

No Life Without You

REFUGEE LOVE LETTERS FROM THE 1930s

EDITED BY
FRANKLIN
FELSENSTEIN





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Twenty-eight: Visas, Visas, Visas

1 August through 21 September 1938

To conserve the limited time allocated to his visits to England, Mope was encouraging Vera to join him in the Soviet Union for the duration of her upcoming vacation. Since she too would now be traveling using stateless documents, the process of obtaining permits was less than simple, particularly so as it involved two-ways transit visas for Denmark, Sweden, and Finland, in addition to a visitor's visa to Russia. The correspondence provides fascinating details of a convoluted process, and of their shared frustration when the denial of a transit visa through Finland prevented Vera from traveling to Russia. In hindsight, given the political crises of late summer 1938 that led to the Munich accord, it was for the best that she did not venture east. As a fall-back, Mope advised applying for French visas with the notion that they could meet on the Riviera.

For Vera, Friday, 2 September, the due date for the opening of the new M&S store in the west London suburb of Ealing, was already a red letter, both because of the necessity to hire and train nearly seventy shop girls for the store, and because she knew that she could not travel to join Mope until after the "big day" was done. Her letters give some indication of the level of her success.

With the change of season and the limits imposed on Mope's residency in England, the south of France was a preferable place for them to unwind and rediscover their intimacy. "I will always keep preserved in my memory," voices Mope, "those most beautiful nights filled with the most tender and wildest love making with my most adorable darling." For each of them the ultimate expression of their love was the desire to start a family. The first entry for more than a year in Vera's private journal records her thoughts on this. After their return to London in October, Mope had to count down to December, when his visa restrictions would force him to depart once again.

From both sides, the correspondence is peppered with mainly pessimistic news and observations about the situation of Jews in Germany. Mope's brother-in-law, Dr. Norbert Moschytz, in common with other Jewish physicians, was on the point of being dismissed from his position in Freiburg and looked with despair for employment elsewhere. Mope's sister, Ketty Goldschmidt, and her family, were still in Hamburg, waiting to emigrate once the necessary permits were granted. Cousins from Karlsruhe, Carl and Lies Rosenfeld, were on a brief visit to England in hope of finding work there for their two young sons as a means of getting them out of Germany. To her relief, Annelie Freimann, who announced her engagement to marry, had now obtained most of the requisite papers to settle in the United States. After getting her parents out of Germany, Vera's best friend and her husband, Hilde and Walter Lewy, still living in Genoa, were also looking toward the United States, having finally awoken to the precariousness of their lives in fascist Italy. The expanding list provides a microcosm of the frenetic circumstances and limited options still available to Germany's Jews in their search for political refuge in countries that might yet offer them the security of a new home. The violence against those Jews that was to take place on Kristallnacht (9-10 November), often seen as the pogrom that ushered in the Holocaust, underlined the absolute urgency of this search.

MOPE TO VERA

Leningrad, 1 August 1938

It will be 11 o'clock soon and the day of our wedding anniversary is approaching its end. My colleagues and I came back from the harbor around 5.00 p.m. and decided to have our dinner in the roof garden of the Hotel Europejsky for a change. That was more than welcome to me, because I wanted to have the opportunity to drink to my darling's well-being. Our mood improved gradually and I ordered a bottle of champagne—everyone was quite happy with that—and we emptied our glasses to your happiness, your well-being, and *our* hoped for offspring. When I wanted to pay, they refused and divided the expenses. They told me that the idea was the most important thing, not paying the bill. I thought that was marvelously decent.

It will be midnight soon, and a completely different anniversary begins, the one of the declaration of war twenty-four years ago.¹⁰⁸ Since that time, small fires are burning again everywhere, and the

¹⁰⁸ Germany declared war against Russia on 1 August 1914 in the chain of events that began the First World War.

irresponsibility of some countries' "leaders" has brought a new danger of war closer than the grim experiences should permit. Four years ago, for the twentieth anniversary of the declaration of war, they issued anti-war stamps here, stamps that I am using on my letter today. All the peoples should be shown such horrifying pictures of terror in order to bring them back to reason and make them refuse sacrificing their loved ones again for such nonsensical cruelty, as they are already doing in Spain and China.¹⁰⁹

I kiss and embrace you filled with the gentlest love and with my happiness in the knowledge of you. Most passionately, you! Your Mope

VERA TO MOPE

London, 5 August 1938

I was very interested in what you told me in your letter of July 29 concerning your conversation about pregnancy. Of course, I intend to breastfeed our child, once we have one, because that is most certainly the best thing for it. It is utter nonsense that a woman should not gain any weight and you can tell your friend so (please don't!), because most of the organs change temporarily during pregnancy, as any beginning medical student learns during the first week.

Thank you for having had a drink to my health on August 1! Did you feel how close to you I was???!!! And am?!!! When will you know how long you will be able to stay and when you will be able to come back?!!! Or if we will be together there, you!!!!

Please let me know once again about the ticket to Russia—single or return,—the travel agent seemed to think a return ticket would be better. I applied for a French, Danish, Swedish, and Finnish visa. And I received the identification paper valid for one year!¹¹⁰ *Your Lilongo*

MOPE TO VERA

Moscow, 6 August 1938

Although today was Wychodnoi, I worked the entire day until late into the night. Around 12.30, there was a telephone call from Schapiro. He

109 Mope is referring to the Civil War in Spain and to the Second Sino-Japanese War.

110 As her passport and papers had been confiscated by the German authorities and her citizenship revoked, Vera would have had to travel using a "stateless" identification paper issued by the British authorities.

told me that I should have my visa extended, and I responded that I would be applying for my exit visa. "Well, whatever you want," was the answer and then, "Didn't your wife write to you that she is coming?" I told him that that would not happen at my expense, that I could not afford that. He: "Well, we shall see about that later." I acted as if I did not know anything and then he asked if I had not written to you to tell you that you should apply for a visa which I answered in the affirmative, of course. In the letter to him I wrote, "Concerning my wife's travel to Moscow, I have to consider if that is the right thing to do. If I have to work until late into the night, she won't get anything out of her vacation!! After all, she is supposed to relax when she is on vacation." If we cannot have at least fourteen days we can spend together in peace and quiet, the trip will be nothing but a strain for you.

I am exhausted and my brain is filled with nothing but business. And when you are here, my heart would be so engrossed with you that there would have to be conflict between heart and mind. I will make everything dependent on your extra vacation time. Please let me know about your decision as soon as possible and don't be annoyed at me for blackmailing you like this. Please show me how much you love me by getting some extra vacation time approved.

Tomorrow evening, I will travel to Leningrad again for a few days. The last visit did show some success as I ploughed through a deal for a little under £ 5000. It was anything but easy, but I do feel more satisfied now.

