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Alexandra continues her story:

Oblivious of other people, the Captain and I walked and talked as winter yielded to spring and summer, and our mutual respect and admiration grew. The warmer weather put an end to the suffering caused by the killing frost, but the famine was worse than ever. What I saw around me was bad enough, and the Captain told me that the situation was growing ever more desperate throughout the Ukraine. Everyone in our office knew that he had sent a report to the League of Nations in April, in which he had pleaded for an immediate increase in supplies should he have any hope of easing this desperate need.

Sometimes we heard rumors that the Soviet government intended to institute a “New Economic Policy” (NEP) recognizing private enterprise and the right to private property and to introduce a new currency based on gold. Meanwhile, people like my mother and myself knew only disorder, arbitrariness, and devastating inflation. To keep the malcontents in line, the authorities continued to arrest innocent citizens on the thinnest of pretexts, and many of our friends and neighbors disappeared without a trace. As before, Mama and I feared for our lives, but by means

of barter, her pay as a nurse, and my salary from the PomGol, we at least managed to hold our heads above water.

I usually left for the office in the morning on an empty stomach, however, and often there was no food in the house when I dashed home in between my regular office job and my work at the switchboard. My stomach was usually growling, therefore, when I started out on my long walks with Captain Quisling, but most of the time I did not notice it because we had so much to talk about.

During one of our walks, Captain Quisling asked if I could find time to meet him on my days off. I told him that, although I was usually busy with my studies and ballet practice or taking part in occasional performances, I was reasonably free to dispose of my time as I wished and would be glad to meet him on Sundays and during the fortnight of vacation due to me soon.

"Listen, Acia," he said. "Next Sunday, let's go to the Technological Park and have a picnic. We'll bring a few sandwiches, take a long walk, and then sit down and have a nice meal in the open."

I was panic-stricken. Food, sandwiches—where would I get anything of the sort? Surely Captain Quisling knew that we Russian PomGol employees were barely surviving on our scanty rations and never received any of the food distributed to famine victims. Did he ever think about it when meeting us in the office or taking me on those long walks—did it make him uncomfortable to be so privileged himself?

After some hesitation, I said: "No, I cannot bring any food with me, we have nothing, no food at all at home."

"Well, never mind, it's all right," he said. "In that case, we'll have to make do without food. We'll just take a walk and talk."

"Perhaps he's too embarrassed to offer to bring the food himself," I thought. "It would be so easy and so natural for him, but maybe he's afraid of embarrassing me." When I recalled the bla-

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tant way in which Bashkóvich and his cohorts had tried to lure Nina and me with food, I was, in fact, glad the Captain did not suggest bringing food himself.

That Sunday, I did my best to improve on my everyday office appearance. We no longer had a mirror because Sófia's Commisar had long since sent two soldiers with a requisition notice demanding our wardrobe with its plate glass mirrors—one of our last pieces of decent furniture—"for the People's Actress Sófia." Our clothes were, therefore, hanging on hooks around the walls of our tiny room. I fixed my hair as best I could, dressed up a bit, and put on a hat I had made myself with yarn unraveled from an old garment. Then I finally told my mother how I had met Captain Quisling, giving her the whole story of my friendship with him.

Mama did not seem too surprised; perhaps she already knew or had guessed what little there was to know. She just gave me a long, thoughtful look and said:

"Be careful, my girl, he's a foreigner. God alone knows what kind of person he is. Don't get too attached to him. He'll go away one day, and I don't want to see you suffer. Leave him alone! The sooner you forget him, the better."

She hesitated for a moment, then added: "You should take better care of your health—look at yourself, you've lost too much weight! At your age, you need nourishing food. I wrote about it to your aunt in Chernigov, where conditions are much better than here, and where they still have food. She says she would be glad to have you stay with her for a while, so I suggest you spend your vacation there. The change will do you good, and you'll gain some weight and strength. Someday I'll be able to repay your aunt, I hope."

