

Honeymoon

Quisling's pocket diary for 1922 is not an infallible guide to what he did and where he was at any given date during that summer. Corroborative documents are advisable.

A publication by Nansen's international committee in Geneva on July 10 notes, for example, that Captain Quisling had returned to Kharkov on June 17 after an inspection tour in the Crimea. According to Quisling's pocket diary, he clearly was in the Crimea around the middle of June, but his arrival back in Kharkov is listed under Wednesday, June 14, not the 17th.¹ It is quite possible that this was when he *hoped* to be back, and it is also possible that the writer in Geneva was mistaken. With regard to the journey to Melitopol that Quisling took with ARA's Ramseyer and John Gorvin of the Nansen relief commission between June 28 and 30, which was reported in Geneva in August, Quisling's notes in his pocket diary agree with the dates in that report.²

1. H, ARA Russian Section, box 80, folder "Nansen," *Information No. 26*, International Committee for Russian Relief (Comité Internationale de Secours à la Russie); RA, Vidkun Quisling's pocket diary for 1922.

2. H, ARA Russian Section, box 80, folder "Nansen," *Information No. 29*, International Committee for Russian Relief (Comité Internationale de Secours à la Russie).

There are curiously few notations in his pocket diary from the second half of July to the end of the period Alexandra has just described. That is not surprising, though, as this must have been a very hectic time for Quisling. From August 22 through September 3, however, there are several notes concerning various train departures. It is striking that these do not include a single reference to Riga, although he and Alexandra had their church wedding there, and he also met with people who would present his important report to the General Assembly in Geneva that autumn. In addition, Nansen had an administrative center in Riga just as he did in Reval, Petrograd and Moscow, so Quisling had several weighty reasons for going there.

It is less likely that Quisling had much, if any, business at the Norwegian legation in Riga, where no new consul had been appointed since Helmsing's departure from the city in January 1919, and where the situation in the autumn of 1922 was so arbitrary that both the city's considerable Norwegian colony and the Norwegian businessmen who wanted to establish themselves in Riga were complaining.³

As mentioned earlier, a Swedish journalist contacted Quisling during one of his two brief stays in Helsinki. During the interview, Quisling said that in the Ukraine alone, one million people had starved to death so far, while people in the southern part of the Republic lacked so many basic necessities that some two or three million of them still faced the specter of famine. In the Crimea, as well, the conditions were extremely serious, he said, but so far it had not been possible to reach this region with meaningful aid. He nevertheless denied that there was a danger of political unrest in the Ukraine and said that in the northern provinces, at least, there was hope of a good harvest that autumn.⁴

3. *Morgenbladet*, October 27, 1922. It needs noting that Consul Helmsing received no pay from the Norwegian state.

4. *Morgenbladet*, September 5, 1922.

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He and Alexandra nevertheless seem to have put aside everyday concerns for a short while, in the manner of newlyweds the world over. More than sixty years later, Alexandra's face would still light up when she recalled those days of happiness.

To my surprise and delight, Vidkun had become a completely different person after our wedding. He was lighthearted and joyful and suddenly seemed years younger. Without even noticing it, we had stopped using the formal *vy*, and now we began to use terms of endearment.

Most of the time, Vidkun used the nickname *Acia*, with which I had grown up (most of his relatives called me *Sandra*). Another name he used for me until the last time I heard from him was *Kròshechka*. In addition, he sometimes called me *lille venn* ("little friend") in Norwegian, as if I were a child and, at other times, he used the Russian word *rebiónok* ("child"). Although he spoke very good Russian, he was not always aware of nuances—I doubt that a Russian would have used *rebiónok* as a term of endearment, especially in addressing his wife. It sounded unnatural, rather than tender, but the latter was no doubt Vidkun's intention. He probably thought the word corresponded to *mon enfant*, which he also used on those rare occasions when we had to speak or write to each other in French. Still, I thought it was rather sweet, and I certainly did not have the heart to explain to him that a Russian would probably have preferred something like *moiá diévochka* ("my little girl").