I hope that Hilde Lewy is doing well and that the child (boy or girl?) is growing. I have to affirm that it would be right to let her parents come to Genoa as well, because, if the older generation can no longer enjoy their children, their lives lose all meaning under the current conditions. Unfortunately, danger reigns all over Europe and in any event, the youth is more threatened than the older generation to whom the anti-Semitic methods in Germany seemed to be more bearable. I would like to ask you to definitely talk to Fred about my things and find out about any possibility that might exist to get them out of Germany. The longer we wait, the more difficult it will become. Your Mope

VERA TO MOPE

London, 7 August 1938

My love, I am wondering what you were doing today. You had Wychodnoi yesterday, didn't you? I would really like to know if you are

still in Leningrad or on your way back already, maybe you are back in Moscow by now? Yesterday, our travel agent sent me the identification paper. It is valid for one year until August 1939. He also sent me the paperwork for a Finnish, French, and Swedish visa, and I sent all of it back with photographs today. He is going to send the Danish one soon.

When it comes down to it, the only thing I want is to be with you, you!!!!–And I am feeling quite sad when my love doubts my wishes and my longing to be with him!!!! You do know that I have a job by the way that does not allow me to be completely free and make decisions on my authority alone, and that my most important fulfilling job is to be your wife. That I hope you know and feel as well!!!! Please believe me when I say that I will never forget my beloved because of M&S!!! You seem to think that I try to numb myself with M&S, because how else would I be able to stand it otherwise??????? For me, it is the only salvation—to have an occupation that takes up all of my time, in which I can immerse myself completely—otherwise, I would simply *not* be able to bear these times of separation. I am sure that my beloved will accept that and agree with it.

Your dear mother and Hannalein and children will be coming back next Wednesday and as soon as I have had a chance to talk to your mother and received more information about the matter of your furniture I will talk to Fred immediately to see what can be done. Your boss, with whom I talked about the matter, considered it impossible to get your things out and also senseless to contact a shipping agent in Leipzig from over here. As I said, I will do what Fred advises me to do! Completely and utterly, Your Lilongo

MOPE TO VERA

Leningrad, 8 August 1938

After I worked in the Moscow office of Sojuspushnina until 7.45 in the evening, I left around 8.25. Since I was by myself in the train compartment, I intended to write another typed letter to my beloved, but all of a sudden, such a tiredness announced itself that I decided to lie down for a little while and when I woke up, the train had arrived at the Kalinin¹¹¹ station shortly before midnight, according to the people talking at the station platform. At that late hour, I did not want to risk

111 Present-day Tver, a city situated at the confluence of the Volga and Tvertsa rivers.

disturbing my neighbors with my typing and really went to bed, that is, undressed. I hope that my sweet girl will not be too sad to have been without news for a day.

My day today was quite busy. I went to the harbor where I inspected merchandise until 2.30. After that, I made some visits to the various rooms of my colleagues to find out what kind of merchandise they had seen, where I have to watch out for the competition, how they rate the merchandise, etc.

That's enough about work! This afternoon, I went on a wonderful outing to Zaoskojc Selo—now it is called Puschkin—to the former castles of the Czar. One of the castles, immense and beautifully furnished, was built by the daughter of Peter the Great. They told us that, after construction was finished, the architect went to her and said that something was missing, that the castle was such a jewel it needed a treasure chest to which she answered that the castle was the treasure chest and she was the jewel that was placed in it. The lady seems to have been quite taken with herself. The second smaller castle was built by his grandmother for Alexander I. While the first one was constructed mainly in the baroque style, the second one is of pure classical construction but it was spoilt by paintings that were hung in such a way that they disturb the classical lines. The newer wing that was inhabited by the last Czars was built in the hideous Art Nouveau style. However, it is very interesting because everything was left exactly as it was when the family left on 31 July 1917. Enormous numbers of family portraits, icons of saints, and small, rather worthless household items can be seen everywhere. Actually, it is the residence of a wealthy bourgeois family that was not exactly blessed with good taste. The most beautiful things are the library rooms that Nicholas II supposedly had little interest in and had been established by his ancestors. There are also quite a few mementos of the criminal, arrogant, but nevertheless historically important priest Rasputin. His pitiful handwriting shows that he must have been little more than an illiterate. The Czarina, a princess from Darmstadt, appears to have been the stronger one in the marriage but she was so horribly superstitious that one becomes convinced that these people earned their fate. It is terrible to think that such human beings were responsible for the fate of a great and powerful people. Some women who were with us were extremely interested in all the photographs and personal items and seemed quite excited in looking at all the things once considered taboo

for “ordinary mortals.” It was also quite interesting to me to watch that reaction.¹¹²

With all these stories, I completely forgot to tell my beloved that the cigarettes arrived yesterday and tasted so good to me, after several weeks of smoking Russian and various other mooched cigarettes. My most heartfelt thanks for taking care of that for me! You did a great service of love for me by doing that. The expense also seems to have been less than for the Du Maurier you sent to me the last time, because the price of the cigarettes was only 23/-to which you have to add shipping and customs, of course, but I do not know how much that was.

I am sure that you were able to talk to my dear mother in detail in the meantime and were informed about how her emigration took place. I really hope that she did not suffer too much upset because of it. I would be interested in finding out whether or not Max (Erich Gödicke) is still a decent person or if he can now be counted among the pigs because of the times we live in. I would also like to hear about Semy's plans. I really do feel sorry for him, even if he did not always go along with our wishes. *Your Mope*

VERA TO MOPE

London, 9 August 1938

I suppose that my beloved is still in Leningrad just now. I was so very happy that your earlier trip showed such success and I hope and wish that this one will also show such positive results, because I know how success in your work heightens the mood, even if a lout like Schapiro does not acknowledge it. Please, my love, do not let that one depress you; he is too ill-mannered and loutish for you to even react to him in any way or show that you do. I am sure that you agree with me on that?!!!

Today, I called the travel agent once again: he will apply for a Finnish, Danish, and Swedish transit visa for my trip there and back and also

112 The town of Pushkin (Tsarskoye Selo) outside present-day St. Petersburg, is the site of the Catherine Palace, built by Czarina Catherine II (known as Catherine the Great), and of the Aleksandrovsky Palace, which was the home of Nicholas II, the last Czar. The Catherine Palace was destroyed during the Second World War but has been reconstructed. Mope is mistaken in believing that this palace was built by the daughter of Peter the Great.

for a stay in France. I told him that we also wanted to spend some time in Sweden and he thought that it would be difficult to get a visa for a stay there. Would it not be better if you were to apply for a Russian exit visa so that you have the alternative of coming to me right away if I do not receive my visa? Or maybe I can meet you in Sweden but that is not possible because the visa will be issued for transit only. What should I do???

Please send me your answer immediately and also instruct me concerning the various visas! You have a much better overview on just how many business deals you might miss out on if you do not stay there. You are still a better judge than I can be from over here. Do others stay as long as you??? It seems to me that you are *the only one* among your colleagues who has to stay there for that long!!! Should you depart from there around the beginning of September, I would suggest that I arrange to meet you in Sweden or Holland or somewhere else, or maybe *France*.

From noon on, I was in Ealing today and everything was going topsy-turvy. The replacement staff floorwalker who comes from Richmond is absolutely not equal to the task. She is working under unusually difficult circumstances because she is facing a staff that is completely untrained, and works in a store in which a smooth course has not been established yet. I was there until around 7.30 this evening and I will go back tomorrow afternoon. The store has more personnel than Hammersmith and needs a *capable* staff manager, but there is *none* at the moment! If those people paid better salaries, they would not have any problems to find able staff managers. Altogether, I have been very, very busy in the store: I now have forty-four *sales assistants* for Ealing and altogether, I will need between sixty and sixty-five.

