

# No Life Without You

## REFUGEE LOVE LETTERS FROM THE 1930s

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# Eighteen: “Happy and Sad at the Same Time”

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9 June through 1 October 1936

*Delays in their correspondence is reflected in the frustration expressed by Mope in several of his letters and Vera in her journal. In Leipzig, the Aryanization of the city by the Nazi authorities forced Mope to change lodging yet again, while also aiding his mother who was being evicted from the Felsenstein family home. Mope was still endeavoring to sort out the complex paperwork that would allow him to leave for Palestine, where he harbored lingering hope that Vera would join him. His Zionist activities included being voted on to the Hebrew culture commission and close dealings with Haavara, the official organization concerned with the emigration of German Jews to Palestine. Vera’s ultimatum that he needed to choose between his desire to settle in Palestine and his love for her took time to be fully ingested.*

*Vera was to spend part of her summer supervising the Marks & Spencer staff summer camp at Rhyl in North Wales. The physical distance between them and the political oppression in Germany left the two uncertain as to how and where they would next meet. The situation was aggravated in late August when a squad of Nazi police terrorized Mope by storming his Leipzig abode at five o’clock in the morning. The police left without taking him into custody but confiscated his passport. Mope alludes to the incident in coded fashion by talking about “a visitor who requested a paper that is very important to me” (24 August) and the misplacement of a “book.” Eventually, with the return of the passport by the police, the couple scrambled a rendezvous during the latter part of September in Karlsbad and Marienbad in neighboring Czechoslovakia.*

## MOPE TO VERA

Leipzig, postcard, 9 June 1936

I was very happy about your letters here because they showed so much positive emotion as a final note of our being together.

Here, I moved my lodgings on Saturday and Sunday, and was finally able to sleep in the new bed yesterday.<sup>15</sup>

Additionally, I wrote a number of letters and applications, and attended consultations with the attorney on behalf of my dear mother. Of course, there are obstacles everywhere which have to be overcome.

On my blessed father's anniversary, my sisters Ketty from Hamburg and Grete from Freiburg have come to give our dear mother company.<sup>16</sup> Ketty will leave tomorrow while Grete will stay for a few more days. I embrace and kiss you in my thoughts, Dein Mope

## MOPE TO VERA

Leipzig, 12 June 1936

I am immensely sorry that my silence agitated you and I ask you to please excuse it. Since my return, apart from the move that cost me a lot of time and strength, I have not had a moment for normal thinking. In negotiating with the authorities, everything involves a terrible amount of thought and consideration in order to avoid mistakes, and because of that, everything moves at a snail's pace with mountains of correspondence. When I went through the paperwork, I came to the realization that a larger amount loaned by my blessed father which was considered lost might be saved at least in part. This caused me quite a bit of worry, but my attorney told me that my idea was a good one. After all of that, I was, as one might say, "done for" and was unable to form clear thoughts of a personal nature.

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15 After moving the previous year from his apartment on Kaiserin Augusta Strasse, Mope lodged on Mozartstrasse, not too far from his mother's home. His final move within Leipzig was to an address on nearby Beethovenstrasse, though he was actually sub-letting rooms around the corner from there in the apartment of Dr. Hermann Jacobson, a retired Jewish attorney.

16 Isidor Felsenstein had died two years before on 28 May 1934. The date also coincided with his daughter Grete's birthday.

Dearest Lilongo, please don't worry if I am mute once in a while, although I would experience the same thing if I didn't hear from you. Please write back soon, because I am waiting, full of longing, for detailed letters about everything that has to do with you.

VERA

Journal entry, 15 June 1936

I am so completely out of balance, so *unsettled*—I wonder what it is.

How much easier everything would be if Mope were here. Tomorrow, I will give him news about something that is not going to make him all that happy. It will let him know that I do not want to go with him right now, that I cannot. It will show him how his eight-day silence last week is completely alien and incomprehensible. I wonder if that is the right thing to do.

Is he a man who can build, who can fight and is strong enough not to fall into despair in this struggle and not to succumb to it? Did he ever have the opportunity to steel himself for that? Will I be able to instill in him those things he might not have?

MOPE TO VERA

Leipzig, 26 June 1936

I have not heard from you for a week. My matters have not made any progress since I cannot undertake anything before receiving permission through the Haavara in Tel-Aviv that I have to present in writing. My application left here on June 9 and left Berlin on June 11.

