhelln on September 11, but he said he did not wish to discuss conditions in Russia, noting that he had come home just to gather strength to withstand another Russian winter.

Nevertheless, the journalist observed that Jakhelln had planned meetings with various businessmen and "other interested parties," and he gave an overview of the successful negotiations that the English minister Urquhart had been conducting with the Soviet authorities about confiscated English industrial enterprises in the Ural and in western Siberia. All of this was naturally of great interest to the Norwegians. The article went on to update the situation facing Norwegian lumber interests in northern Russia. At the time of writing, there were intense negotiations in

6. NB, Nansen Archive, Ms. fol. 1988, RUO₁ (letter from N. Ytterborg, 29 August, 1923.)

London between Norwegian and Russian representatives, the article noted, but the Norwegian government had not yet received a reply to its protest note.⁷

It is unlikely that Quisling was unaware of these negotiations and of his old friend Prytz's central role in them, but it seems equally unlikely that such events at the official level could threaten both Quisling's marriage to Alexandra and their departure from the country. From the years that followed, however, we have innumerable examples of how, in Quisling's complicated personality, the wish to appear master of critical situations went hand-in-hand with the same tendency toward secrecy and exaggeration found in his relationship with Alexandra right from the start. Another example of this complicated side of his nature is a document he obtained, just before his departure, from the Ukrainian Red Cross, with which he had worked closely ever since arriving in Kharkov.

On official stationery, Dr. El. Liebermann gave "Monsieur le Capitaine Quisling" a medical certificate, dated August 24, 1922, stating that in the month of June, the latter had become ill with a stomach ailment during a visit to a famine area, and that at the time of his departure from the Ukraine he still was not cured of it.⁸ Under the horrendous conditions in the Ukraine that year, it is obvious that the relief workers were exposed to great risk of contagion. This medical certificate might have proved useful if anyone on the General Staff had expressed concern over Quisling's long absence from his job in the Ukraine. However, it's important to note that, aside from this certificate, any claims in the 1920s about illnesses Quisling acquired in Russia originated mainly with Quisling himself.

7. *Morgenbladet*, September 11, 1922. As for Urquhart, he already had much experience with such negotiations; besides, he had personal mining interests in Siberia. Lockhart, *British Agent*, p. 303.

8. ". . . [il] est tombé malade d'un entercolite." NB, Quisling Archive, Ms. fol. 3920:V:1.

It is equally interesting that, the same summer he supposedly acquired his stomach ailment, Quisling never mentioned this illness during the exchange of telegrams concerning the extension of his stay in Russia. Nor did illness prevent him from giving a well-received lecture about “the Russian problem” in the Military Society on Saturday, October 28.⁹ Quisling referred to the stomach ailment as a stubborn and very bothersome “cheese poisoning” in a conversation with Nansen around New Year’s, 1922–23, when Nansen sounded him out about another stint in Russia; and in a letter to Nansen in March 1925, he topped up his story with malaria.¹⁰ Quisling evidently maintained that he suffered from a chronic and/or recurrent form of malaria, but it is worth noting that his personal physician throughout the Second World War period stated publicly in 1988 that Quisling had had an iron constitution and had not taken so much as an aspirin during those five years.¹¹

Alexandra was very much surprised when she learned about the medical certificate issued the day before Quisling left Kharkov in order to meet her in Moscow, as well as about the “cheese poisoning” and other instances of purported ill health we will come back to in later chapters. She never saw any sign of illness in him, either that summer or during the rest of the time they spent together, she said. On the contrary, he exuded energy and good health.

Nor did Quisling’s American colleagues in Kharkov note in

9. Review in *Morgenbladet*, October 30, 1922.

10. NB, Nansen Archive, Ms. fol. 1988, RUO₁, (letter from Nansen to Frick, January 4, 1923. Nansen says that Quisling has just been to see him and is well on the road to recovery, but that Q. has been very ill from cheese poisoning—“I think it was in Rostow”—until now. Q. nevertheless said that he would be able to return to Russia if Nansen wished it); Ms. fol. 1988, A₅A (letter from Quisling to Nansen, March 9, 1925. The draft of this letter is in the Quisling Archive, Ms. fol. 3996: 3).

11. *Dagbladet*, March 5, 1988, pp 10–11, interview with Hans Eng, M.D.