I love you completely and utterly and passionately, *Your* little Lilongo-witch

MOPE TO VERA

Leningrad, 10 August 1938

Your last, ever so beloved letter that reached me was dated July 31 and I almost feel forgotten, without news. I am expecting a telegram from you with such huge yearning, almost as if it were a small piece of my beloved herself. I have no idea yet how many days I will have to stay here. It could be that I will travel back to Moscow tomorrow or in five

days. For this reason, I cannot have your mail forwarded to me, because that usually takes at least two days *if* it is sent off right away which is something I cannot count on.

I waited for a telegram from you until late into the evening, and instead Schapiro's cable arrived announcing that he would call that night. That means that I will have to wait up until late into the night, and more likely than not, for nothing. Why doesn't that idiot telegraph like every other normal human being? It is much better for me when I have things in front of me in black on white and can show, if need be, what is wanted, while such a conversation, difficult to understand at best, only informs me of half of it. That man is incorrigible with all that telephoning.

Outside, a full moon is beaming brightly. It is looking down on both of us at the same time. Right here, it is looking down into my window. If I could just be—for just a minute even—the man in the moon and look down on my sweetest little girl and then return to my desk, calmed and content. However, the moon does know that I would not be happy with that one minute, because, if I were in it, I would want to look and look until I was satisfied and there would be no end to it. That is why the man in the moon does not switch places with me and is taken aback when I look at him so filled with wishful thinking, because he knows that wishes, filled with such enormous longing, can be stronger than he, and he would like to just hide behind a cloud. But there is no cloud to be seen near or far. So everyone has his own worries and it is almost satisfying to us poor residents of earth to know that even the man in the moon is not free either. I am sure that my darling is laughing at me now because I give way to my imagination which is why I am telling you that the gentleman himself just told me that—how else could I come up with such a story (a story you might believe or not!)???—

There has been no trace of Schapiro's call and it will be 1.30 a.m. soon. I will wait for another half hour and then let the telephone department know that I will no longer accept the telephone call if it does come through. I will no longer consider letting myself be made crazy. Why does that man use such enervating methods to make business more difficult for me and for himself?

I will now wish my darling a good night; it is high time that you go to sleep! I kiss you everywhere and caress and bite and open your sweet little legs so I can give you all the love and your Muschi will react to this love in the sweetest way and your entire beautiful body can concentrate

on sharing all the feelings and share all the desire I am able to make you feel. When will it finally, finally be that time when all of it will come true, everything I dream of and long for with such pain? When will I be allowed to take you in my arms and bring every pore of your body close to mine, to feel you and relish in the enjoyment of having you close to me?

My little girl, you!!!! Your Mope

The announcement of the telephone call from Schapiro came in at 2 a.m. and we finally talked at 2.30!

VERA TO MOPE

London, 12 August 1938

Yesterday, after dinner, I talked to Hannalein on the telephone. She asked me to inform you that starting this fall, Norbert and all his colleagues of the same race may *no* longer practice medicine, which is terrible, of course.¹¹³ After that, I talked to your dear mother who is at Ruth's at the moment. She said that her things have not come in yet from Germany and she is quite annoyed about the delay and hopes that that is all it is. Ruth whom I talked to on the phone for a short time as well told me how disastrous the business situation is at the moment and how happy she would be if Heinz had a steady income she could rely on. And that she often did not know how and with what to take care of everything.

I have to close now! This morning, I will go to Hammersmith first and then to Ealing.

I have to go, it is late! I was *not* able to read through this scribble!

Most passionate, most loving, sweetest kisses, you—

MOPE TO VERA

Leningrad, 12 August 1938

Apart from a leisurely drive along the Newa and an evening walk, I spent this Wychodnoi in my room reading. It is still very hot here but

113 A decree of 25 June 1938 barred German-Jewish doctors from treating non-Jewish patients with effect from the autumn. Mope's brother-in-law, Dr. Norbert Moschytz, was still in practice in Freiburg im Breislau, and his wife (Grete) and their four children remained with him.

there is a breeze which is refreshing. It has not rained even once in Leningrad since July 8 while there have been a few thunderstorm rains in Moscow now and again but they do not bring any cool-down either. If I get done with my work in the harbor on time tomorrow, I want to go to Peterhof, a castle with many fountains in front of it—it is supposed to be very beautiful. The work here actually takes up much less time than the work in Moscow, but you have to wait for an eternity until it is your turn for the drive to the harbor for the merchandise inspection because only two people can work there at the same time. Sometimes, we get around to discussing what we inspected, usually in the evening around 9 p.m. or even later so that it is difficult to do anything else. The scheduling is better in Moscow and I would really like to go back soon because I am sure that there are many letters from my darling waiting for me.

Tomorrow in three weeks is September 3 and I assume that my sweet girl will leave by boat from Hull to Helsingfors that same day or will fly to Riga via Stockholm on the 5th. If you took the boat, you would arrive here on Friday, September 9, so that you would be in Moscow on Saturday, September 10. If you fly, which I consider the better choice, you would arrive in Moscow on the 6th—aside from the Sunday in between which you can use to pack your things. The plane leaves Croydon in the morning at 9.50, via Amsterdam, then Copenhagen-Malmö to Stockholm where it will arrive at 16.20. The next morning, you will leave Stockholm at 9 a.m. via Riga to Moscow where I will take you in my arms at 18.05 (Russian time) and be *indescribably happy* to *finally* see you again. Completely and utterly, *Your Mope*

VERA TO MOPE

London, 12 August 1938

Today, I made up my mind definitively to leave here on September 4 by air. We will just have to pay the difference between air and boat from our own pocket. Should I fly to Moscow or to Leningrad????? Schapiro sent me £40.—today and enclosed a letter to me with the following content, which, for him, was extremely *friendly*:

“I believe that your husband will have to remain in Moscow for business reasons. I have already written to him concerning the matter. I do not know for how long, since that does not depend on me, but is dictated by business. In order for Mr. Felsenstein to stay as long as possible, I

suggested that you join him there. Unfortunately, we cannot promise that he will travel back with you. I do not oppose you staying over there for a longer period of time and wait until he can depart, but I do not know if that is possible for you. It is possible that he will have to stay for another month after you leave to travel home, but maybe that will not be necessary. However, it is impossible at this time for me to make any firm commitment, as I mentioned above. No one can say if he will leave at the beginning or the end of October."

My love, today, I filled out a fourth French visa and enclosed four passport photos and I sent my identity paper and book to our travel agent, since he needs both of them for the consulates. I will leave here in three weeks from Sunday—hurrah, hurrah, hurrah!!!!

MOPE TO VERA

Leningrad, 17 August 1938

Tomorrow, I will find out if and what kinds of merchandise can be expected to arrive here in the next few days. Once I am back in Moscow, I will try to reach you by telephone because this surrogate—writing—is not as good as talking on the telephone—and I want to hear your voice at least! As soon as you receive your visa for here, send me a telegram and also let Schapiro know immediately. It should be much easier to get the other visas.