MOPE TO VERA IN RHYL, NORTH WALES

Leipzig, 28 June 1936

I would like to raise something with you that I might not have the right to write, but, as your lover, I have thought about it a lot and you, an intelligent and understanding human being, will consider if there is not something justifiable to it and not be mad at me. You only ever write about your mother and when I was with you at your house, I was left with the impression that your father is regarded as a negligible quantity.

It seems not quite right that this is so, since, in contrast to my widowed mother, your Mutti has with her the partner she chose for a life together and is not forced to a life of loneliness.

Children are like an artist's products. They are created through love and strength and soul. Aside from the fact that your father has sired an especially perfectly made child in you, there has to surely be a lot of positive in him. The world only judges people according to their material success, but the closest circle uses other rules, and it can, by recognizing the person, inspire and bring that person to material success and help him through failure as well. If a man feels very connected to his family, he needs encouragement in order to succeed. Otherwise he will resign and that seems to be the case with your father.

### MOPE TO VERA IN RHYL, NORTH WALES

Leipzig, 5 July 1936

Of course, it was not all that easy for you to answer my writing and, as you yourself write, an answer like that cannot be exhaustive in treating the difficult problem, man to woman or daughter to father, like talking about it in person would make possible.

I grasp your arguments very well and your attitude as well. I tried, probably much too late and when I was older than you are now, to find my way into the thought processes of my own father. Of course, every case is different, but basically, most people of our fathers' generation are the same in that they are outdated because of their commitment to their principles, unchanged and unchangeable since their youth. My brain tries to construct your answers to my thoughts, and if you were with me, I would feel without strain that the answers are much more right and the forms much more harmonious and flawless than imagination is able to make them.

I spend quite a bit of time with Annelie and she regretted that you and I don't seem to have quite as close a friendship as she had expected and hoped for. I left her to her beliefs, because it is your business to tell her differently when you think the time is right.



## VERA

Journal entry, 9 July 1936

Rhyl: I am happy and well-balanced and thankful: These are days I fancied: close to nature, and together with girls who enjoy the days simply and unspoiled, just as I do. I am completely and firmly occupied and I feel that I am actually accomplishing something. I am in the most beautiful surroundings: the sea, mountains, clean air.

Even if you do not give a minute-by-minute account in your letters of everything by writing down everything for the people you are close to, that absolutely does *not* mean that your feelings of belonging or affection are any less intense. I make a good living, I have an angel of a Mutti and a friend and lover who stand behind me. Dear God, I thank you!!!!

## MOPE TO VERA IN RHYL, NORTH WALES

Leipzig, 10 July 1936

After a constant suspense, I received your sweet and detailed letter. I am interested in everything you do and how you adjust to your new work just as much as in what is going on inside you and your thoughts, because the one is intimately connected with the other. It is very wonderful that you were able to exchange the big city for a scenically beautiful seaside place during the hottest and most uncomfortable season.

Our long-distance status is unbearable in the long run and, besides everything else, there is so much to talk about that cannot be taken care of in writing. I really feel like saying "Damn!" just once and in such a loud voice that you can hear it all the way in Rhyl and become a little respectful of my masculine anger!

In my impatience to receive an answer from the Haavara, I called and talked to Berlin yesterday and there, they put me off by telling me that such enquiries always require quite a bit of time until completion and that the waiting period was completely normal. They only promised to ask Tel-Aviv once again by airmail to expedite the matter. So I have to go on waiting and so, you have to wait for me, unfortunately.

## VERA

Journal entry, 17 July 1936

Today was my day off. I do not feel well and have a cold and because of that, I spent a relatively quiet and contemplative day; I know now that, when I will be with Mope again the next time, I will go all the way with him without any misgivings; only then will I really be able to determine if I still think it right to spend the rest of my life with him. It would be small-minded and conventional or cowardly narrow-mindedness to let anything dissuade me from this.

I am completely clear on this: I am *not* passionately in love with Mope, but I consider that to be a good thing if you want to enter into a marriage and it is a much greater guarantee for long-lasting happiness in a marriage than a love that drowns out everything else with its lack of critique and judgement.

I value his refinement, his tact, his intellectual alertness and interest, and his joy in the aesthetic, aside from his decency and his sense of responsibility. I am afraid that he is not much of a daredevil and that he is not really used to really intense work. I hope, I hope that my misgivings are unfounded.

