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Home to Oslo

Concerning the time Alexandra describes in this and the previous chapter, Vidkun wrote in a letter to Hermod Lannung at the end of August, 1924:¹

During the Fall and winter of 1923 I roamed about in the Balkans on an assignment for the League of Nations. . . . Since March, I have mostly . . . been in France (Paris), where I have been studying the subjects that interest me and learned something about French affairs. On my last trip home I went via Jutland, had never been there before and wanted to see, among other things, Fredericia with Olaf Rye's grave (he is a distant relative). I was there for two or three days.

As one can see, he sweeps under the carpet all the excitement in Paris that winter and spring and does not mention his matrimonial problems with one word, nor that he had a companion on this leisurely trip home via Jutland.

Before Hans Fredrik Dahl wrote about this stage in Quisling's life, he gathered personal information from Arne Quisling and from Dr. Nils Qvisling's daughter Signe about how the family had reacted to being confronted with not only one, but two Russian women in Vidkun's life. Reportedly, Signe's father just

1. Lannung, *Min russiske ungdom*, p. 165. Quote translated by K. A. Seaver.

laughed, but Major Rasmus Qvisling was not amused. He described the situation as “depraved” (*liderlig*). Dahl continues: “The younger ones understood that Vidkun had been living and working under conditions that had made bourgeois Norwegian morality seem distant. What the pastor and his wife were thinking, they kept to themselves.”²

Quisling himself was aware that his parents did not digest this new situation with ease. Naturally, he had prepared them while visiting them in Telemark in October, when he had been given his next assignment for Nansen; the letters he wrote to his parents during the fall and winter of 1923–24 show that he had already told them that the next time they were confronted with a wife of his, her name would be Maria, not Alexandra. The latter he had merely rescued out of Russia. But as late as on January 21, 1924 (in the letter discussed in chapter 23), he complained to his parents:³ “For me, it has been strange to notice that I have never in my life been so misunderstood, even by those closest to me, as with regard to the only truly selfless act I have committed.”

Jørgen Quisling, who in 1924 must still be counted among “the younger ones” in the family, evidently was not fooled, either. Aside from Vidkun Quisling, he was the only one who knew that when Alexandra left Oslo in the spring of 1923, she was pregnant. As Juritzen notes, Jørgen repeatedly claimed that Maria and Vidkun were never married. The last time he did so was in 1951, when he informed the supervisors of the Quisling estate both orally and in writing.⁴ Furthermore, Maria’s executor, the lawyer Finn Thrana, confirmed to me that no marriage certificate had been found among the many papers Maria had left.

2. Dahl, *Vidkun Quisling*, p. 104; source reference p. 497. Quote translated by K. A. Seaver.

3. NB, Quisling Archive, Ms. fol. 3920: XI: 9. Quote translated by K. A. Seaver.

4. Juritzen, *Privatmennesket*, p. 71.

It cannot have been at all easy for Quisling when he saw his family again in the spring of 1924, subsequent to events which Alexandra will now describe:

Alarmed and disheveled, Vidkun walked into my room, fell to his knees, and cried openly and unashamedly while he pressed and kissed my hands and begged me to forgive him. Blaming himself for all my suffering, he assured me that I was the only person in the whole world whom he truly loved and trusted. He would never abandon me.

I had no idea where Mára was, and in my exhausted state I did not care. All that mattered to me now was that my tormentor was gone and that Vidkun was with me. Undisturbed by Mára and by other outsiders, we were at long last able to talk to each other at leisure and without fear of interruption.

Shocked and dazed though I was after my latest shattering experience, I sensed that, for the first time in our relationship, Vidkun seemed to be fully aware of the havoc he had wreaked in my life. Perhaps the Norwegian owner of the hotel had told him about my suffering and despair, or maybe Vidi had put it to him in a letter. At any rate, Vidkun had never been so concerned, so tender, and so caring as he was at that moment and during the days that followed. But despite all his evident repentance, he never explained what powerful forces had made him turn away from the path of decency and honesty.