At that time, when food was so scarce that people hardly thought about anything else from morning until night, people hesitated to accept food even from their closest relatives. I rather

liked the idea of taking a trip, however, and Mama seemed much relieved that I did not protest. Then I quickly kissed her and ran out the door.

The Captain and I walked together all the way to the park, which actually was more of a forest. I knew it well because I had been there many times before, first with my parents and later with my friends. Quisling and I walked along the wide road running through the park, and then we turned to the right into a smaller lane leading to a favorite observation spot near the edge of a very deep ravine. We sat down at the edge of the ravine to take a rest among the flowering shrubs and trees and savor the welcome change from the hot, dusty city.

Past the gently sloping side of the ravine we could see far into the distance. The view included Zhuravlyovka, one of the poorer suburbs of Kharkov on the wrong side of the railroad tracks running north. I had never seen it closer than from that particular spot, but I knew that it was mostly inhabited by railway workers, lower-middle-class people, and impecunious college students. Even from where we were sitting, we could see that the houses were small and ugly, with rusted sheet-iron roofs, and that there were very few trees except for the dry and rugged white acacia trees that the Americans call locusts. The town certainly was a blot on an otherwise lovely view.

With a sweeping gesture, the Captain pointed to Zhuravlyovka and said: "Now look there! What kind of life is that? What kind of life can Russians expect if they haven't got the sense or desire to learn even such a simple thing as building proper houses? What style of architecture is that? Look at those disgusting iron roofs, those outrageous colors! Isn't that a typical Russian provincial town, with its dirty streets, ragged people, decrepit huts, everything in disrepair, with no pavements, no landscaping, no plumbing, even!"

Although it was impossible to see all those details at that

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distance, I had to agree with him that Zhuravlyovka did not look attractive. But what could one expect on the city's outskirts, the customary domain of those with very little money?

My first reaction to his scornful outburst was pain because he, of all people, did not understand. I thought, "My God, would not the same thing happen to any other country forced to go through such mortal trials? One of the things I admire in you is that you have come to my country's rescue, like the Good Samaritan. If you don't like us, why do you stay, why have you spent years learning Russian?"

Out loud, I just said, "From what I know, even the most beautiful cities in the world have their outskirts and backyards and their slums behind the railroad tracks. This is one of the Kharkov ones."

Quisling replied by reverting to his favorite theme of how the Russian people needed wise leadership and proper training. Our unfortunate situation now was mostly due to inborn weaknesses in the Russian character, he continued, such as indifference, a lack of clearly defined goals, an inability to pursue goals with conviction, and a happy-go-lucky attitude. He said that even with worthy goals and a sincere desire to reach them, it is impossible to accomplish anything without willpower, determination, and concentration.

"Yes, I think I know what you mean," I replied. "I found out long ago in my ballet work that talent alone is not enough; success demands hours of hard, stubborn work every single day. I think I have both willpower and determination, and I want to become a prima ballerina and work very hard for it, but I don't think my career should be all there is to my life! Wouldn't it be a pity always to be looking in just one direction, depriving myself of the many other interesting and beautiful things surrounding me? It would be just like taking monastic vows. And there are very few people with that kind of willpower!"

"Not at all!" he exclaimed. "Willpower, or let us call it moral courage, can be developed by any human being worthy of that name! And the joy of being able to reach your goal is greater than anything else, because your will made you master of yourself." He said this with an intensity I had never seen in him before.

"Listen, Acia," he continued, "I shall tell you a story from my childhood, something I have told nobody else. You can learn something very useful from it."

I remember his story almost verbatim, especially since he repeated it on several occasions later.

He said he came from a distinguished, but not wealthy family. His father was the parson of a small provincial town, where he also taught school, and his mother was a housewife. They lived quite comfortably, but they had no money to squander. Not wanting to spoil their children by giving them too much pocket money, his parents gave them barely enough to cover essential expenses.