After a few days of being together completely, of sleeping together, I will be able to see how far the man loses sight of the necessity to make decisions. Should that happen in too great a measure, I am not sure if he is the most suitable life partner for me, because, as much as I love that feeling of reverie, it is completely unacceptable under the circumstances in which we want to enter this marriage. If he cannot see that or does not want to, then his incompetence will be proven to the degree that I consider unsuitable in my husband and the father of my children.

I hope that our next meeting will convince me even more than the last one that I have made the right decision.

But there is something else that scares me: his war injury to his leg; how much does that handicap him physically? I had planned on asking him that both of us should be examined, but I did not do it. However, I do not think he is so unscrupulous to get married when he is not healthy and not physically able.

Mope, despite all of these ever so doubting and weighing thoughts, I do love you and I would love to marry you. It's just that I know if you confirm any of these misgivings, I am convinced that our marriage would be a very unhappy one, and I do not want that for either of us.



## MOPE TO VERA IN RHYL, NORTH WALES

Leipzig, 18 July 1936

Your letter arrived at the same time as the approval of the Haavara in Tel-Aviv, which I took to the attorney immediately. His work really only starts now in negotiations with the authorities. Please excuse the fact that I write about these things, but they do interest you as well.

Since yesterday, after a chill and rain, the weather has been beautiful. Today, it is even hot in a tropical way, a humid air that lays itself on the skin. In Palestine, the heat is much more bearable and comfortable due to its dryness.

You are perfectly right when you say that one has to construct everything in life according to one's will and that the togetherness of two people depends on the realization of one's wishes, but the realities of fate usually hamper that. It takes a lot of conviction and even more love to each other in order to let the harmony you talk about ring together even in everyday life. It is impossible to judge for oneself and determine if this great love—lasting love—is there. That can only be determined in those times when love has to prove itself, and that is where the lottery game of marriage lies with human beings who don't marry just because marriage has to be or because that is what people do, but because they wish to be together, one with the other, and firmly believe that one is the partner to the other intellectually, spiritually and physically.

In the meantime, the sky clouded up and a thunderstorm is approaching, hopefully it will clear the air and make way for the sun tomorrow morning, so that one can enjoy a day off, even if it is not in the way I would prefer—with you. Your body is probably already tanned by the air and the sun and beautiful in its form and color, and I am jealous of the other people who see you and caress you with their eyes, while I just long to do that.

## MOPE TO VERA IN RHYL, NORTH WALES

Leipzig, 22 July 1936

Monday brought me a wonderful letter from you and a beautiful beginning to the week which usually lacks diversion. We have nothing to do in the store, and that is really troublesome and exhausting. We are imprisoned inwardly and life is ghetto-like, surrounded by walls whose

gates are barricaded, but the culture that the ghetto used to breathe is missing. The nature of the people in our circle is strange and shy, their intellectual development is curbed and the feeling of inner atrophy is clearly worn on their faces. Maybe this atmospheric overload is not so much in the air as in us whose respiratory organs no longer dare to fill with the aroma of blooming linden trees and the evening wind pulsing with summer, because we have been detached from our connection to the environment that was familiar and our own, and have not found a new environment that can satisfy us.

There is a photograph of the Erechtheum of the Acropolis in front of me. An ocean of rocks that attained form. The Caryatides, the girls from Carya who turned to stone, with the stone gable on their heads—from ancient times—have more freedom of movement in their beautiful forms than we who represent unhappy figures paralyzed by fate. If we don't manage to create a new habitat for ourselves in the near future, we will freeze in place with a stony burden on our heads, just like the Caryatides, but the beauty that even today lets the eye glow in appreciation of the beauty in the lines, will be torpor and distortion in us and whoever looks at us will be frightened like he would be of the head of the Medusa.<sup>17</sup>

Many years ago, on a bridge in Stambul,<sup>18</sup> I saw two vagabonds, dressed in rags. Their bellies were big and content like that of Crassus<sup>19</sup> and their faces shone like those of happy people. Sometimes, when I think of them, I wish that I could change into one of them, to wander across the wide, beautiful bridge and over the country roads with the other for a friend, to gain new impressions day in and day out, to live on the kernels of maize and the grain that bends under its own weight and to be without my very own environment, because the ALL surrounds me then. I would rather be dressed in rags and be satisfied by that which nature provides than be banned in a circle in which you are a banned man, to vegetate and cry out in spiritual hunger.