I was convinced that Vidkun's effusions of guilt were genuine, but I could not help asking myself which was the real person—this gentle, emotional man going out of his way to make me feel loved and secure or the cool, egocentric one who for so many months had manipulated me and my life as if I were a pin used for marking a position on one of his maps.

A combination of wariness and emotional exhaustion on my part probably accounts for the complete role reversal that now

took place. While Vidkun remained in a high emotional state, I felt cool and detached in the midst of our new-found intimacy, as if I were an outsider observing two people trying to reassemble their lives. Vidkun concentrated on telling me how he felt; I focused on giving him a sober account of some of the events that had led to my present sorry state.

When Vidkun learned the details of Nikitin's visit, he became enraged and vowed that the first thing he would do was to go out and teach that scoundrel a lesson he would never forget. I tried to calm him down by changing the subject to my still unformed plans for my future and by asking Vidkun's advice. However, he refused to discuss such plans and said that all that could wait until I had had a chance to rest and regain my health in our comfortable Oslo home. Right now, there were more urgent problems to attend to.

He nevertheless calmed down sufficiently to sit for a while in silent reflection. Suddenly, with an abruptness that was more like his old self, he asked me to put on a better dress and pack my things.

A short while later, Vidkun checked me out of the SVANE hotel and moved me and my sparse belongings to a small *pension* that looked like an elegant, remodeled mansion, where he had rented a studio *pied-à-terre*. There was no trace of Mára anywhere. The atmosphere was quiet and relaxing, and with Vidkun's company and solicitous care I soon felt at home. After we had eaten lunch together he left me, saying he had some urgent business to attend to. He promised to return shortly.

While he was gone, I speculated about what surprises might lie around the next corner. I did not have to wait long to find out, because Vidkun soon returned and said that everything had been taken care of. I need not worry, because he, Captain Vidkun Quisling, was a man with influence and important friends. That rascal Nikitin had been dealt with and was getting what he so

richly deserved; he would have to leave Europe for South America with a pledge never to return. For my own part, I could not remain in Paris alone, but must accompany Vidkun back to Oslo, as planned long ago.

I had no objections. I was happy at the prospect of returning to the peace and stability of Norway, and I looked forward to seeing again the many new friends and relatives I had left behind there. Maybe they would be able to help Vidkun with whatever personal problems he had. Most of all I hoped that Mor, my dear, sweet mother-in-law, would exert her good influence on Vidkun. Indeed, life suddenly looked brighter than it had for a long, long time.

And so, before evening on that same day that had begun so bleak and hopeless, Captain and Mrs. V. Quisling at last resumed their second journey from Russia to Norway and left Paris for their home in Oslo.

Vidkun had been in a great enough hurry to get out of France, but he allowed himself plenty of time on this journey home. We went by train through Belgium, Holland, Germany, and Denmark before taking the ferry across the Skagerak to Norway. Such a journey would normally have taken no more than a couple of days, but at the leisurely pace chosen by Vidkun, we used at least ten days. In almost all respects it resembled our honeymoon trip from Moscow to Norway. Just as he had done then, Vidkun insisted on stopping in every city of size and fame on our route. As before, he always took the best room in the best hotel, and meals at the very best restaurants were interlaced with our sightseeing excursions.

The only difference was the new gentleness in Vidkun's gallantry and attentiveness. It touched me deeply. I basked in the warmth of his attention, all the more so because he had regained

his former good humor the moment we left Paris. Now, he was relaxed and downright cheerful.

The closer we came to Norway, the more I longed to see our home again and to resume a normal, purposeful life. I was impatient to see if there was mail waiting for me from Mama and my friends and eager to retrieve the personal things I had been missing so badly—family photographs and letters, Mama's gifts, my beautiful fur coat, and all the lovely wedding gifts we had hardly had a chance to use.

Vidkun, however, grew increasingly pensive as our journey progressed, and there was often a look of sadness and concern in his eyes. At such times he would be particularly attentive and affectionate. He well understood my impatience to be back home in Oslo, he said, but there were several good reasons for us to travel slowly. I needed to regain my health and vigor before our arrival, and this leisurely pace allowed us a rare chance to be together without interference from others. Besides, he was merely keeping his old promise to show me more of Europe. Rather disconcertingly, he added that this trip would give me an opportunity to explore the educational possibilities in the various small countries we were passing through.