Farewell to Kharkov

115

their reports that Nansen's representative appeared ill or weakened, although they were quick enough otherwise to comment on the Nansen mission. George Harrington informed his superiors in Moscow in a memorandum dated August 19, 1922 that he had just discussed parcel distribution with Captain Quisling. Not only was Quisling clearly on the job, but August 19 was a Russian holiday, when all offices were closed, so that both men might have taken a break with a clear conscience.¹²

The very next day, Alexandra turned seventeen. In Quisling's pocket diary there is a notation in Alexandra's writing next to Sunday, August 20: "My Name Day. Acia." And for Monday, August 21, she wrote "Wedding."¹³ With that happy anticipation, she continues her story:

With so little time to think things through, Mama and I felt more bewildered than ever. We had no husband and father to consult, or anyone else to turn to for advice and support. At no point did Vidkun offer to help us deal with our anxiety and confusion; nor did we ask him to do so. To give him his due, he was very busy winding up affairs at his office and attending farewell parties given by Soviet dignitaries. I must confess, too, that I paid little heed to my mother's objections and warnings, but was inclined, instead, to trust Vidkun and to follow his instructions blindly.

Vidkun had worked out a detailed plan that he asked me to memorize and recite for my mother. According to that plan, I was to leave for Moscow alone, ahead of him, and wait for him in a hotel where his friends at the Norwegian Trade Legation would reserve a room for me. He gave me a tiny, beautiful, leather-bound address book made in England, which I still have; the last entry, under "Y," is dated 1930 and contains the name

12. H, ARA Russian Section, box 145, no. 28 (Harrington's letter); box 121, folder "Office Memoranda," no. 10 (about the holiday).

13. RA, Vidkun Quisling's pocket diary for 1922.

and address of the man with whom I eventually decided to spend the rest of my life. In case we lost track of each other or there was some other emergency, Vidkun made me write both his parents' address and that of two Norwegian legations. In my childish handwriting, those addresses occupy an entire page:

Quisling – capitaine
Miortvy pereoulok
No. 9 Moscou R.R.S.S.
” Jonsborg
Heglandsgrenn p.o.
Norvège Telemarken
M. le capitaine
V. Quisling
% Legation de Norvège
Helsingfors
Finlande

The day after my seventeenth birthday, Vidkun and I went to the ZAG-office (Registry) to sign the papers that proved we were married according to Russian law. It was a completely unmemorable occasion, especially since neither he nor I regarded it as a proper wedding. Besides, my head was filled with all the things I had to do before I left. These preparations unfortunately did not include proper good-byes with my friends because Vidkun was adamant that nobody except Mama and I know anything about our plans.

Mama was nearly crushed by the prospect of having to part with me so soon, perhaps forever. But when she saw how willing I was to follow Vidkun's instructions, she kept her grief to herself and ceased her opposition to my departure. She busied herself with getting me ready for my long trip into the unknown, away from her protective wings.

She felt very bad because she could not outfit me properly

Farewell to Kharkov

117

and provide me with a decent dowry. Bitterly regretting that on our last journey to Crimea she had left most of her good jewelry and other valuables in our friends' safekeeping, she hastily equipped me as best she could. In addition to her treasured old copy of the famous Russian cookbook *Gift To Young Housewives* by Molokhovétz, she gave me a set of sterling fruit forks and knives on a silver stand. They had so far escaped being bartered because nobody wanted such useless objects, especially since the set was missing a piece—there should have been six of each.

When the moment for my departure came, Vidkun arrived at our house by automobile to take me to the Kursk railway station. He had stressed that he wanted nobody to see me off at the train, not even my mother. I had to tell her my hurried goodbyes and part with her right there. It is a scene I do not have the strength to recall.

At the station, Vidkun bought me a ticket for Moscow without having to stand in line like everybody else. Together with the ticket, he gave me additional instructions and some money for expenses, and then he shook my hand to say goodbye. I moved forward to kiss him, but he stepped back and was gone without waiting for the platform gates to open. He later told me that he had always been disgusted by the way Russians, especially Russian men, embraced and kissed each other in greeting or farewell. He considered it a transgression of every rule of conduct, and he would never allow anyone else, even his own mother, to touch him in public.