From his earliest childhood, Vidkun had been very ambitious. He wanted to escape from his rural surroundings and did everything in his power to gain success and recognition. To achieve that, he had to work very hard and renounce most of childhood's joys and pleasures. He had to forget about the kinds of recreation that occupied his schoolmates, such as team sports, games, flirting, and other forms of play. He was determined to develop and temper his willpower to such a degree that he would not flinch or falter even under the greatest stress or at the moment of the most critical decision.

In his view, it was equally important to develop both mind and body to their fullest potential, he said, and he wanted to be ahead of everybody else both in his academic work and in athletics. He had made up his mind to become the skating champion of his area, and for that he needed good, professional skates instead of the old, defective ones he had found in a closet at home.

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In the local sports shop window he had seen a pair of exceptionally fine skates, but they were very expensive, and he had no money at all. With fierce pride, he told me that he did not want to ask his parents for the money but would earn it through his own efforts.

For the next year or two, he doggedly saved all the money he could get his hands on by working and doing errands, depriving himself of many things he needed, going without lunches, saving a few cents here and a few cents there, always with those skates in mind. When, at long last, he had saved the considerable sum required, he happily ran to the sports shop where he had spent so much time feasting his eyes on those skates. At last, he held them in his eager hands and could try them on before becoming their new owner.

He had never wanted anything more desperately than those skates. But the moment he was about to realize his dream, he suddenly decided to deny himself that longed-for happiness. I believe he gave the money to his mother for some charity.

Why did he refuse himself that well-earned joy? Because there was a joy of a higher order. He could not act otherwise if he wanted to prove to himself that he was strong and determined enough to direct his life in any way he wanted, without being enslaved by the fancies and desires of the moment. He said all this with great force and with pride shining in his face.

We remained for a long time on that high spot overlooking the ravine. It was clear that the Captain liked the park and greatly enjoyed our foodless "picnic." He said that this outing was the best time he had had in Russia, and he added:

"You know, Acia, I'd like to see you more often. Now that you're getting your summer leave, how about taking advantage of it and coming here every day? It's so nice to sit here and talk with you. Shall we return here tomorrow?"

"Oh, I'm sorry, but it'll be impossible for us to meet again

that soon. My vacation begins tomorrow, and my mother wants me to go to Chernigov and stay with her sister."

When he at last understood what I had said, he looked at me with surprise and disappointment. After a moment's silence, he asked, "And where exactly is Chernigov?"

"Here in the Ukraine—it's an ancient city somewhat north of Kiev."

"Oh yes, of course. But how long are you going to stay there?"

"Well, I'm going there for the whole two weeks of my leave," I said.

"What a pity, what a pity! It means that we won't meet again—this is our last meeting! Because in ten days I must return to Norway."

"Yes, then it means that we'll have to part."

At that moment, he took my head in both his hands, pressed it to his shoulder with strength and tenderness, and then kissed it. "Oh, Acia, now I'll remember you for the rest of my life."

He looked at me intently in silence and finally added, "From now on, whenever I unfold my maps of the world and see the word "Asia," I shall always think of you."

"I'm really very glad we've met," I replied. "I have so much enjoyed our conversations and our walks—I'll miss them. We've had such a nice time together."

I said it with great sincerity because it had indeed been a very pleasant friendship. He had always behaved so very correctly; there had never been a moment of embarrassment, vulgarity, or unpleasantness, except when he was critical of Russia and her people. But what had he really seen in Russia except disorder, misery, famine, death, and other horrors?

Our happy outing came to an end with wistful farewells. Our parting was very warm and cordial. Vidkun kept repeating, "I'll be thinking of you—I'll think of you often."

When we shook hands, he would not let go of my hand.

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“Maybe you’ll come back?” I asked.

“Yes, that is possible,” was his polite reply, and with that we parted.

Although trains did not run on regular schedules at that time, there was a train leaving for Chernigov the next morning, and I boarded it without hesitation, not even dropping by at the office to tell my friends goodbye.