My work here seems to be mostly done. I am thinking of inspecting a few more things on the 19th and then go back to Moscow in the evening where I will hopefully be able to stay at the National this time. You cannot imagine how much I am looking forward to, and long for, finding your beloved letters there. The time I spent here was very difficult to bear and I am ever so grateful to you for having beautified that time twice with your telegrams which also let me feel much calmed where your well-being is concerned. Your Mope

VERA TO MOPE

London, 17 August 1938

This morning, your telegram arrived and I found out that you are still in Leningrad. I keep sending my letters to Moscow. I hope that someone brought them to you from there. I filled out all of the paperwork for the

Swedish consulate today and I hope that everything will be taken care of soon. The travel agent received the Danish one today, the one for the return trip as well, as he told me, and he will let the Swedish and Finnish consulates know about it because he hopes that that will help. I got in contact with the Swedish consulate by telephone because the agent wrote this morning that I would have to go there myself. However, that was not necessary—I only had to give them the dates of my travel. My love, tomorrow, it will be three weeks ago that the Russian visa was applied for at Intourist, or actually the day after tomorrow, and this evening, our agent said on the telephone that it usually takes around three to four weeks. I just wish that it would finally, finally come through!!!!

It is really a good thing that I am so very busy right now and have so many things to do. They left the entire personnel question to me. If I were not so occupied, at least in my thoughts, during the day, I do *not* know how I would get through these last two and a half weeks of our current time of separation. Tomorrow, I will go to Ealing to interview more staff there during the afternoon. I went to the labor department around noon today and hired seven of the fourteen girls I saw there. I still have to hire around thirteen more and have a lot of work ahead of me since I am supposed to find floor walkers for the other stores.

I received a letter from Hildelein in Genoa yesterday evening in which she tells me that that they are strongly considering the possibility of a second emigration. I was quite shaken; her brother-in-law's children are no longer allowed to attend school there. I wrote to her that she and Walter should visit us for an investigative trip just as soon as possible. Actually, she asked me if they would have a chance over here. She had been told that it was completely out of the question to ever be allowed to come to this country. However, since we have seen that such things are considered on a very individual basis, I do not consider it impossible. In the meantime, they have added their names to an immigration list for the U.S.A., although they have not made any definite plans yet. The furniture from Hilde's parents in Frankfurt has arrived and they hope for calmer times now.¹¹⁴ Things really are not all that nice right now and one has to be grateful all over again every single day to be at some distance from all of that; for how long it will remain in the distance remains to be seen, of course.

114 Hilde's parents had by now succeeded in emigrating from Frankfurt.

I hope that I will be able to find something out for Grete and Norbert concerning Costa Rica.¹¹⁵ Fred and Hannalein came by for a little while yesterday evening, and we compiled a series of questions concerning emigration prospects with further help from your dear mother, who looks very well indeed. She really is a very special woman, who possesses intelligence and kindness in the same measure. She and I got along famously. She did not take *anything* out with her when she left Leipzig, and they promised to send her personal things but nothing has arrived here to this day. Max (Erich Gödicke) seems to have been quite decent. However, he did say that he did not have any of your personal things anymore when your dear mother questioned him.

My love, it seems completely improbable, but when you looked at the moon so closely Wednesday evening and charged it with all those wishes, I went for a short evening walk down Northend Road with Muttilein and the full moon shone down on us and I said (there is an eye witness for this) how much I wished to be the moon who can look down on my beloved!—

Completely and utterly Your Lilongo

MOPE TO VERA

Leningrad, 18 August 1938

Our outing today was definitely worth the time. The drive to Peterhof, a wonderful park with various castles which were begun by Peter the Great¹¹⁶ and then continued and expanded by several other czars and czarinas leads along a well-built road that nears the ocean at the halfway mark. The first castle in the park that should actually be called a pretty bungalow was built by Peter the Great himself directly on the water of the Finnish Bay and ever since then has been preserved as a museum or a memorial of this unique great one of the house of Romanov. His wife Katherine I had a different castle which was built of wood but that

115 In 1937, land had been purchased in Costa Rica for the purpose of settling Jews from Central Europe, but, in the face of government anti-Semitism, it was decreed that this was illegal. Very few Jewish refugees were able to settle in the country, and Mope's brother-in-law, Norbert Moschytz, opposed attempting such a move.

116 Peter I (called "the Great"), 1672-1725, became Czar on his father's death in 1682. It was he who founded the city of Saint Petersburg (Leningrad). Peterhof and its palaces became a sumptuous summer retreat for the Czars of Russia.

was replaced by her daughter with one constructed of stone. Peter's bedroom is a tiny room with a very small bed in it, a bed that makes an extremely chaste impression. I would have furnished it differently after I met my sweetest girl but earlier, I would have been very sympathetic of this method of sleeping in separate rooms.

Peter the Great seems to have been quite taken with fountains which he created in such a way in part that he could satisfy his desire to play tricks on people. Directly in the vicinity of his house, for instance, there is a bench he used to sit down on when he received guests who would stand in front of him filled with reverence. In the ground in front of that bench, nearly invisible water pipes were installed which could be activated from a distance at a wave of his hand. The water would spring from the ground up to three meters high from both sides and the two streams would then unite in the middle and cool the guest down to the skin. At a little distance from there is a mushroom-like construction with benches arranged in a circle around the stem. If someone sat down there, he would have water bubble from the outer edge of the mushroom roof, and it was impossible to leave the area which was so nicely protected from the sun without getting thoroughly drenched. Well, this is not the main side of this very progressive monarch who is still much beloved by his people, but it is interesting to see how people "amused" themselves back then.

In the 1760s, in his last years or shortly after his death, they built a wonderful arrangement of fountains with the help of a French expert that made Peterhof into a second Versailles. The water needed was brought in from about 25 kilometers away by laying down the appropriate water pipes. In my opinion, Peterhof is more beautifully situated than Versailles because of the adjacent ocean (of course, they could not use the ocean water for the fountains because, despite its relatively low salt content, it would have clogged and corroded the pipes very quickly). The immense and especially beautiful park has been open and available to the public since 1926. There are bands there every afternoon—they play concert and dance music and in some places, people can be seen dancing in the park. On display in one of the walkways, there are extraordinarily humorous caricatures—painted on canvas—which show the generals of the world war and also the current enemies of Russia. These caricatures show the visitors whom they got away from and what they might have to face if they are not careful. A very interesting method of education for the masses that look at these paintings with great interest!

My little girl, the day is over and the new one has begun already and I want to go to bed and continue chatting with you—not as visible to you though—until, instead of my darling, Morpheus takes me into his arms. I hope that that will make you jealous and gives you even more reason to come as quickly as you can. Your Mope

VERA TO MOPE

London, 18 August 1938

Today, I did not have the afternoon off and hired an additional four girls in Ealing so that I have sixty-one girls now. The new store will open tomorrow in two weeks and all in all, I need sixty-five girls, that is salesgirls, on top of that, I need a presser and another three weekend girls, added to the two I have already hired. About forty of them are training in other stores, like Chiswick, Fulham, and Hammersmith, and the other twenty-five will come to Ealing on the 29th where a staff trainer and I will train them until opening day. This morning, I found a few more serviceable girls in Chiswick and so, everything seems to develop satisfactorily, at least where the staff is concerned.