"Take Belgium, for example. Many people don't think much of this small country, but it's one of the most advanced nations when it comes to technology and industry, and it supports more people per square kilometer than any other country in Europe. The Belgians have some of the most outstanding professional schools anywhere. And the fact that French is the chief of their two official languages ought to make you feel quite at home here. You ought to take note of such things."

I gazed out at Belgium while that industrial wonderland, drenched by rain and covered with soot, passed review outside our railway window. Mills, mines, tall chimney stacks belching dirty smoke over a cheerless landscape interspersed with railway

yards. . . . Brussels had displayed a certain provincial charm, that was true, and had in some odd way reminded me of Kharkov, but I had managed to pass through several similar cities without being seized by the urge to take up residence in any of them. What was Vidkun trying to tell me?

“No, thanks, Vidkun. Belgium might be very nice, but it’s not for me. If I’m too stupid to learn enough Norwegian to attend a university in Norway, I ought either to forget about going back to school or else continue my education in France, which I have loved since I was a child. I love it even better now that I’ve seen how well it suits my own nature.”

Holland was next. The weather was still foul, but that failed to put a damper on my instant liking for that picturesque and captivating country with its canals, windmills, and clean and friendly people. In Rotterdam, in Amsterdam, in ancient city after ancient city, I walked about so entranced by what I saw that I became almost oblivious of Vidkun’s presence. For a change, *he* had to adjust his pace to *mine*.

Seeing my enthusiasm, he asked me—somewhat hesitantly this time—whether I should not like to extend my stay in Holland. I laughed off his absurd idea. How could one live in that fairyland without being born into it or without knowing a word of its fantastic language?

Leaving Holland behind, we cut across a corner of Germany and started up the entire length of Denmark. As far as I could tell, before we boarded the ferry for Norway, Denmark was also a thoroughly attractive country, and Vidkun did not miss the chance to call my attention to all its advantages. He spoke at length of the country’s important role in European history, not forgetting to mention its close ties with Russia through marriages between the two royal houses. He reminded me that the Russian Dowager Empress Maria Fyodorovna, formerly Princess Dagmar of Denmark and now the widow of Tsar Alexander III, was living

in Denmark with several of her younger grandsons after they had made their escape from the Crimea.

For all its charm, that flat and smiling, orderly landscape looked alien and not the least reminiscent of Russia. I explained to Vidkun that when I thought of Denmark at all, it was only as the quaint home of Hans Christian Andersen.

Vidkun was not easily discouraged. A short while later, I said that all these people seemed so prosperous and happy, rolling along in all directions on their bicycles, that they made me want to join the busy and purposeful throng. That immediately produced a fresh suggestion:

“Well, Acia, that could easily be arranged. If you like, we could buy you a bicycle, and then you could stay here for a while. Frederikshavn is not far from Oslo, so it would be easy for me to visit you here often,” said Vidkun, half in jest, half in earnest. At the same time, his face expressed confusion as well as longing.

My patience was at an end, and I decided to take the bull by the horns. “Listen, Vidkun, what is the matter with you? First you abandoned me in Paris without any explanation at all. Just as I was growing used to that city, you suddenly decided to take me back to Oslo. And now, when we’re only a few hours away from it, you’re trying to get rid of me again. I don’t understand you. You know how miserable you have made me, and you don’t look so happy yourself. No, let me finish what I’m saying. I have always considered you a wise and reasonable man. *Please*, tell me honestly at last what you want from me—what is going on with you . . .”

Vidkun listened attentively while watching me with pain and sadness in his eyes.

“Acia, you know I’ve been happier with you these last several days than I’ve been for a long, long time. I wish I could just go on traveling with you like this forever, all around the world, just the two of us. Please remember that, always. What a pity, what

a crying shame that we have to return home, that I must go to Telemark!”

He seemed so sincerely unhappy that I was overwhelmed with pity for him. At that moment, I could gladly have accompanied him to the ends of the earth.