My nickname for Vidkun was *máhl'chik* ("my little boy"), which hardly suited his size, but with which I intended no irony. At times, when I felt we were especially close, I called him "Poo-pie"—that was the name I wrote under the pictures of him in my album. I may have gotten the idea from the French word *poupée*—"puppet" or "doll." In speaking of Vidkun to other people, I

usually referred to him as “the Captain,” and that is the name he still goes by in my memory.

Despite my recurring attacks of pain, the transformation in Vidkun’s manner turned our wedding trip into an unforgettable experience for us both. I suspect that our journey from Riga to Norway was the happiest time in Vidkun’s life, for never again did I see him so gay, so tender, so simple, and so open. When he abandoned himself to happiness, he exuded loving considerateness. That frozen north wall had thawed at last, and he acted like any other normal, happy young husband. As we relished together the constantly changing scenery and people, it was obvious that he delighted as much in my company as I in his. I found my self-confidence returning in this spring thaw and became convinced that everybody around me was good and kind, and that everybody liked us. I wanted the whole world to know how happy we were, so I spoke to the people next to us at hotels and at restaurants and to our fellow passengers on trains and ships while we slowly made our way through Finland and Sweden.

We had returned to Helsinki by boat from Riga and stayed in the same hotel as before while Vidkun took care of some business. We then took the train to Åbo, where we immediately boarded a steamer bound for Stockholm. This voyage has remained vivid in my memory. The weather was chilly, and we were completely enveloped in a fog so dense that everything around us disappeared. I wanted to stay in our cabin because I was suffering from another attack of strong pain, but Vidkun brought me up on deck instead, where he found me a sheltered place to lie down and covered me with a blanket before disappearing.

Resting there while the boat slowly felt its way through the fog, I felt peace and respite descend on me. For the first time in the hectic days since I left Mama and our home in Kharkov, I could draw a deep breath and take a good look at the abrupt and

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incredible change in my life. Only now did I realize the completeness and finality of that change. The prospect of the totally new future that lay before me, in a strange country without Mama and my friends, suddenly bore down on me and gripped my heart. I felt terribly lonely, lost, and helpless.

Then I chanced to look up and saw Vidkun standing next to me. At that moment, I realized that in this fog, in this whole obscure and alien world, there were only my husband and myself. I looked at him standing there so tall and steady next to me, and I felt that all the strength and protection, all the meaning and purpose of my life, were now centered on this man. He had taken my destiny into his strong hands and would stand steadfastly by me, come what may.

The fog grew denser still, so dense that we could hardly see our hands in front of us. After a while, our ship, which had been moving more and more slowly, came to a complete standstill. Even the sound of the ship's engine ceased, and we were ordered not to talk loudly or make any other noise. Coupled with the impenetrable fog, the ensuing deep silence made us feel completely cut off from the rest of the world. It was like being inside a glass jar of milk—we had become both blind and invisible. As if to reassure us that we were not deaf as well, the silence was broken at short intervals by a despondent moan from our ship's low-pitched foghorn.

Stranded in that pearly luminescence, I still felt safe and secure, knowing that my sturdy and reliable husband was standing by me. As if he had penetrated my thoughts, Vidkun said:

"Lille venn, you have nothing to fear. Our ship has stopped as a precaution because this part of the Baltic, here at the entrance to the Bothnian Bay, has innumerable small islands and very heavy boat traffic. Our skipper is very experienced and stopped the engine to prevent our running aground or colliding with another ship."

Then he added: "You know, in life we have to rely on people with more experience and training than ourselves. Marriage is much the same way. The law of the world says that if you have given someone your solemn vow to spend the rest of your life with another person, you owe that person your complete confidence and fidelity. You must keep your word, no matter what happens. You can never change your mind—you must not even think of turning back or running away, even if you happen to meet someone you perhaps think you love better. This is the law of man and of nature, the absolute law, no matter what the circumstances or the age of those involved, even if one of the partners should become old, ill, and ugly with the passage of many years. A true marriage is like love of the fatherland—it consists in fidelity and loyalty, it is for better and for worse, and it is forever."