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17 Mope's remarks in these two paragraphs subtly allegorize the political situation and the plight of Germany's Jews about which he could not write directly. The gaze of the Medusa had the power to turn the onlooker into stone, and alludes obliquely to the death threat to the Jews posed by the Hitler regime.

18 i.e., Istanbul.

19 The Roman Crassus was known for his infamous greed.

We live in the days of lamentation for Jerusalem.<sup>20</sup> It was destroyed twice in these days, once by Babylonia, then by the Romans, and we sing the same songs even today, augmented by those that are for our broken circle that was home to us, because we had grown roots inside it for centuries. But for what reason should we live in the past and let our strengths sour, as long as there is still a future for us. I must tear myself away from looking backwards and free myself from the bitterness that wants to anchor itself within me and look at you the symbol of my–our–future and now I am once again filled with hope of joy and happiness and inner salvation. The tension flows from me and a soft sleepiness overcomes me that will let me see everything more easily and fill me with hope for tomorrow after a recuperative sleep. Please be greeted, Lilongo, and love me, so much that the strength of the feeling lets us overcome everything much faster and I can be with you very soon and forever.

### VERA

Journal entry, 31 July 1936, Rhyl, North Wales

I have not heard from Mope for a week. I know through Annelie that he received my last letter. Is he so lame—did something happen? I really do not worry about it, because I have been through this with him so many times before—that he did not write without having a serious reason for it. Nevertheless, I was quite disappointed to *not* hear from him at all these last few days.

### MOPE TO VERA

Leipzig, 31 July 1936

After the few lines beginning with "just a few words" on the 23<sup>rd</sup>, I have heard nothing else from you. The pictures you sent that show me your lovely face and much else that is quite beautiful, heighten—if that is possible—the desire in me to have a dialogue with you. But for

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20 Tisha B'Av (the Ninth Day of Av in the Jewish Calendar) is a solemn fast day in commemoration of the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem by the Babylonians (586 BCE) and by the Romans (70 CE). It coincides with the time that Mope was writing this letter.

that, I need a few written words that tell me about you and remove the small disturbances in the dialogue caused by ambient noises. With the advancing radio technology, the communication between us keeps getting better and shows a fortunate harmony a lot of times, but we want to really try to remove all interruptions due to atmospheric disturbances and make our harmony complete.

Nobody knows better than I do that moods can make writing letters more difficult, but should we not participate in these moods in order to make them easier to bear, one for the other? It is an infinitely difficult task that we have posed ourselves, not only to keep up contact between us but to let it become deeper.

Please imagine: Mope comes home every evening, after the breakfast table was empty, with a fevered eagerness to see if there is a letter from you, and then he goes to bed disappointed and, instead of your eagerly awaited lines whose content should follow him into his dreams, he reads a boring newspaper article about unrest in Spain, floods in China, insolvencies in the economy and the persecution of Jews in Poland, and that fills his sleep that should have been recuperative had you just chatted with him before he went to sleep. After so much longing, we have really earned time alone together, don't you think?

My "affairs" are going their own way now. I am expecting the certificate from the emigration advisory service on Monday, and I will have to take it to the other agencies. Added to that, the liquidation of different financial assets belonging to my dear mother requires my careful considerations already overburdened by other great responsibilities. These things all move forward very slowly and I am happy about any movement in the right direction—well, slowly happy.

VERA

Journal entry, 5 August 1936, Rhyl, North Wales

I am very tired and a little exhausted and *downcast*.

Mope, how wonderful it would be if I had you here with me now! I hope that you are the right one in all practical things as well; what I mean by that is real life, the practical side of things.

*MOPE TO VERA IN RHYL, NORTH WALES*

Leipzig, 5 August 1936

I won't receive the certificate from the emigration services agency until tomorrow, although it was promised for Monday, and then, there will be more delays which I don't know about yet, but which everyone who has plans like I do gets to suffer. Before all of this is done, I cannot make any firm plans for the future. I have no idea as to what country and what profession comes into consideration, but Palestine is definitely not deleted off the program. I am still unable to decide, since the form has to be created before the bell is poured. In my momentary situation, it is difficult to form a picture of the future way of life. The view is too narrow and, because of that, every idea that comes from the outside and looks like it might become reality in practice is of immense importance, but it also creates a target for aimless thoughts.