It was my first journey without my mother, and it was with some trepidation that she sent me off. Unlike our horrible trip to Crimea, however, this trip proved uneventful and pleasant. I shared a coach compartment with several elderly women who did everything they could to make me comfortable and who even shared their scanty meals with me.

The farther the train traveled to the northwest, away from Kharkov, the clearer it became that this part of the country had been spared the extremes of destruction and famine that wars and revolution had caused in the southern Ukraine. And when I arrived at my aunt’s, I was surprised to learn that there, too, they had been spared personally. Although both their city house and their large country estate nearby served as headquarters for a very important Red Army command, the Commander, a former Tsarist officer and a very humane person, had not evicted my aunt and her family, but had allowed them to stay in the former steward’s residence so that my aunt could manage her property. There was plenty of space, both indoors and out, and enough good food for us all.

Not only my aunt, but also various cousins and their friends received me warmly, and I was very happy to be with such delightful relatives and to make new friends under conditions that reminded me so much of life before the Revolution. We talked a lot about ourselves and our ambitions. We discussed literature and current events; we tried to guess our future; we played and

danced; and we went to see several ancient churches. In one of those churches, in a small, thousand-year-old town on the high bank of the river Desna, we paid our respects to the grave of Prince Igor of Chernigov, one of our ancestors who descended from King Rörek and who still lives on in the *Lay of Igor's Raid* from the twelfth century.

Under such pleasant conditions, time passed very fast. I scarcely thought about Captain Quisling, and when I did, it was only to describe him to my new friends. And even then, I felt scarcely any regret or sadness, just gratitude for his friendship and his irreproachable behavior—and pride that this distinguished, erudite, and mature man had chosen me for his confidante. It had been a pleasant and interesting experience while it lasted, but our ways had parted; he would be gone, and that was that.

When it was time to go back to Kharkov and I had reluctantly parted with my aunt and my new friends, I thought only of my mother and my old friends, whom I eagerly looked forward to seeing again. Not until I returned home from this brief separation from my mother did I fully understand how much she and I meant to each other.

In anticipation of my arrival, she had worked very hard to prepare a special meal and to make our room as pleasant as possible. Naturally, I had to tell her everything about my vacation and our Chernigov relatives, and I also wanted to hear how she had managed in my absence, so we were both physically and emotionally exhausted and turned in early. My last thought when I went to bed was: "I'll have a good rest, and tomorrow morning I can run to the office and see Nina and my other friends."

It was good to be back.

The next day, I opened my eyes to the most beautiful sunrise sending its slanted rays through our skylight, and I quickly got into my clothes. Out in the still-deserted street I stood for a mo-

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ment, drinking in the cool and bracing morning air and looking at the huge Kirka clock in front of our house, which glittered golden against the bright blue sky and showed nine already, although in reality it was much earlier.

As I started walking toward the office, I saw a tall figure standing absolutely still, as if set into the ground, on the street corner right by our house. The figure seemed very familiar, but my mind did not register recognition, probably because the figure was so motionless, so unexpected, so unreal. I took a few steps, and—dear God, it was my Captain!

He stood there like a lamp post, looking at me in silence with his protuberant eyes.

“Good morning!” I said. “What happened? How come you’re still in Kharkov?”

He remained silent for a while longer and then tried to say something. After another long silence, he said at last: “I should have a talk with you, Acia.”

“But that’s impossible. How can we have a talk now, when I have to go to work?”

“Well, then let’s walk there together.” He started walking beside me while he continued: “You know, I simply could not force myself to go away.”

In the course of the two weeks since we had bidden each other farewell—for good, I had thought—I had put him completely out of my mind, weaned myself of him so totally that I never even thought of him. But at that moment, I suddenly felt very glad that he had waited for me over there in the street. In my heart I felt a wave of warm tenderness, as if he were a close relative.

This man, an important foreigner, had delayed his departure just to stand there and wait for me. Not one of the young boys from our group, who would often wait for hours hoping that I

would change my mind and go out with them after all, but a grown man in his thirties, a fascinating man. How extraordinary!