Although I remained silent while Vidkun delivered this monologue, I was observing him. From time to time he bent forward to see if I was listening, which I was. The reason I remained silent was that everything he said seemed so self-evident. A marriage is to last a lifetime. Two times two make four.

While I rested in my deckchair, Vidkun switched to a scientific and detailed explanation of the reasons for the thick Baltic fogs and of where and at what seasons they were most likely to occur. He was equally well informed about the winds and the currents, the rules of sea-going traffic, and how to avoid accidents at sea. I finally nodded off, and when I looked up again, he was gone. I slipped into a reverie in which my body seemed insubstantial, and everything around me appeared as unreal as a fairy tale. A magic wand had touched my life, and new and wonderful things lay waiting in my future. All would be well. . . .

The stabbing pain in my side again grew so unendurably strong that it swept away all my thoughts and dreams. Suddenly, all the transformations in my life appeared in a very different and

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much harsher light. This fantastic voyage into the unknown, this incredible, suffocating fog—everything struck me as utterly absurd, alien, and useless. I wanted only to be back with my mother, for she would know how to comfort and soothe without fussing. Quickly, she would do everything in her power to rid me of my pain and suffering; she would not keep telling me about Coué's system and Christian Science miracle cures, the way my husband did. How could he watch me suffer like this without at least trying to find out what ailed me?

As on a few earlier occasions when I had felt baffled by Vidkun, I at last found an explanation in what I knew of Hamsun's novels and Ibsen's plays. I told myself that Vidkun's reserve, taciturnity, and frequent bouts of melancholy were not the result of some inborn affliction, but, instead, were just qualities intrinsic to every full-blooded Norwegian.

In part because the pain in my side had eased somewhat, these thoughts cheered me up considerably. I certainly had no reason to complain about my lot. And Vidkun was really so happy and carefree on this trip! In contrast to his cool reserve in Khar-kov, more than once on this journey he looked down on me from his great height and exclaimed:

"Goodness, but you're really beautiful!"

It was just the sort of thing a young wife wanted to hear. I decided that I probably had not seen his true self before.

We were still in this happy mood when our ship finally broke out of the fog and docked in Stockholm, where we went straight to the best hotel in the city, as was Vidkun's custom.

From our window, we could watch a large expanse of water covered with the billowing sails of boats so large that they might almost be called ships. Vidkun explained that there was a large regatta in Stockholm just then, and after going into the details of how sea-racing on prearranged courses was regulated, he gave me

the history of such races and compared them with horse racing and Olympic games.

We decided to go outside to watch the regatta. The cool, transparent air, the light breeze with a touch of autumn in it, and those billowing sails created an unforgettably beautiful scene against the backdrop of the old and picturesque city. We were so happy and preoccupied with each other that I don't remember anything about the people around us.

From Stockholm, we went directly by train to Oslo, which was still called Kristiania at that time. Vidkun had evidently not informed anybody of our arrival because nobody met us at the station. Since the apartment he had bought at some earlier time was not yet ready for us to move into,⁵ we went to the Grand Hotel, an old, elegant hotel on Karl Johansgate, the city's main street. No doubt it was the best hotel in town, but I was so exhausted by the time we arrived there that I was in no condition to admire anything. My illness had returned with full force while we were on the train, and now I was nauseated and dizzy and scarcely able to keep from vomiting. I wanted only to go to bed and sleep.

My lack of enthusiasm clearly bothered my husband, who was busy demonstrating the many excellent features of his hometown establishment. When I thoughtlessly mentioned that the hotel struck me as rather old and gloomy, he looked at me in astonishment.

"Then you don't like it?" he asked. Then he suddenly lost control. "You come here from what God knows is a rotten, dirty,

5. Arve Juritzen reports that Quisling bought the apartment in Erling Skjalgssonsgate for Nkr. 11,000 in cash from Øivind Walter on January 10, 1922—in other words, nine days after returning from his post in Helsinki. The reason that he and Alexandra had to wait a few days before moving in was that the apartment had been rented out while he was in Russia for Nansen. Juritzen, *Privatmennesket*, p. 41.