*VERA*

Journal entry, 10 August 1936

I have Mope's picture here and I am afraid of his mouth—he looks much too unenergetic. I hope that is not true and you cannot always judge by the face alone. Mitja's face was too deceptive, and, looking at this, my future life partner seems too soft. Oh, Mope, I hope that our marriage will be a beautiful, good, and joyous one. I will do everything I can on my side to make that come true, but I am still terribly afraid that you tend to brag a little too much, are a little too dependent and a little too soft. I hope that I am wrong.

You are absolutely right for me where your human side is concerned: sensible, fine, intelligent, imaginative, and kind! Oh, I think that should be enough and everything will work out just fine (and I should not reach for the stars too much)!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

*MOPE TO VERA IN RHYL, SOUTH WALES*

Leipzig, 16 August 1936

There goes another lonely Sunday spent without you, but it brought me the happy news that your vacation begins on September 12. I have

applied for a letter of credit for Czechoslovakia after I did not receive one for Belgium, but it is still questionable here if I will receive it. At this time, the only letters of credit available are to Hungary and Yugoslavia and you have to wait for those, all other requests—even if allowed—won't meet with any success for an undetermined period of time. But the main thing is that we will be together and take joy in each other, wherever that may be.

On Thursday, Fred and Hanna, arrived here and delivered your greetings. Fred and I utilized the days very well, and his help in decisions that the other gentlemen of the Gebrüder Felsenstein have to make and to which we have to bring them, was of great use to me. He accomplishes much more with these people as a “neutral” person than me, especially since he impresses them as an Englishman. By the way, it seemed to me that he was quite content with everything we accomplished and even thinks the direction taken is a good one. His affirmation concerning the matter was more than welcome to me. This afternoon, Fred traveled on to Berlin, while Hanna will stay here for fourteen more days. It is a joy for my dear mother to have her youngest daughter here.

### MOPE TO VERA IN RHYL, NORTH WALES

Leipzig, 24 August 1936

After I got home quite late yesterday evening—I had attended a Hebrew class—I found your dear letter. Because I had a lot of work during the day today, I was unable to answer it, and since I cannot have any lights on tonight, due to anti-aircraft drills, I am going to hurry—it is already 7.30 p.m. and twilight—writing to you.

Yesterday, I had a visitor who requested a paper that is very important to me as a hospitality gift, and I could not refuse what he seemed to be entitled to; just a short time after that, your letter arrived—it satisfied me inwardly and I am sure that I will receive a replacement for what was lost.<sup>21</sup>

At this very moment, I am unable to make a decision concerning a meeting place for the two of us. We just have to bide our time to see

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21 In his post-war *curriculum vitae*, Mope makes brief reference to the police raid of his “lodging on Ferdinand Rhode Street, where, at 5 in the morning, officers appeared to arrest me. I was able to convince them that I was innocent, but they did take my passport.”

what hurdles there are to be overcome. Everything else is going on in its usual way, and we have more than enough work in the store so as to avoid thinking silly thoughts.

Hanna is staying for another week. Unfortunately, my mother does not have enough time, since she is without personnel, to enjoy her visit the way she should be able to. Added to that, she will give up her residence on September 15 and for that reason is very busy with the sale of superfluous household items and is forced to stay at home quite a lot.

I have to apologize for the cursory tone of this letter, but if I don't turn off the light now, I will be in trouble. Most affectionately, my dearest girl,  
Your Mope

### MOPE TO VERA IN RHYL, NORTH WALES

Leipzig, 30 August 1936

I think it's wonderful that your time off had been finalized in such a way that we can meet and enjoy those free days together. Unfortunately, I cannot give you a location yet since I do not know if I will be able to get back my book in time. As inferred from your latest letter to me, you do understand me correctly!

This evening, Hanna left. My mother will find her four walls particularly lonely, especially since she is without domestic help and won't be able to find one for the few remaining weeks because none would like to take such a short time position.

There was a Zionist conference of the mid-German group alliance all day today. Since no one knows that I am occupied with moving plans, they voted me onto the Hebrew culture commission, something I accepted rather gladly because it concerns an area that is close to my heart and gives me validation while I am still here.