What was very interesting is that quite a few girls from *British Home Stores* and other similar stores in the vicinity of Ealing applied for positions with us, although they would not receive higher salaries from us for the most part. They told me, "*We have heard that M&S is such a good firm to work for! And that one has a chance to get on there and to get promotions!*"

One of the directors, Simon Marks' brother-in-law, came to Ealing last Tuesday for a tour and I suppose that the entire company will appear for the opening or at some time during the first two days.¹¹⁷

My love, this morning at the station in Chiswick, before I left for Ealing, I called the Intourist bureau and they told me that my visa was expected to arrive with the next mail from there and will probably be here next week. I will be in Leningrad on Monday and on Tuesday, my beloved will claim me at the train station in Moscow.

¹¹⁷ Simon Marks's brothers-in-law, Israel Sieff (much later Lord Sieff of Brimpton), and Harry Sacher were both directors of M&S. It is uncertain which of the two was the visitor that day.

I wonder what my beloved is doing right now. It is 10.45 here now and I am writing from the chaise longue in the dining room and Muttilein and Pepper are playing cards. I will close now and go to bed and dream myself to you. Your little witch

VERA

Journal entry, 21 August 1938

It seems to have been a long time since I wrote anything here the last time. The reason for that is not a lack of experiences, but simply the fact that my beloved man spent most of the year separated from me—and even now, he is still gone—and I already wrote down everything that worried me when I wrote to him every day. Today, I also sent him a very detailed report, but still, I reach for this little book.

The reason: there is something bothering me, something I want to come to terms with for myself, for the time being anyway: Both of us would like to have a child. Mopelein received his residence permit around the end of May. I am 28 ½ years old, so what is keeping us from fulfilling our wish? I will probably have to give up my career after about four months, at least temporarily! So I will no longer be able to help out my beloved Muttilein on my own, and what shall she and Pepper do then? I know that my Mopelein will do everything he can for them here; but will he be able to do that? It is entirely possible that he will lose his current position during my pregnancy, and that means he will get *no* visa!!! What to do? And on top of that: you want to bring a human being into this world that is full of hatred, strife, and spitefulness?

No, I am allowed to do it anyway! Even while I am writing all of this down, my thoughts are clearing and I realize: I can bring *one* child into this world for us—we need it!

1. We want to give living expression to our love!
2. We want to learn with and from our child and stay young and agile because of it.
3. It will provide us—maybe and I hope so—with the answer to why and what for. It's not that I wish to get an answer from our child and not from each other, but I hope that our child will be such that it will *also* mean an answer to us.

4. Since I am not all that young any longer, we cannot wait much longer.
5. I have more than enough (jewelry and other things) to help my Muttilein until I can work again!
6. I hope that I will become more mature and understanding because of the experience of pregnancy and childbirth.
7. I am looking forward to *our child*!

MOPE TO VERA

Moscow, 21 August 1938

If you only knew what a relief it was for me to receive a large number of most beloved letters from you waiting for me in Moscow. Back in Leningrad, I had been so unsettled waiting to get newer messages from my beloved. Since I do not belong to those people who want to enjoy things a little at a time, but to those who want to enjoy everything to the fullest, I called you in the evening and was overjoyed when I heard your beloved voice and to assure myself of your well-being—as far as that can be done by telephone. Since it was difficult to understand anything at first, I complained immediately after the call, and so, I had the great joy of having a really nice chat with you. They were decent enough to only charge me six minutes for the entire call, that is, they did not charge for the unintelligible part at all.

I was unable to do anything when in Leningrad concerning your visa, and yesterday and today I tried to hurry things up. Since you will receive an Intourist and not a consulate visa, there seems little that Sojuspushnina can do for it. Please keep the choice whether your first stop will be Moscow or Leningrad open for the time being. The first stay overnight has to be in the city the visa is made out for. The matter is a little complicated.

Your plan to fly to Helsingfors and then take the train to Leningrad sounds great to me. However, I do not think that you will be able to reach the evening train to Leningrad. The airplane arrives at the Helsingfors airport at 9.40 in the evening and train leaves Leningrad at approximately the same time, as far as I know. Maybe, the train can be reached on time after the airplane lands? If not, you might have to stay in Helsingfors for a day. In that case, I recommend either the Hotel

"Torni" where you can take your meals in the restaurant on the top floor with a wonderful view of the entire city, or the Grand Hotel. Do not go to the Hotel "Kämp" *under any circumstances*, because they are Nazis. And most importantly, please do not forget to let me know of your good arrival *immediately* by telegram, if you decide to stay in Helsingfors for the night. In any case, please do so at the first opportunity that presents itself, at the border station for example where you will probably have more than enough time for that. Should I happen to be in Leningrad at the time of your arrival, I will have to know when I should be at the train station to pick you up. If I receive the telegram too late, I might be in the harbor when it arrives.

Did I already tell you that you will need at least three passport photos here? Please don't forget to take care of that in advance and order them with time to spare. I would also like to mention that, when you cross the border here, or better, during customs inspection, you have to declare all jewelry you have with you, and they will add a statement in your passport or give you paperwork so that you can take it back with you. Otherwise, you will encounter unpleasantness when you try to leave the country.

If I get my own passport¹¹⁸ returned to me tomorrow, I will go to the French consulate and apply for a visa which will require a little time.

I think it is horrible that Hilde's family has to consider emigration. Why don't you tell Hilde about Costa Rica? The main business there is exporting fruit and I am sure that Walter would be able to become acquainted with that business rather easily. I am sure that it is much better to show your back to Europe. The new decision concerning Jewish doctors in that country of filth is such a cultural disgrace that I just have no words for it. How glad I would be if my suggestions concerning Costa Rica are of some kind of help to Grete.

It really astounds me to hear that the economic situation is supposed to be so catastrophic in London. At this time, there is very little merchandise here and a lot of demand, and in Leningrad, people are sitting on top of each other while they wait for further shipments.

I already wrote to you concerning my return trip—that I cannot stay here for much longer because of my clothing which is not suitable for winter—and I am still hoping that I will be able to travel back with my beloved. Your Mope

118 Mope's "passport" was the stateless document issued by the British.

VERA TO MOPE

London, 22 August 1938

The day in Kilburn was quite interesting for me today, as usual, and it was pleasant to be among all those familiar people. This evening, shortly after 7 o'clock when I was getting ready to go home from the Kilburn store, I was told, "*A lady is waiting for you downstairs who has asked for you.*" The store was already closed and when I arrived downstairs, can you guess who was waiting there for me?? Your dear mother! During our conversation Saturday afternoon, she had heard that I would be in Kilburn today and so she had decided from one minute to the next, after she had spent the afternoon sewing as she told me, to get on the bus at Mill-Hill and meet me since I was so close for once!! (How close that really is, you know all too well, my love!!).¹¹⁹ I was so touched and so pleased and so happy all the way to the innermost heart over such a dear thought.