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wretched country, and you say there is something here that you don't like?"

It is not in my nature to take offense easily, and in my heart I might even agree with Vidkun that it was rather ungrateful of me to feel sick and miserable in the midst of such prosperity and comfort. But when he went from reproaching me to vilifying my country, I also lost my temper.

"How dare you say such cruel things about my own people, who are living in agony and dying by the millions from starvation and disease caused by a war those innocent people hate? Yes, yes, I know you're a soldier, and you did go to Russia to help them. But what do you really know about wars and death and hunger and suffering? Oh yes, you've seen it all, but only as a safe on-looker, as a spectator in a theater!"

Flushed and excited, I also reminded him, as I had done once before, that before everything began to crumble, Russians, too, had known comfort, security, and proper hygiene.

"No, you have never had a stable and decent life there," Vidkun replied, visibly surprised by my outburst. "I was in Russia at the very beginning of the Revolution, and in your cities I saw innumerable slums, ugly houses, dirty backyards. . . . It was the same then as now. I simply don't understand how you can criticize our old and magnificent Western culture. You must learn to appreciate our civilization, our organization, our deep traditions of real culture—values we would not lose just because of some war or revolution! No, ma'am! Obviously, Russian civilization and culture did not run very deep or strong if everything could fall apart that quickly."

This was our first and, as far as I recall, only serious disagreement—a silly display of blind chauvinism on both sides. When we had calmed down, Vidkun took me out for a long walk to show me the town. We walked along Karl Johansgate up toward the Royal Palace, but it was growing late, and we returned to the

hotel. It was not a moment too soon, for another attack of dizziness overwhelmed me, and all the splendor of the hotel turned cartwheels in front of my eyes. I went to bed, but felt no better.

It soon became clear that Vidkun's show of temper that first evening in Kristiania was not to be an isolated incident. From the moment he stepped onto his native soil, he went through another rapid transformation. It was as if his color faded; even his enamel blue eyes lost their striking brilliance. All his recent cheerfulness disappeared as fast as it had arrived, and I often found him glancing at me with an anxious expression that he made no attempt to conceal.

I finally asked him what was the matter. At first, he avoided giving me a direct answer, but when I insisted on an explanation, he at last looked straight at me with the rigid expression I remembered so well from our first encounter in Russia. I was very upset at this change and felt as if my swift flight into a new and happy life had suddenly been dashed against a stone wall. Involuntarily, I made a small, tweeting sound of regret that all our harmony could be extinguished so easily.

The room was deathly quiet. I felt as if nothing was left of me but a small, wet spot on that formidable wall—the pitiful trace of my smashed hopes drying up in a silent darkness. I finally forced out:

“What has happened, my darling? Is it something I have done, or failed to do? Do tell me all!”

“You see, my pet,” he answered, “at first I did not even notice how you act with other people. But then, after watching you for a while, I realized that you're not even aware of what you're doing. Believe me, one must never be so openhearted with strangers. People may misunderstand you. The great majority of them are just common sorts who don't belong to our social circle—many of them are downright low and vulgar. It would not be

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proper to include them among ourselves. One ought neither to speak to them nor look at them.”

“But why not? And especially here? Aren’t they all Norwegians, your own western Europeans you’re so proud of? Why, they are really all so kind and courteous, and I’m sure that being on a friendly footing with them could only enrich our lives!”

Now he was upset in earnest, but he struggled not to show his resentment. When he continued, his voice was low, but reprimanding:

“Well, it would be silly to pay attention to such rabble. For instance, it really bothers me to see your open, happy face with a ready smile for everybody. Take that young man at dinner tonight, for example—an imbecile with no manners whatever. He took the liberty of having an open book in front of him at the table, which he read even while he was eating! The fact that he doesn’t know the most elementary rules of conduct proves his low origin. You cannot get away from such people anywhere these days; this rabble penetrates everywhere. But when we came into the dining room, I saw that even for him you had a pleased smile, and that during the dinner, you looked at him several times!”