I looked around when he was gone and suddenly felt terribly alone in the huge station hall, although I was surrounded by a huge, milling crowd. People were also sitting or lying on the dirty floor, packed together and surrounded by their sacks, bags and baskets. Dirty and hungry, they were waiting for a train or for some miracle that would return them to a normal life. Many did not move at all. They were asleep, ill, unconscious—perhaps al-

ready dead. After so many years of public misery, I should have been inured to the sight, but I was not. Shaken to the core, I clung to the flimsy, round, bent-wood hatbox my mother had given me to hold my “dowry” and the rest of my possessions; it seemed like my last friend in the world.

As I waited for my train to be announced, I noticed a well-dressed lady of about thirty who had been watching me for some time. Our eyes finally met, and she smiled and came over to me.

“Where are you going, *diévochka*? Are you all alone? Who was that tall gentleman who brought you here?” she asked, neither introducing herself nor waiting for a reply.

Quite apart from the fact that nobody had called me *diévochka* (“little girl”) for the past two or three years, the woman had also used the familiar pronoun *ty* instead of the formal *vy*. Looking back, I realize that in my emaciated state I probably looked quite a bit younger than seventeen, but at the time I was affronted by her lack of proper regard for my adult status, so I introduced myself rather formally.

It did not take long, however, before this friendly soul had discovered that I was Dr. Voronin’s daughter, and that I was in the process of marrying the tall foreigner who had just seen me off, who was none other than Mr. Quisling from the international relief mission. Before we had taken our seats on the train, she and I were talking unreservedly. Although she was now addressing me as an adult, she retained her misgivings about the propriety of my traveling alone, and when she found out that Vidkun wanted me to wait for him at a hotel in Moscow, she shook her head doubtfully and said:

“My mother lives in Moscow with my younger sister. Before you go to that hotel, you should go and see my mother. She’ll be pleased to see you. Here is a note with her name and address—she can help you if necessary. And tell her that I’ll be in Moscow soon.”

Farewell to Kharkov

119

My new friend got off the train long before Moscow, but her kindness and the consideration shown me by several other nice people in my carriage eased my distress at leaving Mama and all my friends so suddenly. And I received plenty of advice on how to manage in Moscow, the city that “pays no heed to tears.”

As soon as I arrived in Moscow, I went straight to the home of my new friend’s mother and younger sister. They lived in a large, elegant apartment, now in total disarray because they had just been notified that strangers were about to share their apartment. The two women nevertheless received me with open arms and urged me to stay with them, and they indignantly refused my offer to pay for my room and board. They clearly found the story of my marriage wonderfully romantic and insisted on helping me prepare for this important occasion. Their enthusiasm lent a sense of reality to a situation that still had me quite dazed, and it helped me through the next few days of waiting for Vidkun.

Right after my arrival in Moscow, I had called both the Norwegian Trade legation and the hotel to tell them where I was staying, and I had asked them to let me know if a letter or telegram came for me or if there was a change in Vidkun’s schedule. My new friends brushed and ironed my jacket and the better of my two dresses before I went to the railroad station to meet Vidkun’s train.

I was glad to see him again and eager to hand over my cares and worries to him. He remarked that I looked well and said that we were expected at the Trade Legation as soon as possible that same day, so that we could register our marriage formally with them. But first we had to go back to the apartment where I had been staying. On our way there, I told Vidkun how exceptionally kind the N.N.s (whose names I unfortunately do not remember) had been to me, and that I should like them to come along with us to the Legation.

I had barely finished my story by the time we arrived, and I

proudly introduced Vidkun to my new friends. He thanked them for their hospitality to me and said that he regretted not being able to comply with my wish to invite them to our wedding since that would be taking place abroad. Today, we would only register our marriage at the Norwegian Legation; there would be no ceremony and, therefore, nothing to observe. His manner was formal and cool, and we were soon on our way to the Legation without accepting the N.N.s' invitation to stay longer.

On our way, Vidkun took out of his pocket a small box, which turned out to contain a beautiful ring set with three large diamonds surrounded by rubies. He put the ring on my finger.

"Many thanks, but you really shouldn't have done it!" I exclaimed.

"Oh yes! It is required by custom. I should have done it earlier, the moment we became engaged. This is your engagement ring. Our wedding rings we'll buy later, when we're out of Russia."