“But why must you go to Telemark?” I asked.

“Well—because—because Mára is waiting for me there,” he said tonelessly. Then he told me that he had brought Mára straight to his parents’ home without stopping in our Oslo apartment. Beyond that, he offered no explanation for either this latest bizarre act or for the many that had preceded it.

After this, there was nothing left for me to say or do. I had asked for the truth, and the truth held no comfort. The only relief I could find under the circumstances was the thought that Mára evidently was not sharing my home.

Despite the shock I received from Vidkun’s disclosure during this last leg of our journey, I felt both excitement and relief when we arrived at Erling Skjalgssonsgate 26 late in the evening.

The house was just as I remembered it—dun-colored and massive and practically indistinguishable from the other houses in the block. This was Vidkun’s and my home, where we had spent the first months of our marriage. A tangle of emotions warred inside me when I followed Vidkun up the stairway just as I had done the very first time I entered that building. In a perfect repetition of that time, Vidkun carried the heavier luggage with me helping him. Then he opened the front door with his key and let me walk in first.

It was dark in our apartment, because the electricity had been turned off, but fortunately it was the season of the “white nights,” as we say in Russia. I walked over to the window, pulled the heavy drapes aside, and opened the window. The pale light of the northern summer sky filled the rooms. I could see where I was going and need not fear the dark.

Meanwhile, Vidkun went back downstairs for the rest of my luggage, which he placed with the other pieces in the small front hall. But instead of continuing into the apartment, he showed signs of leaving.

"I'm in a hurry, Acia, a very great hurry. I have to leave for Telemark immediately."

I was utterly confused by this unexpected turn of events. "What do you mean, 'immediately'? You can't just leave me here this late, in the dark, without gas or electricity or even running water! If you really have to leave right away, can't you at least order the utilities connected so the place is habitable?"

"No, it's too late to do anything about that now. Everything is closed for the night, and everybody is in bed. And so should you be. Just stay calm and get a good night's sleep. It will be morning before you know it, and then the superintendent can arrange everything for you."

I could see that he was impatient to be gone. After several more assurances—"I'll be back soon; don't worry; everything will be taken care of; we'll see you soon"—he was gone. He left some money on the shelf below the mirror in the hall, gave me a box of matches, kissed me on the forehead, and disappeared.

After Vidkun had left, I was at first more baffled and angry than scared. After all, I had stayed alone in our apartment before, and there would be friends and relatives within easy reach. I had better follow Vidkun's advice and try to get some sleep; I was exhausted.

After rummaging around out in the dark front hall, I found a candle stump in the small drawer underneath the mirror. I lit the stump and walked back into the other rooms, but there it was so light that I decided to save my candle, especially since its small, bright flame shone in such dreadful contrast to the yawning solitude around me.

All our bedding and other household linen had been packed

away, and I was too tired to start unpacking it this late at night. All I wanted was to wash off the travel dust and have a drink of water, but the pipes had been drained. Everything in our apartment bore witness to our long absence. The air was stale; the furniture draped in sheets looked fantastic in the silvery light; the mattress on our bed was bare; and everything was covered with dust. Walking about from room to room, I felt sick. How different they looked now from the way I had left them! They did not have much in common with my dreams of being back home in them again, in a safe and happy harbor where I would be busy and happy raising a family.

I spent most of that night, and the many nights that followed, out on our balcony, where I sometimes managed to nod off. I would not have been able to sleep at all had I known that my husband, who so recently had gone out of his way to show me his tender love, was resuming his attempts to convince his family that Mára was his real wife. Both that first night back home in Oslo and for many months and years afterwards, I was completely ignorant of Vidkun's and Mára's stories about how he had married me quite *pro forma* just to get me out of Russia, after which he had obtained a divorce so that he could marry Mára.

Morning came at last. The utilities were restored, which made me more comfortable, but it could not remove the heavy burden that had descended on me after that short interlude of relatively carefree happiness. Mára was still in the picture. With my Paris experience in fresh memory, I trembled at the thought of having to contend with her again, of having to fear for my life.