After I showed her the personnel rooms, we went out into the fresh air for about a quarter of an hour and then, sadly, she had to make her way back. I put her on the bus so she would not get back to Mill-Hill too late. We had a heart-to-heart talk and she was so completely understanding and loving and attentive! I told her how, just how terribly difficult it was for me to make you understand that I simply cannot get away for more than a total of four weeks and that the only alternative would be for me to quit my job completely which is something we really cannot afford at this moment and I do not really want to do anyway.

Your dear mother agreed with me completely and even suggested that she would write to you about it which I refused however since I explained to her that the two of us would come to some kind of agreement on our own. The more I get to know your dear mother, the more I feel drawn to her and the more admiration I feel for her; she is a really extraordinary woman: intelligent, kind, broad minded, and understanding.

VERA TO MOPE

London, 24 August 1938

I am really sad and *downhearted*; I called the United Travel Bureau and Intourist today and both of them told me that the visa still had not arrived yet. The Russian consul can only be reached until 1.00 p.m. and

119 The distance from Mill Hill to Kilburn is a little over five miles.

I will try to talk to him during my lunch break. This state of waiting and uncertainty and insecurity is downright horrible. I contacted the Travel Bureau once again today: they told me that there is usually a layover between the arrival of the airplane in Helsingfors and the departure of the train, but I do not even have my visa yet! And I am wondering if I will get it and if I do, will I get it in time? I think that the airplane is supposed to arrive around 9.00 p.m. and the train departs around 11 p.m. Maybe the travel bureau here is making the mistake of taking the two-hour time difference into account or does it not exist in Helsingfors?!

Much later in the evening

In the meantime, your dear mother and Hannalein came by for a visit. And both of them were charming and sweet as always. Your mother told me that she had had it reported to her that Max (Erich Gödicke) could not and was not allowed to send any of your things. Well, nothing can be done about that! Your dear mother's things have not arrived yet either.

I have assembled the complete Ealing personnel now and I am curious to see how many will abandon me on Monday—I am sure that a few will and I think that is quite normal in most cases. After several of the girls I had already hired canceled, I hired more staff for Ealing. And now, I have all I need except for one ironing girl and maybe one more weekend girl. I really do hope that everything will work out well now. The entire staff is supposed to appear there next Monday and we have until Thursday to introduce the twenty-five to thirty girls who are completely new and have not had any training in one of our other stores.

VERA TO MOPE

London, 25 August 1938

My most heartfelt thanks for your dear telephone call! I felt quite desperate today! I left the store early because the Russian consulate is only open until 1 p.m. and when I arrived there, the sign said *NO office hours on Thursdays!* I rang the doorbell anyway and with much coaxing, I got all the way to the consul who could not do anything as he told me. I just wanted to cry! Then I called Intourist and went there myself in the afternoon; they cannot do anything for me either and I was downright desperate! I am sooooo glad to have talked to you and to hear that you are sure everything will work itself out. I was told today that the train leaves Helsingfors about two hours after the plane arrives, so there is normally enough time to get there. So now, the only thing I need is the visa!!!!!!

MOPE TO VERA

Moscow, 26 August 1938

It is terribly hot here and they say that they have not had such a consistently high temperature in forty years. Today, I turned in my application for the extension of my visa and would be very thrilled if I received it in time, together with my passport, so I could welcome you in Leningrad. I have to go there anyway at the beginning of September to handle a Persian lamb contract and would save my darling from having to travel through two nights in a row. I think you should wait with the stamping of your Russian visa until the very last minute because you have to give them the name of the city of your first stay and that depends on whether I am here or there and that again depends on when I will receive my passport. Have them give you your "tourist book," that is the one with the coupons for room and board, in tourist class, that is III. class, but demand that they give you first class for train travel within the U.S.S.R. I will hopefully receive the report concerning your visa which was promised for yesterday evening sometime early tomorrow and if it gives any specific information, I will send you a telegram.

I have to make a few more suggestions to you that seem important to me. Bring an ample supply of stockings—they do not have to be the best—because you will tear many of them up here. Additionally, equip your handbags with powder boxes and take along powder, skin lotion and small perfume bottles. Also bring a good choice of clothing, because we cannot buy anything here with our money. Please do not forget to bring toilet paper.

And now, I will climb into my chaste bed. And my dreams will once again carry me to my beloved and let her rest in my arms and I will kiss her most passionately and caress her gently. Please think of me and my plea to take care of yourself which comes from the heart.

Your Mope

VERA TO MOPE

London, 28 August 1938

Last night, it got to be very late again. I did not get home until around 10 o'clock since our typist is going on vacation this Monday and she had taken some letters in shorthand for me but she had not typed them yet—unfortunately, it got to be too late to get them all done. Since her

replacement who is starting on Monday cannot read her shorthand I will have to go back to Hammersmith in the evening and dictate those letters again, whether I like it or not, after I have spent the day in Ealing. There is no typist in Ealing, unfortunately. The personnel rooms there which are finished now give the impression of a *hotel lounge* which means that they are excellent. They were photographed yesterday and will be published in the local paper sometime soon!!!!!! I am curious to see how many of the sixty-five girls I hired will *not* appear tomorrow morning. There were several who dropped out last week and I was able to replace them with others.

Just now, I received a card from Annelieschen with which she tells me in a roundabout way that she has become engaged, to a Dr. So and So, she did not give me his name, a journalist in Berlin—she had told us about him several times last January, but she only talked about him as a friend and never as a potential marriage partner. She wrote a very funny card and everything I told you about her *husband-to-be*, I was able to get from what was hinted at between the lines. She wrote that she feels *very* cheery once again and I am very pleased about that. I just wrote to her and told her how genuinely happy I am for her.¹²⁰

Yesterday, during lunch time, Carlchen Rosenfeld called and told us that he is here with his wife for a few days to take care of the accommodations of his children. We were expecting both of them after dinner yesterday evening, but unfortunately, they called around 9 o'clock to tell us that they were too tired to come over. I hope to be able to see Rosenfelds before they leave again and would really like for Muttilein to meet Lies Rosenfeld.¹²¹

My love, in one week from tomorrow—God willing—I will be with you instead of all alone and lonely here, you—

Completely and utterly and without reservation, Your Lilongo

MOPE TO VERA

Moscow, 31 August 1938

I am writing this date with a heavy heart, because I had counted on being able to send my sweet darling a telegram concerning her visa

120 Annelie had become engaged to Arno Herzberg.

121 Carl and Lies Rosenfeld, Mope's cousins from Karlsruhe, were in England to try to place their two boys in work there. The elder one, Georg, found a position, whereas his brother, Benjamin, was able to settle in Palestine. Their parents were obliged to return to Germany after their exploratory visit.

by this date. After I had been told in the morning that they were counting on receiving positive news in the evening, I got the same bitter disappointment once again a little while ago, just like every single day before. My girl tells me that she feels *down-hearted*—you cannot even imagine how depressed I am over the fact that I still do not know when the sorely awaited answer will finally arrive. I am so scorched with longing for you that I can no longer think of anything that does not concern you. During the last few days, I have asked about the visa so many times and everyone at the Sojuspushnina already knows about my great worry and everyone asks me on a daily basis about how things are going with my beloved's coming.