“But I didn’t even notice that he was reading! Besides, why is it a crime to read at the table? He was sitting by himself and not bothering anyone. Why shouldn’t he read if eating alone bored him? It may even be that he had to learn something in a hurry!”

“Oh, I see now how naïve and ignorant you are. You still refuse to understand me. There are definite rules of conduct a gentleman may not break, even when he is alone—*particularly* when he is alone. You must have heard that even living all alone in the desert, an Englishman follows all the conventions of good society. It would never occur to him to read during a meal. I know you think everybody here in the West is civilized, but that is very

far from the truth. A fellow of the sort we saw in the dining room might even get the idea that you were flirting with him!"

"For heaven's sake, Vidkun, what are you saying?!"

"Well, it's true. You must never forget what I recently told you, that despite the age difference between us you must never, not even in your innermost thoughts, break the solemn oath you gave me in church."

Vidkun was my husband. I trusted him. I *wanted* to trust him in everything and to follow him without reservation for the rest of my life. His admonitions took deep root, and I forced myself to act in the way he expected. His lessons had plenty of time to sink in because the very next day after our arrival in Oslo he resumed his work on the General Staff, and I was left entirely to myself, first at the hotel for a few days and then in our apartment.

The day we moved into our apartment in Erling Skjalgssonsgate 26, Vidkun gave a characteristic little speech to mark the moment:

"Well, Acia, let me show you your new home. Remember that it belongs to you, and that nobody in the whole world can take it away from you or force you out of it, the way you and your mother were expelled from your home in Russia. Here, the law protects you. This is your home, and you may stay in it for as long as you want, to the end of your days! I hope you will have only happy days here."

I was so happy and so deeply touched by this lovely speech that I was near tears. But if truth be known, the apartment itself was somewhat disappointing at first glance because Vidkun's description of it had led me to expect something quite grand. As it was, I thought the apartment quite attractive and large enough for the two of us, but the rooms were small and dark and the floor plan poor. Our apartment building was one of several fairly new and identical buildings, neat and well-maintained, but with-

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out architectural distinction and all painted the same dull, yellow color. And there was no trace of life anywhere.

I would sometimes look out the window and wonder why those streets were so deserted and quiet. There was not a living soul in sight—no children playing, nobody going for a walk. All I saw were blind windows with tightly drawn curtains and the same lifeless balconies in all directions. In later years, I have often wondered how Mára may have felt during all the years she spent there after World War II, a prisoner in the self-imposed solitary confinement of the lonely apartment I still remember so well.

The stairs from the main entrance on the ground floor led to small landings, each serving two apartments with front doors that seemed very heavy and large to me. The door to the right on the third floor landing was ours. It led into a small vestibule with dark wood paneling and no windows, where a ceiling lamp with a large, dark wooden shade did little to dispel the gloom. On the right, as one entered, there was a space for overcoats and umbrellas, as well as a small table for brushes and calling cards. Above this table hung a mirror in a dark and heavy frame, so high up that I had to stand on my toes in order to see anything at all. In those days, I could not resist the luxury of looking into every mirror I passed. Vidkun used to tease me about this and would sometimes remind me:

“Lille venn, you missed a chance of looking at yourself again—here’s another mirror!”

A door to the left in the vestibule led to a small kitchen corridor with a maid’s room and the kitchen. Though quite small, the kitchen was actually the nicest room in the house because it was so light, but it had one serious flaw. It was equipped with a gas range and a gas water heater, the latter fastened to the ceiling high above my head. It scared me out of my wits every time someone turned on the hot water in the bathroom or kitchen

without warning me because the water heater would give off a huge bang followed by an horrendous gurgling sound.