The formalities at the Trade Legation did not take long. We simply had to show the papers from our registration in Kharkov and sign a few documents, and then we went into an adjoining room where drinks were served and where members of the Trade Legation took turns congratulating us. Many years later, in Shanghai, I met a Norwegian Foreign Service representative who said he remembered that he had been present at this celebration in Moscow.

My photograph and my married name were added to Vidkun's diplomatic passport, and I was issued a red booklet—my first Norwegian passport. When I left the Norwegian Legation in Miórtvyi Pereúlok ("Dead Lane") no. 9, I felt like a completely different person. I was Mrs. Quisling, a married woman and a foreign subject of my new King. I was overwhelmed by excitement and exhaustion.

Vidkun had said that he needed to stay at the Legation for a

Farewell to Kharkov

121

while to take care of official business before we went to the rooms he had reserved for us at the Savoy Hotel. I had better fetch my luggage from the N.N.s and then join him at the hotel, he said. Thus, I walked back alone to thank these lovely people for all they had done for me. I felt extremely embarrassed that Vidkun had refused to let them take part in our reception, but I ascribed his insensitivity to his having so many other things on his mind. I told the two women that I would never forget their kind friendship, and I promised to send them a gift and some food parcels as soon as we were settled abroad. It was a promise I was never able to keep because during all the time Vidkun and I lived together, I had scarcely a cent to call my own.

My friends offered toasts and best wishes for my happiness, and we parted as tearfully as if we were friends of long standing.

I was still in a high emotional state when I and my battered yellow hatbox finally arrived at the Savoy Hotel. These last few days had been much too eventful, and ahead of me lay a completely new and unfamiliar life among perfect strangers. I felt scared and very lonely as the prospect of joining my new bridegroom confronted me with yet another difficult situation.

The Savoy Hotel was located in the center of the city, close to the Bolshoi Theater, and it was reserved exclusively for foreigners. I told the clerk at the reception that I was Mrs. Quisling and asked for our room number. He reached for the house telephone, and Vidkun came down right away—*bezotlagátel'no*. The elevator was out of order, so we had to use the stairway to reach our suite on one of the upper floors.

It had grown late, and in the fading daylight, our large drawing room looked somber and quite grand. Vidkun proudly showed off the paneled room with velvet drapes, several large Oriental rugs, and an overabundance of small statues, vases, and other expensive knick-knacks. There was also an alcove with a dark brown velvet curtain partly concealing a bed or a sofa attached to the

wall. I think the actual bedroom had red walls, but my fear prevented me from paying much attention to it. There was no private bathroom.

After a brief look around, we went downstairs to have our dinner, our first meal together. It took a long time because Vidkun ordered some special dishes, and the service was very slow. I nevertheless thought the dinner was wonderful—it had been a very long time since I had eaten anything like it. Vidkun did most of the talking, telling me about the travel plans he had made. We would first go to Petrograd, then to Finland, and from there to Riga for a while, where he had several good friends. We could have our church wedding there, so that by the time we arrived in Norway, we would be man and wife in the eyes of both God and man—and, most of all, in the eyes of his parents.

Our conversation gradually grew somewhat strained. It did not help matters that I was still feeling uncomfortable about our treatment of the N.N.s. I suggested to Vidkun that we send them a nice gift or invite them out to dinner. That would be absolutely impossible, he said; there was no time for such niceties now. We had to leave Moscow very soon, and he still had many important things to take care of before our departure. We would do something about my friends later.

I had a bad headache, and we were both very tired, but neither of us was in a hurry to go upstairs again. I think we were both scared of our first *tête-à-tête* as man and wife and postponed the moment as long as possible. The hotel dining room was practically deserted when we finally made our way back to our suite. By that time, a stomachache had joined my headache, but even though I felt really sick, I thought it was just due to tension. Even so, I did tell Vidkun that I felt far from well.

“Never mind,” was his reply. “But you’d better get to bed. After a good night’s rest I’m sure you’ll feel much better in the

morning. Here, the bed has already been turned down! You just go to bed, and I'll sleep here."

"Where?"

"Here in the alcove."

Wondering how somebody as tall as he could possibly spend a comfortable night on that small couch, I said: "Perhaps it would be better if I sleep here and you sleep in there, in the bedroom."

"Oh, no, God forbid! You take the bedroom. I'll manage fine right here," he said firmly.