Vidkun resumed his explanation. "You see, I simply couldn't go away!"

"But what kept you from going? Was it business, or are you unwell?"

"No, it was impossible for me to leave simply because—because when I returned home from our last picnic, I took off my coat and found one of your long, blonde hairs on it. And I was so overwhelmed by this yearning that I simply had to wait for you. And I must tell you expeditiously (he used the archaic and misplaced Russian word *bezotlagatel'no*, which now strikes me as just sweet and endearing, coming from him) that I love you and want to marry you!"

This peremptory and categorical proposal took me so much by surprise that I very nearly tripped and fell. And that odd word *bezotlagatel'no* lent a further air of unreality to this declaration of love. In a sense, the word does mean "urgently" or "without delay," as well as "expeditiously." Poor Vidkun just did not know that it had long since gone out of common use and was now found only in official dispatches, if at all. I never had the heart to correct his use of *bezotlagatel'no* in this connection.

I was so disconcerted that I cannot recall just how I replied to this proposal. But I know I was struck dumb for a long time before saying something to the effect that I needed time to think. I was terribly disturbed and excited.

He replied: "Then let's meet again as soon as you get off work. We can go to the park again."

I just managed a nod and a "Very well."

At the office I received a warm welcome. Everyone complimented me on my appearance: "Acia dear, the vacation has done you a lot of good—you've actually gained some weight—your skin has such a healthy glow—you look better than ever," and so on.

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Since none of us ever used cosmetics, they knew that my skin color was natural, but they did not know that I was flushed with excitement because Captain Quisling had postponed his journey home from Russia just to wait for me in Kharkov and tell me that he loved me and wanted to marry me.

I felt hot and cold by turn. I did not mention a word about Vidkun to any of my friends because I needed to reflect alone on the morning's events. I was still perplexed by his strange choice of words, which revealed so much about the Captain's obvious lack of experience in matters of the heart. But I also kept wondering if he was acting like a spoiled little boy in deciding all of a sudden that he loved me and wanted to marry me. It did not seem to have occurred to him that he might be refused. Was this the height of naïveté or, on the contrary, the epitome of self-confidence and pride?

Deep inside me, vague but disturbing new thoughts were stirring, about our vulnerability in life and our seeming dependence on blind chance. Here I was, suddenly confronted with a momentous decision just because a single hair of mine had stuck to somebody's coat. Was it fair that blind chance should control my fate? Or was it some minute detail in the grand design of Providence? Did I really have a choice, or was I just an insignificant pawn, an infinitesimal speck in a predetermined pattern? Ever since that day, these questions have continued to haunt me. George, my closest friend for most of my life, wrote me a poem about it:

. . .
And the axe is hanging,
Hanging overhead.
By a hair, a hairline,
By that single thread. . . .

I now believe I see the answer to all those disturbing questions I asked myself during my life's first great turmoil. Everything has

a meaning and a divine purpose in which we may safely trust. But, at that time, I felt no such certainty, and when Vidkun came for me after office hours, I was no closer to resolving my inner conflict than I had been in the morning.

We went for a long walk directly to our favorite place in the park, by the edge of the ravine. There had been no rain for a long time, so the grass had turned yellow and the leaves were dusty, but we did not take much notice of our surroundings.

Vidkun said: "Now, let's have a serious talk. We have to think everything over in detail and decide when and where we are to get married, when we are to go away, and many other important matters."

"What do I understand about such things? I can tell you nothing about them," I said. "And since I haven't even been home yet, I haven't had a chance to speak to my mother about this."

He took my head in his hands, obviously intending to kiss me, but it felt more as if he were stamping me with his personal seal. He pressed his firmly closed lips against my cheek, much as one would kiss a pet animal from which one is afraid of catching an infection. I found it a little strange, but then I thought that perhaps it was a foreign custom—some quaint rite of courtship. The occasion itself certainly struck me as very beautiful and poetic.