Why is everything combined with such indescribable difficulties? And there is no possibility to have some kind of influence on it because everything has to work out in its own way. I have not been able to write to my darling in as detailed a manner as usual during the last few days because with all the inner tension, I do not know what to tell you and until now, I also wanted to avoid pouring my heart out to you and make you feel even sadder.

When will I finally see my beloved again? Alas, I cannot even imagine that our beautiful plan can no longer be realized. I am soooo sad and so crestfallen—and I kiss you—still only in my thoughts—most passionately and filled with indescribably great and deepest love for you, my sunny girl, Your Mope

VERA TO MOPE

London, 31 August 1938

My Mopelein—Today is the last August day of 1938 and I still do not have my visa. I called the travel agent again today and he told me that the Finnish visa was not there yet either, only the Danish one, so I seem to have misunderstood him because I was totally convinced that the Finnish visa had been received!!!! I will only receive the Swedish one with the condition that the Finnish one is approved and all three cannot be stamped into my papers until the Russian one is on hand because I can only get them then—if at all. All of the consulates close at 1.00 p.m. on Saturday. The agent thought if the Russian visa is received by Friday noon at the latest that everything could still be taken care of on time. I no longer believe now that I will be able to travel on Sunday, maybe Monday or Tuesday!!

My love, no one makes things all that easy for us! But on the other hand, the two of us should *not* complain at all because we do have each other and our mutual deep love that shines above everything and that is the greatest and highest and quintessential thing most human beings can ever reach or own.

A little while ago, I called your dear mother who was very sweet, as usual. She sends you her heartfelt love and greatest sympathies for our experiences. She told me that she had received a very unhappy letter from your sister Alice in Palestine. Her husband has nothing to do and they would like it best if they could go to America. I hope that that is a passing crisis period there.¹²²

I have a very bad conscience: I have not called Carlchen Rosenfeld yet. He and his wife went to see your dear mother last Sunday afternoon and he was rather *down-hearted*, unfortunately. I will try to call him tomorrow.

I spent the entire day in Ealing today and in the afternoon, five girls from Reading (about twenty miles from London) visited me—they had their free afternoon today and had met me in summer camp. They went to Hammersmith first where they were told that I was in Ealing and they appeared there around 5.30 p.m. I served them tea and showed them the new store and then I found out that one of the girls is a virtual expert at displaying canned items, and both the manager and supervisor in Ealing were so enthused with her ideas that they prompted her to come to Ealing tomorrow morning instead of going to Reading. I wrote a letter to her manager and the supervisor signed it in order to explain her absence tomorrow. The girl was beaming! And the other four also asked if they could not be used in Ealing as well. It was an odd coincidence that the five of them came to see me on this particular Wednesday!

MOPE TO VERA

Moscow, 2 September 1938

A really red half-moon makes its way across the sky and I have to think of the moon letters I exchanged with my beloved three weeks ago. Back then, I believed that I would have her here with me by the new full moon and to draw her near to me filled with happiness that the terrible

122 Mope's sister, Alice Homburger, a trained nurse, and her husband, Julius, a medical doctor, had landed in Haifa in November 1935. He had great difficulty in making a living there.

separation is finally over, and to make up for many of the things we missed out on—even if we cannot make up for everything. Today is a half-moon and in another week, it will have rounded itself and where will my darling be then? I can no longer tell you because it is not given to me to be able to address my feelings in all their fullness and depth of experience in words.

They promised me a decision for the late afternoon this morning as well and my hope which still survives to some small degree received another blow and I am not sure that it can recuperate from that. Today, I was “put off” again for two or three days and explained that I will apply for my exit visa if no decision has been made by Monday.

I registered a telephone call to my girl for later today. I have to talk to you and will try to make you feel better and ask you to postpone your leave by a few days so that *our* time—should you be able to come after all—does not suffer any reduction. I only know one thing, that I need you, that I long for you, that I will break if it takes much longer until I have my sweet one with me again.

All day long, I was thinking about the exciting and stressful work my darling will have today and I hope with all my heart that everything works out well so that you will find some satisfaction in that at least. My entire thinking and being is so completely dominated by you, waking and sleeping that I cannot comprehend that my will to have you with me is not strong enough to move all obstacles out of the way. I kiss you with the most painful longing, and I embrace you again and again, you, you! Wholeheartedly, Your Mope

VERA TO MOPE

London, 2 September 1938

I just put myself into the horizontal position and this writing tablet is the only one within reach, so please forgive me! I was soooo happy to hear your beloved voice just a little while ago. Hopefully, I will arrive in the U.S.S.R. before this letter does—how I wish for that!!! It was so nice to be able to understand you so well—the connection was exceptionally good today!!!

I am *very* tired—today was a big day!¹²³ Hundreds of customers were standing in front of the glass doors with their noses pressed flat and

123 Vera is referring to the grand opening of the Marks & Spencer store in West Ealing, for which she had recruited most of the staff.

at 10 o'clock when the doors were opened they came streaming in like a migration of nations. The *takings* were much higher than expected! Around 10.30 about twelve city representatives came by for a tour and a snack. We had prepared sandwiches, tea, coffee, etc., and my deputy and I served as "hostesses." One of the directors (who knows me, Simon's brother-in-law) was there,¹²⁴ the manager, supervisor and various other people from the head office. The councilor and one of the directors each made a short speech and the entire company left after a detailed inspection, apparently highly satisfied. In the afternoon, I had the two managers from the Labor Department here for tea, and everything with legs at the head office came by. Apart from Simon Marx and Israel Sieff who will come by tomorrow, I believe.

When will the visa finally get here????????!!!! Most passionately and see you soon???

Your Lilongo

MOPE TO VERA

Moscow, 3 September 1938

Although there will be no plane tomorrow because it is Sunday and this letter will lie around until Monday, I still want to tell my beloved how happy I am to have talked to her yesterday and that I could listen to your beloved voice so very well. I had feared that you would be even more depressed than me because of the postponed trip. Then, I was so very pleased to find out that my darling has come to terms with the unalterable facts.

A week ago, I would not have thought it possible that I am still writing to you and I still do not know when you can finally begin the flight to me. I was so convinced that my girl would be with me on Tuesday at the latest that I cannot tell you just *how* bitter every minute I am forced to spend without my little witch is to me. I am abysmally fed up with work and I think of nothing but your arrival which will make my life worth living and happy again. However, your later arrival might make it possible for us to travel back together. Whether or not I can come to Leningrad depends on when I get the extension of my visa which I applied for on 26 August. I do so wish to be able to meet you there so I can save you the second night trip.

124 Harry Sacher (1881-1971), who was married to Simon Marks's sister, Miriam.

They told me today that your visa had *not* been refused but that you were the only one who could find out about its issuance; that could not be done by "Sojuspushnina" because it is not a consulate visa. I now live in the hope that the visa will be sent with the next courier which means that it will arrive there either Tuesday or Wednesday, and I beg you to send me a telegram the minute you find out anything. As far as I can see, it will be difficult for me to get to Leningrad before the 13th because my papers will not be ready until then.