To chase away my apprehensions for the moment, I took a shower and went to work putting the apartment back in proper order. At least it was clear that Vidkun had spoken the truth when he said that he had not brought Mára here. I saw no sign of her anywhere. I cleaned and tidied up feverishly that whole first day so that everything would look nice when Vidkun's rel-

atives and my Oslo friends learned that I was back and came to call.

The days went by, and nobody came to call. My few attempts to get in touch with people I knew were in vain. It seemed that everybody had left town for their summer holidays. In his first letter from Telemark, Vidkun confirmed this, saying that at that time of year, all Norwegian cities were empty. He asked me to be patient and just wait for his return. As usual, he did not mention Mára; nor did he write about her in his subsequent letters.

As time wore on, my isolated existence and all the uncertainty took its toll. My insomnia grew worse and was probably not helped by my spending every night out on our balcony to escape the loneliness in the apartment behind me, which threatened to consume me. Occasionally I would write a letter by the lingering daylight, but the rest of the time I would just stare out at the street below me, which lay there so deserted in the pale summer night. At that time, there were very few automobiles in Oslo, and it seemed as if none of them ever passed by our house. There were no lights in the windows around me, for the few people who were not away on holiday were fast asleep in those lifeless houses that stretched as far as the eye could see. The whole scene looked theatrical and as unreal as my own situation.

Endless days succeeded those sleepless night. I saw no reason to cook just for myself, especially since I had no desire for food. Still, I knew I had to eat, so every day or two I would walk to a nearby shop and buy bananas and cream. I would cut the bananas into little pieces, pour the cream on top, and eat the mixture when I finally felt hungry. Some kind of survival instinct must have dictated this diet, because it kept me healthy for the month or so that I ate nothing else, and it was fattening enough to prevent me from getting thinner than I already was.

After my frenzied housecleaning on that first day, there was

nothing more for me to do in the apartment. To stave off gloom, I reverted to my old habit of taking long walks along Karl Johansgate while I tried to sort out my present situation and to guess what the outcome might be. When I felt sufficiently tired, I would return to the apartment, hoping that somebody, *somebody* who knew me would pay me a visit.

One day, the doorbell finally rang, and I opened the door in a joyful anticipation that quickly disappeared when I saw the middle-aged gentleman standing outside. I could not recall having seen him before. He said he was a distant relative of Vidkun's and had met me on some occasion or other the last time I was living in Oslo. Without letting him in, I asked politely what he wanted. Holding out the flowers and the box of candy he had brought with him, he explained that he had heard I was all alone, so he had come to ask if he could be of service to me. Although I now thought I recognized him, I knew he had never been a guest in our home, and the fact that he came to call when he knew that I was home alone was so strange that it put me on my guard. I thanked him and said that precisely because I was alone in the house, I regretfully could not ask him inside. Very reluctantly, he left with his candy and flowers.

Aside from that interruption, I had to depend on letters to keep myself from thinking that I had ceased to exist. When I first arrived, I had found several letters addressed to me, some written quite recently and others from quite a while back. They had been placed in a tidy pile and showed that Vidkun had stopped by in the apartment before he brought me back to Norway. The letters were from Mama, from friends in Russia and Paris, and from aunt Génia in Nice, who wrote to me in the most tender way possible. She said she had been very fond of both Papa and Mama, and that she would very much like to see me if I happened to be in France again.

On Vidkun's desk there were also several letters to him from

Vidi, which he had left opened and prominently displayed, perhaps in the hope that I would read them. I glanced at one of them and saw that Vidi was asking him to pay her some money he owed her. Then she wrote something about me. I did not feel that it was right for me to read further and turned away in painful embarrassment.

Vidkun's letters from Telemark came at least once a week, full of advice but containing very little news, and with no word about when I might expect him back. My sense of time became rather blurred, but I think I may have been in Norway for some four or five weeks when my life as the only spectator in a deserted theater came to an abrupt end.

With the swiftness of a revolving stage, the scene changed. Completely without warning, Vidkun, Mára, and all their luggage arrived and shattered the silence surrounding me.