Grasping my hand with both of his, Vidkun said: "I am awfully sorry that at this moment I cannot give you an engagement ring. I simply could not get one, what with all the chaos in this country. Even the simplest things are not obtainable here!"

Clearly, he had not even imagined that I might say no; he had decided ahead of time that I would accept at once. I was pretty certain that even if I now refused to marry him, he would not accept my reply, perhaps not even hear it.

While he pressed my hand and looked eagerly into my face, I stared at the ink stains on my fingers and regretted that I had

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not had time to go home after work to spruce myself up for the occasion. He, too, glanced at my hands, held my forefinger up before my eyes and said reprovingly:

“But this fingernail should be cleaned!”

I found myself at a complete loss for an answer as I stared at the dark line left under my nail by my typewriter ribbon. Was Vidkun really still unaware of the trying and primitive conditions under which we lived—did he not understand how hard it was for all of us to keep up a respectable appearance when it was so difficult just to survive? And could he not have found a more suitable occasion for such an embarrassing rebuke?

Certainly, I could have told my would-be bridegroom that we lacked not only food and security, but also such basic conveniences as water and soap and the luxury of a little privacy. I could have told him that in my dreams, I often found myself back in my childhood, blissfully soaking in a tub of warm and fragrant water while my hair was being combed, and then being taken care of in my own room. In front of a mirror yet!

Such explanations were far from my troubled and excited mind, however. Besides, there was no point in hurting this man who had so impressed me with his irreproachable correctness, trustworthiness, and high principles, and who had just told me in his unusual and touching way that he could not live without me. I could only repeat that I must tell Mama about his proposal and hear what she had to say before I could come to any decision myself.

A short while later, we walked back to town, he to his apartment and I to Mama’s and my little room. My mother greeted my news with profound sadness.

“I simply don’t understand it!” she exclaimed. “Such things cannot be done so hastily and carelessly. It’s most improper. He ought to come here to meet me and talk things over with me.”

“Yes, Mama, I’ll tell him to come and see you. Then you can tell him whatever you wish.”

She looked deep into my eyes and said slowly: “I do not know what to tell him. I do not know him; I know nothing about him. And you are much too young. I cannot let you go away alone with a stranger.”

Despite my excitement, I knew she was only putting my own fears into words. It was not just that I was so young and that the proposal was so unexpected, but what would Mama and I do without each other? For years we had been each other’s whole world. How could I leave her behind alone, with nobody to take care of her and protect her?

Gradually, however, I began to think that there was no reason to expect that our separation would be more than temporary. Either Vidkun and I would return to Russia soon, or we could somehow arrange to include Mama in that other life to which Vidkun had suddenly opened the door for me.

For as long as I had known Vidkun, I had always had warm and positive feelings for him. Now, contemplating the new and promising life he offered me, I felt increasingly certain that he cared for me and wanted to make me secure and happy in his own world, and my gratitude and excitement matured my own feelings from a passing infatuation into a much deeper and more genuine love. I remember thinking: “My God, I really am so much in love with him—I do love him!”

I told my mother about all these thoughts and emotions and tried to comfort her. “Please, oh please, don’t worry. I’m sure everything will turn out fine! Perhaps we’ll all be able to go away together, or maybe you can join us later—I’ll talk to him about it when I see him tomorrow!”

But Mama only shook her head. “No, you’re just carried away; you don’t know what you’re talking about. You’re too young to know what you really feel! You had better tell your Captain that

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I cannot let you get married this suddenly. You're far too young. If you think you love each other, you should put your feelings to the test by delaying your marriage for at least a year or two."

When I gave Vidkun this message the next day and told him that he was expected to call on my mother, he was somewhat surprised. Perhaps he had thought that all the usual rules of conduct had been suspended in Russia during our protracted crisis. But I told him in no uncertain terms that he had to ask my mother's approval of our engagement and marriage.

Whatever he may have been thinking, Vidkun voiced no objection to my mother's request. At the appointed hour, he came to see her at our apartment.