Another door opened directly from the vestibule into the dining room, the largest room in our apartment. The first time I saw this room, I wondered about the heavy, black wooden beams crossing the whitewashed ceiling; they looked as if they had been charred in a fire. I later found out that they had been burned with a torch and then waxed in order to give the room an old, rustic look. Because of its central location, the dining room was where most of our activities took place, although it was as gloomy as the vestibule and the furniture dark and heavy. How heavy I certainly discovered whenever I cleaned in there and tried to move the huge chairs. The dining table and the sideboard I could not even budge; they let me know in no uncertain terms that they knew better than I where they belonged. Frustrated and defeated, I would lie down flat on the floor to reach under the furniture with my dust mop.

When entering the dining room from the vestibule, the door to our bedroom was to the left, while our sitting room—the parlor, as we called it—was to the right, separated from the dining room by a couple of steps leading up to a higher level. I personally preferred the parlor to the dining room because it was a corner room with soft furniture upholstered in blue, the only colorful objects in the whole apartment. Our bedroom (from which a second door led to the only bathroom) was very sparsely furnished, with only a huge bed and a wardrobe.

In none of these rooms was there any trace of human activity, such as an open book on the settee, an unfinished piece of embroidery on a table, or a forgotten handkerchief on an armchair. When I eventually decided to do some embroidery to pass the time, Vidkun at once ordered a portable folding table with a box for my needlework. It would clearly have been a crime to leave my work about the room instead of stuffing it into the box and

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hiding it along with the table in the big closet in the hallway. I had much to learn.

All three of our principal rooms had windows toward the street and the balcony, but as far as I remember, Vidkun's study (entered from the parlor) had no windows at all, except possibly an opening into the narrow, dark passage ending in the back yard. Even in the middle of the day one had to turn the light on to see anything in there. From floor to ceiling, the walls were covered with overflowing bookshelves, and on one's right, inside the door, stood a large desk and an armchair, just as massive as everything else in the apartment. The floor was covered with a soft carpet of some hopeless color, but that did not matter, since huge maps were usually spread all over it. Vidkun spent long hours crawling on all fours among these maps with his compass and notebooks, deeply absorbed in calculations whose purpose I never learned. Every time I asked, the reply was:

"You would not understand it, *lille venn*. You had better go and occupy yourself with your language studies."

And he would absentmindedly look up at me from the floor and wait impatiently for me to be gone.

On my way out, I would glance back at him from the threshold, hoping for a miracle. Perhaps my Captain would get up from his maps and drawings, put his arms around me and say—no, I could not imagine what such a serious and solitary man might be expected to say. Perhaps something simple, kind, and tender, something that would dissolve my sadness and my fear of those inhospitable surroundings into tears of relief. But scarcely had I crossed the threshold before Vidkun bent with relief over his military maps, oblivious to my existence. His face would resume its expression of stubborn concentration and purposefulness, while his hair, whose silvery blond color was a rarity even in Norway, hung over his forehead like a small boy's fringe.

The marked change in Vidkun's personality upon his return

to Norway also affected his physical appearance, in large part because he now wore his uniform to work. Until we reached Norway, I had never seen him in uniform. Both in Russia and on our long journey to Norway, he had always worn civilian clothes, in which he looked very elegant. He must have been aware of this himself because in Norway, as well, he wore his uniform only while at the office in the General Staff. At official receptions and balls, he wore his black gala uniform, which I thought was very becoming.

The first time I got a real impression of Vidkun in his regular uniform was when I went out on the balcony to wave goodbye to him the day after we had moved into our apartment. If I hadn't known it was Vidkun down there, I would not have recognized him. His long, heavy, steel gray great-coat concealed the outlines of his figure and made him look completely round, like a primitive sculpture or a toy carved from a block of wood, and the tall *kepi* in the French style made him seem even taller than he was. His neck and head seemed unnaturally elongated, and from the back, his *kepi* resembled the tall, flat-topped hats worn by Russian Orthodox priests.

From that very first day, I made a habit of accompanying Vidkun to the front door downstairs to see him off. Then I would race back upstairs and wave to him from the balcony or from a window in the apartment. But no matter how long I stood there waving, he never turned to look back at me or to wave back.