Yesterday evening, I was at Annelie's who had asked several friends to her place and drank quantities of Cognac, something that was good for me and most especially my cold.

My issues are moving slowly but surely forward and trees need time until they grow up to the sky. It is probable that I will receive my Certificate of Good Standing [Unbedenklichkeits-bescheid]—a notice that declares that I am of no danger to the government—and that is another stage along the way, and I am happy about everything that



brings me closer to my goal and in a completely positive mood, because a bad mood really does not help to move things along more quickly.

I am so not bent on being philosophical that my letter probably sounds rather clinical, but a writer cannot always wait for philosophical highs, because my girl would receive letters from her non-intellectual man much more rarely as is the case already. My existence here is lacking stimuli (with the exception of my Zionistic work which, due to the conditions in Palestine, requires more gritting of the teeth than it provides stimuli), so that I feel like an emptied skin waiting for the new harvest and freshly pressed juice. It is a time of intellectual slump that will hopefully be followed by a rise very soon, so that I can give you more interesting reports than I can today.

## VERA

Journal entry, 2 September 1936

It is truly about Mope that I want to write!

I *want* to be perfectly clear about my current situation: I have rarely been this indecisive, thrown back and forth, and so insecure where my affection for another human being is concerned, as I am at this moment!

Should I have the courage to be completely honest with myself, see everything in *black and white*? At least where my mood today is concerned!

I am afraid that I will marry Mope *pour faute de mieux*. I am discouraged by his lack of self-reliance: a man of thirty-seven years, who lets his mother contribute fifty Reichmarks for his trip and who forgets to pay his bride who works for her living the eighty Reichmarks she spent for him. A man who says about himself that he has an extraordinary sense of direction and then cannot find the way back on a relatively straightforward location. A man whose greatest wish it is to marry a girl and make her happy, and who, despite more than enough free time, does not have the energy to cultivate the language that is necessary for his advancement. A man of thirty-seven who loves a girl completely, but would never think of calling her or sending her a bouquet of flowers, but who is kind almost to a fault. A man who loves a woman so much and still does not have enough empathy to realize that, if you send her such a scary message (like for instance this passport confiscation) and she sends him a very encouraging, brave, but still basically very worried letter, you answer this letter *immediately* so her worries will not

be heightened without good reason and to show her some *resonance* for her willingness to go in for a copper, in for a gold.

Why do I want to chain myself to a German who will always be regarded as a foreigner and outsider here despite *one's own* gift of assimilation? I do not even have any kind of proof of his capabilities. His positive character traits consist only of the fact that he is sensitive and kind and that he loves me immensely? What to do????

These four days of being together, in about two weeks, are actually poisonous, because the physical longing for a sexual partner, on both sides, will sweep away everything else and those clear eyes will be darkened. We should live in the same city for a few months, like other lovers or friendly pairs, without living together, in order to get to know each other better, but when it comes right down to it, is that really all that important? Isn't it more important for someone to satisfy one's ambitious demands? Isn't it much more essential to secure someone who loves you, who will do anything for you and who will secure a home for you in the future and instill ideals in children, as far as that is possible?

Well, this is how far you have come—out of fear of being alone later and a desire for children, you are going to get married! A conjecture Mope made at the very beginning of our becoming acquainted. However, I did not want to marry Mope, he wanted to marry me, and I more than hesitated with my acceptance. What a horrible state of mind today's tiredness, disappointment and maybe even a little indignation at Mope's long-awaited lines made me put down on paper!!!

### MOPE TO VERA IN RHYL, NORTH WALES

Leipzig, 5 September 1936

Between dinner and a walk with my dear mother, I want to write a few lines to you. Unfortunately, I have not received any news from you for quite a long time, so that, if there is no letter from you by tomorrow, I will send a telegram to enquire.

Nothing has changed here since my last letter and only my hope to have my book once again has grown a little.<sup>22</sup> Fortunately, the period of

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22 The "book" is, of course, his passport that had been confiscated when his apartment was raided.

time between now and our reunion is untouched by any of the events and decreases so apparently if one looks at the calendar.