From our many conversations, he knew the whole story of how we had been forced to turn most of our large apartment over to strangers, and I assumed that in his travels among our devastated population, he had seen far worse conditions than our tiny room. Nevertheless, when he entered my home that first time, I strongly sensed—as so often before and since—that he never fully comprehended the tragedy of our situation. It made me feel very uncomfortable.

Though Nanny's room was dark and gloomy in winter, now in summertime it had plenty of sunlight and looked more like an artist's studio. It was sparkling clean, and Mama had done everything possible to make it presentable. She served tea with cookies, obtained with goodness knows what difficulties, on a table laid with a linen tablecloth, napkins, and our few remaining pieces of silverware. But Vidkun evidently did not notice any of these efforts. He had looked very serious, almost gloomy, when he arrived, and he grew increasingly morose while he and Mama sat at the table talking.

Vidkun told Mama that he loved me and wanted to marry me. Saying that he understood her concern about my being so young, he promised to take very good care of me and assured her

that she would have no reason to worry about either me or herself. He also said he had made inquiries and found out that marriage at my age was quite legal. With parental consent, girls might be married even at fifteen, and I would be seventeen on August 20.

He stayed only a short time and did not touch his tea and cookies. When he left, he told Mama he would call on her again soon and tell her more about himself, his family, and his plans for our future. He added that because of me, he had already overstayed his military leave of absence and, therefore, must try to leave for Norway as soon as possible. He did not know if and when he would be able to return to Russia. Repeating that he would arrange everything necessary and keep us informed of all further developments, he left.

It may be that Vidkun was afraid that I would insist on taking my mother along and so avoided a discussion of those details, at least for the time being. But something vitally important had been left unsaid in this conversation that was supposed to settle the destiny of all three of us, and I felt again the same air of unreality I had experienced during his proposal.

After this unsatisfactory first meeting between Mama and Vidkun, I felt as though the wheels were turning without me. I just kept on with my job at the office, where everybody soon "knew for sure" that I was marrying Quisling and leaving with him for Norway, while Vidkun, for his part, was making the necessary arrangements for our marriage and taking care of the many details connected with our trip.

Vidkun continually expressed worry about overstaying his military leave of absence. Just at that time, he was working very hard to complete his report to the League of Nations on the work of his International Relief Mission, a report in which he stressed the great need for future aid. He was eager to deliver the report himself before the General Assembly, but he did not want to risk

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losing his job on the Norwegian General Staff by being AWOL. We were, therefore, to travel by way of Riga, where he had a good friend and colleague who, as a member of the Latvian delegation to the League of Nations, would deliver the report on Vidkun's behalf at the forthcoming conference in Geneva.

One day toward the middle of August, I found Vidkun in a state of great alarm because he had received news of a serious conflict brewing between the Soviet and Norwegian governments concerning huge stocks of lumber belonging to a Norwegian company. The lumber was kept in Arkhangelsk on the White Sea, earmarked for shipment to Norway, but the Soviets had begun loading it onto their own ships destined for England, where they were selling it to an English firm. According to Vidkun, the situation was very strained, and a rupture of diplomatic relations between the two countries was possible, in which case it might become difficult, if not impossible, for me to leave Russia as his wife. He himself might be detained in Russia indefinitely, he said.

Vidkun did not tell me how he happened to be so well informed or why he might be singled out for detention. I could not understand why Captain Vidkun Quisling, Nansen's much-respected emissary traveling on a diplomatic passport, would need to fear detention merely because of some temporary friction between the Norwegian and Russian authorities, but Vidkun insisted that we get married and leave Russia without delay.

I was hurtled into marriage before I had even accustomed myself to thinking of us as engaged—regardless of the lack of a formal announcement. In my confused and fevered state in August 1922, it never occurred to me to ask questions about the man I loved. On the contrary, with the selfishness and inexperience of youth, I was inclined to think that such an exciting future as awaited me must hold countless advantages for us all.