He seemed as pleased with these separate accommodations as I. Looking back, I think that he, a pastor's son, did not consider our civil ceremony morally valid until confirmed and consecrated in church. And now I am sure that, although I was very naïve about such matters at that time, Vidkun had no more experience with physical relations than I did, despite his being twice my age. We were both equally relieved to postpone this trial until we had grown more used to each other. Besides, to give him his due, I think he wanted to ease my tension because he saw that I was ill and nervous.

Long before he had showed any romantic interest in me, Vidkun had several times asked me questions that were clearly designed to find out the extent of my past experience with love. Sometimes the questions were indirect, connected with books or plays we were discussing, but at other times they were quite direct. Had I ever loved anyone? Had I ever had a real boyfriend? Did I like men?

Not suspecting his real motivation, I had always answered him very frankly. No, I had never really loved anyone. Yes, I did like boys at least as much as girls. I had told him about the attention paid to me by boys in our own circle of friends and about the "dirty old men" of all ages whom my friends and I at ballet school despised for such remarks as "My God, what a lovely pair of legs!"

And I had naturally told him about Nina's and my terrible experience with Bashkóvich.

For his part, Vidkun had made it clear that his experience with women was as limited as mine with men, but for a different reason. He told me that as a very young man, he had fallen deeply in love with a girl who was supposed to become his wife one day. When he finally was in a position to get married, he bought an engagement ring and made her a formal proposal of marriage, only to be rejected in a cold and humiliating way. Since that day, he had never wanted to have anything to do with women, he told me.

And here we were, on our first day together as man and wife. Still using the formal pronoun *vy*, we wished each other a good night and went to our separate rooms.

The next morning, I was awakened by a knock on the bedroom door. To my half-awake "Come in!" a loud female voice called out from the other side of the door:

"Le bain est prêt, madame!"

What luxury—a maid had prepared a bath for me, and she spoke French! Although I had to go down the hall for my bath, it promised to be a very pleasurable experience indeed.

Vidkun was already up and fully dressed when I entered our sitting room, and when I saw the papers scattered all over his desk, I wondered if he had worked straight through the night and not slept at all. Right after breakfast, he left and said he would be gone most of the day, adding:

"You don't look well today. Take a good walk in the fresh air!"

I still felt very ill, but I decided not to complain; I was probably just having trouble digesting the rich hotel fare. Soon, however, I discovered that I had gotten my monthly period. That was something of a disaster because in my hurried departure from home, I had forgotten to pack such feminine supplies as were

Farewell to Kharkov

125

available to us at that time. Even in Moscow, I would not be able to find such articles in the shops. Embarrassed and desperate, I had to tear up one of my precious linen garments in order to improvise a belt and pad before I could go anywhere.

As I did not feel up to a long walk, I took a tramcar ride along one of Moscow's circular boulevards. The ride proved very rough, so I got off near the Súkharevka Tower. At the foot of the tower, there was an open-air market where a huge, milling crowd shouted out their wares, which appeared to consist of all kinds of junk. A handsome little boy in rags walked toward me, took off his dirty cap and held it out to me with a bow.

"Oh dear," I thought, "the poor little fellow is probably lost and needs help!"

Suddenly, the boy pushed his cap against my chest and then vanished in the crowd. My brand new silk kerchief—my mother's parting present and my great pride—was gone. I had been the victim of a thief's trick. Upset and angry with myself, I returned to the hotel.

Our remaining time in Moscow passed uneventfully enough, except for an incident that grew out of my predicament of not knowing how to dispose of my used, makeshift sanitary pads. This aspect of adulthood was still rather new to me, and I was so unfamiliar with hotel living that it did not occur to me to leave such things for the maid to collect; therefore, I bundled everything up and walked out to find a place to toss my unwelcome luggage. Finally, thinking myself unobserved, I threw my bundle into one of those cutaway areas in the sidewalk that allow flats below street level to have windows on the street. For a moment I felt great relief, until I was startled by a man's voice:

"Look here, *babushka!* What did you throw over there, dearie? Was it a baby?"

I looked up. There, on a stairway in front of me, partly hidden by a pilaster, stood an old man wearing a cloth cap and roaring

with laughter. Almost beside myself with fright, I ran all the way back to the hotel and did my best to put the whole incident out of my mind. But it forced itself back into my consciousness less than a year later, this time with the dreadful significance of an omen.