This evening, my cousin Julius is going to London and will stay there for at least a fortnight. I don't have to tell you how happy I would feel to be in his place, especially since he already received permission to establish his residence there. He goes over there within the scope of the company Gebrüder Felsenstein and consequently has a guarantee for the existential minimum at the same time. If one has capital, one can accomplish things much more easily than one could without. They would never have released me from this enterprise on the same basis. When I leave, it also means a surrender of all rights I have based on belonging to the family and my father's partial ownership, while the others who are wealthy through inheritances simply declare, "I am moving to Milan," "I am moving to London," and the others have no choice but to say yes.<sup>23</sup> But maybe, instead of money, I inherited a little more intellect and that is worth something as well, and the two of us will fight our way through, I am not worried about that. We only have to be a little more modest, until we get ahead, live more modestly than we could have ever dreamed, but even that is doable if we understand each other just as well as we both have the willpower to do.

## VERA

Journal entry, 6 September 1936

I did not write to Mope, although I intended to at first. The written word is too plump and immovable for such a subtle matter as this one, I am sure of it. I will call him to account when we are together, very soon now. I am afraid of this meeting, of being disappointed. Of course, the physical, sexual will play such a great role that it will overshadow everything else, but it cannot be allowed to do that. I cannot make things that easy for us, or rather be so shortsighted. I know we harmonize in

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23 Mope's cousin, Alfred, moved to Milan in 1933 shortly after the Nazis came to power, and from there to Uruguay. Julius had contacts in London but settled in New York, taking for himself valuable possessions of the Gebrüder Felsenstein that should have been shared but were never even offered. Both remained full partners in the business and claimed further assets after the war. The demise of the family business was escalated by the mercenary behavior of individual partners.

this one point—and that is why I think that it is not the right thing to go all the way, as I thought at first, just to see if I still yearn for him afterwards, but instead consciously and certainly not go all the way and also let him know right from the beginning, because, right now, I am afraid that it would not help me win clarity, but would take all of my senses prisoner in such a way that I would not be able to judge clearly. And right now, I need a clear and objective power of reasoning in order to make a complete and final decision concerning a yes or a no; and once you have made that decision and it happens to be positive, then you can crown the alliance by giving yourself to him.

### MOPE TO VERA IN RHYL, NORTH WALES

Leipzig, 9 September 1936

Your reaction seemed incomprehensible to me until the arrival of your letter which I had to read several times in order to understand. I informed you about my being indisposed as fast as I could because I thought it only right for you to know about it. At the same time, I told you that the matter was not that important. I cannot tell you more even today.<sup>24</sup>

You write that you have "a lot of good will in stock for me." That is not enough for me and my answer to that is that I neither feel the notion nor the necessity to beg others for love; a store of good will is not love and I do not place any value on anything else. I have written to you several times and asked you to tell me if you have doubts and that I will always try to alleviate them if I think they are unjustifiable. But you also know that I admit to my faults, as far as I am aware of them, because human beings who want to live together have to either come to terms with that or fight against them with love through constant understanding and commitment. People separate because of doubts that eat at them if they don't talk about them. After your conduct which appears quite egocentric to me, I consider it difficult to get back on to the "old correct track," because it bears witness to self-love and unkindness

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24 Mope is, once again, referring to the confiscation of his passport, an "indisposition" which made it impossible for him to travel. The ill temper of this letter is partly brought about by personal strain, and by a feeling that Vera's letters were more indifferent than loving. His passport was returned to him the following weekend.

towards me. It seems ridiculous for me to write essays on energy and the gift of empathy again and again; only a life together can prove that, if you did not already receive an appropriate impression from my letters. But I would suggest to you, if you still have them, to read a few of the earlier letters again in order to recall earlier conversations.

You cannot change me into someone placed to the side, as was done with your father—as I see it. You can go with me together on an equal basis or not at all. Your letter is a conscious or maybe subconscious attack on my feeling of self-worth, but fortunately, I am strong enough to withstand such attacks. It is late once again and I wish you a good sleep, something I will start as well now.

### MOPE TO VERA IN RHYL, NORTH WALES

Leipzig, 13/14 September 1936

Now I am happy and sad at the same time. It is one o'clock at night and I just came back from Berlin where the meeting of the Zionist state board of directors took place. I wanted to participate in it because of the important events in Palestine. Actually, I had counted on finding mail from you on my return home, but did not believe that its content would prove to be so gratifying to me, that my assumptions were wrong and I am, under full consideration of the depressing feeling that I did you wrong. I am more than happy with the two letters you sent.

I would very much like to beg your forgiveness. I hurt you and did you wrong and I am very, very sorry because I can see that now. In return, I want to give you something to be happy about. Yesterday, before I left for Berlin, the missing book was given back to me and I am feeling incomparably freer than during the last few weeks.

Sometimes, there is an abysmal difference between what a writer wants to say and how the reader takes it in, because the mood or the electrical charge of the two participants are different and unknown to each other, and then, according to Nature's patterns, there is a thunderstorm. They are difficult to bear, but at least the atmosphere is cleared and I hope that, once we talk to each other on the telephone tomorrow night, the sky above and in us will be as blue as our stationery once again. If you are not too mad at me, I would suggest that we meet Thursday morning in Karlsbad or Marienbad. Please be so nice and contact Fred right after you get to London so he can procure the needed

Czech crowns for you. You will get them much cheaper through him than in the country.

Please let yourself be passionately embraced and kissed by me in your thoughts and write back as "Your" Lilongo to *your* Mope

VERA

Journal entry, 13 September 1936

During the day:

Yes, I would like to marry Mope and walk down my life's path with him. From now on, I will not let such tortuous doubts come over me again nor lend them my ear in the future.

I will write to him much more often, should we have to keep being separated and will see if that might not be the better and most effective method.

I really hope that he will call me this evening and I am looking forward to those days together, now so tangibly close, and I will not make any plans for them, but enjoy them to their fullest, just the way they are.

Sunday night, *same day*:

Mope did not call me. I waited for that call for over two hours.

It felt good for him to finally be tough with me, and if I have not lost everything, then this was the best possible lesson he could give me. A woman like me, or should we say a spoilt and overly pampered girl, needs a strong hand behind her, otherwise she will get sassy.

I am ashamed, not for having made Mope wait for so long, but *on the thoughts behind it all*; which I put down on paper here in a completely unbalanced hour, but now, I want to make a final decision: Yes, I will marry Mope and no other man shall be able to dislodge him from this place (not even in my thoughts). Pack up your teenage dreams; you really are too old for that and should be experienced enough by now to know that the only thing that counts in life is harmony between a man and a woman and that all the small outside vanities and comforts are completely inconsequential in the end.

Mope is gentle to a fault, is intelligent and you find him physically attractive, so please, let all that nagging and waffling sink into the abyss and keep sight of everything being relative: *the basic stock is good and right*

*in Mope!!!!!! Do not let anyone ruin your conviction; this determination is and forever shall be unshakable and holy to me!!!!!!*

But maybe, I have already lost him! Will he be that impulsive? I think and hope not!

*Vera and Mope were together in Karlsbad, Marienbad, and Leipzig from the morning of Thursday 24 September through to the evening of Monday 28 September. In 1936, Karlsbad and Marienbad (the Sudetenland) belonged to Czechoslovakia. The Sudetenland was forcibly annexed by Germany in October 1938.*



Fig. 67 Postcard of Marienbad in the 1930s.

## MOPE TO VERA

Leipzig, 29 September 1936

Your train is racing through the clear night and will arrive in Lehrte very soon, while I sit here alone, where you were still with me yesterday with your kisses and the gentleness of your movements. The beautiful flowers you brought me still decorate my room. They have bloomed into their full beauty, after they almost succumbed to the change in atmosphere. The moon is looking at me from outside in its fullness and, with its perfect clarity, gives the writing desk its own coloring. We saw it in its beginning at Marienbad. The tender sickle, often overshadowed by clouds, did not have enough strength to illuminate our walk in the forest. Why do the days together go by so fast that they won't even let us experience the moon's travels together?

My beloved girl, I am so happy about the beautiful days, up to and including the very last one, that we spent together in unbeatable harmony and in ever-changing entertainment, never too much and definitely not tiring. I thank you from the bottom of my soul and



with a heart filled with you, that you followed my call to Karlsbad so endearingly and without contradiction and let us enjoy your vacation together, and I would like it if you considered those days among the most beautiful that life has granted us.

VERA

Journal entry, 1 October 1936

Last night, I came back from my Karlstad-Marienbad-Leipzig trip. I am completely happy in my awareness of having found that human being, the life partner who will be able to give me everything I always dreamed of: intelligence, kindness, and gentleness. Dearest Lord, I thank you!