And now, I have to finish a letter to Schapiro so that it will reach the 11 o'clock mail. I do hope so very much that the stress of the Ealing opening gives way now to a calmer work day, until you can finally, finally come to me. Your Mope

VERA TO MOPE

London, 4 September 1938

I did not write to you yesterday although I had the afternoon off. I came home and slept for several hours. I was just so completely done in after the opening. Yesterday, I talked to one of my superiors at Head Office on the telephone and she told me that she wanted to congratulate me "*on the opening*." She asked the manager, the supervisor, etc., in Ealing and all of them said that they had thought I must have managed a dozen openings before this one. I thought it was very nice of her to tell me. The takings during the first few days exceeded *all* expectations.

This morning, I slept well into the morning. Yesterday evening, Carlchen and Lies Rosenfeld were here and both of them were as charming as ever. He is feeling very depressed; they hope to get their older boy hired on in a factory here soon.

Hopefully, hopefully, this note will get into your possession *after* me!!! How I wish for that!!!! You, I feel such indescribably longing for you, my love! Well and truly, *Your* Lilongo

MOPE TO VERA

Moscow, 6 September 1938

Today was Wychodnoi but I worked for most of the day and did not give myself one free minute aside from business meetings and shining my shoes, a pleasure I had not indulged in since I got here. It is still very

hot here but there was a bit of a cooling wind today which I felt made it much more comfortable.

I wait for my beloved's telegram hourly although I know that a few more days might pass until the visa arrives. This waiting is too horrible and unbearable to me and I could feel how hard it was for my little girl, and I know that you are waiting just as longingly for the reunion as I am. As I already told you, the cardinal mistake lies in the fact that you are expecting an Intourist and not a consular visa. It seems that Sojuspushnina lacks any kind of influence at the former agencies to hasten the process. However, I am glad to know that it has not been denied and I keep hoping from hour to hour to receive your message that will free me from a ton of weight. You did not write to me yet about the French visa but I hope that you have received it.

So Annelieschen has become engaged once again and I do wish with all my heart that she will be happy and married. The fact that she chose a journalist of all people makes me a little skeptical but she has to know best. The main thing is that she is happy again and stays that way.

It is really bad that Alice's husband lacks any initiative. I never liked him all that well and I thought it was really silly that she was more or less forced into marrying that boy. But my blessed father's view of the matter was that a girl has to be married off and the husband had to be Orthodox, and so, it was done under pressure on her good conscience. And I even believe that she loves him but you cannot put any bread on the table with that. If she were not such a brave soul and got the money out of that accursed country, the two of them would be starving with their three children. By the way, in my opinion, the crisis does not bear any blame because one of my mother's cousins, who reached Palestine at the same time as the Homburgers supposedly has an excellent medical practice.

I wonder if you talked to Carlchen and Lies before their departure. I really feel sorry for that one. He has such a penchant for depression anyway which is probably heightened quite a bit by the immovable prosthesis,¹²⁵ and there should hardly be any way for him to get out of that damnable country as long as his sons do not earn any money.

I feel such a weight on me today because I still do not know when I will see my beloved once again. Every single day, I decide to apply for my exit visa, but then, I pat myself on the back and tell myself in the

125 Carl Rosenfeld had lost one leg beneath the knee when fighting for Germany in World War I.

most convincing tone—just wait one more day. Maybe the visa will come in after all and it is your duty after all to wait just a little while longer. It is a horrible test of nerves that has been placed on both of us and actually—we are like the two royal children who could not find their way to each other because the water was too deep and probably loved each other just as deeply and burningly as we two entirely non-royal ones.¹²⁶

I kiss you full of the greatest and deepest tenderness and love, you, my everything, Your Mope

VERA TO MOPE

London, 7 September 1938

I talked to your dear mother on the telephone yesterday evening—she sympathizes deeply with our plight. Norbert arrived in London yesterday to have a look around and he and Hannalein and your dear mother spent time together. I am afraid that Norbert will be very disappointed in connection with his medical prospects, but I hope that another chance for somewhere overseas with a good climate will offer itself.

Monday evening, I talked to Rosenfelds on the telephone and I told Carl that I was actually quite sad because I thought that the call was from you. Lies told me that Georg, their eldest son, will begin working here around the beginning of October, and I am glad that at least one member of the family will have turned his back on that “beautiful” country.

This morning, I called our travel agent again and he told me that there was nothing that could be done and that I just had to wait!!!!!! My love, if it arrives tomorrow, I can still fly Sunday morning. Would it not be better if you applied for the exit visa so that you have the alternative of coming to me right away if I do not receive my visa? Or maybe I can meet you in Sweden but that is not possible because that visa will be issued for transit only.

126 Mope is invoking from memory a traditional German folk ballad, “*Es waren zwei Koenigskinder*” that can be traced back to the fifteenth century. In the nineteenth century, Heinrich Heine cites his recollection of the ballad, “an old old story that no one now believes” which opens with the lines “There were two kingly children / Who loved each other truly; / They could not come together, / The water was too deep —” (*Italian Travel Sketches*, trans. Elizabeth A. Sharp [London: Walter Scott Ltd.], n.d., p. 36). [<http://library.umac.mo/ebooks/b32309181.pdf>]

I do not think that I can wait much longer, because I will put myself into a blue envelope and fly to you as a letter—maybe the decision will come tomorrow after all!

Most passionately and tenderly, *Your* little witch

MOPE TO VERA

Moscow, 10 September 1938

Right now, the outside is bathed in moon light and because of that, the beauty of the great Red Square is lit most strikingly. The clock on the wall of the Kremlin just struck 10 and I jumped out of my bed from which I enjoyed the grand vista to write to my beloved. However, I just remembered that there is no point in hurrying because no plane is leaving tomorrow.

On September 12, as things stand now, I will probably travel to Leningrad in the evening, if my passport gets here in time. Should my little girl not come during those days, I will apply for my exit visa immediately after my return here. I also telegraphed Schapiro the same by giving him the 15th as the date so that I will most likely be able to depart from here around the 20th and arrive in London that evening. Should my exit visa not be ready by the 20th, I would not be able to leave here until the 24th because I do not want to travel on the Sabbath, and there is no plane traffic on Sundays. I do not see any sense in sitting around here any longer, since there is hardly any merchandise available aside from Persian lamb which I will buy in Leningrad, and the new harvest does not begin until December, and I will have to be back here by then anyway, as *horrible* as that thought is to me.

I kiss you, filled with the most burning longing, and I embrace you with a love that is so unspeakably great and deep. *Your* Mope

VERA TO MOPE

London, 13-14 September 1938

My love, this evening, I feel more than depressed! I found a letter from our travel agent this evening letting me know that the Finnish visa had been denied without giving a reason for the denial.

I had a terrible day today! Someone called early this morning and told me that the telegram I had sent to you on Sunday to Leningrad

had been forwarded to Moscow since my beloved was not staying at the Astoria in Leningrad. I spent the entire day worried as to why you did not travel to Leningrad after all. My love, this state is really becoming unbearable and I implore you with all the intensity at my disposal to come to me as soon as it is possible. I worry terribly and constantly and dream the most horrifying dreams and even at the store, I can hardly manage to master my expression any longer, and I do not even try when I am at home. As I said: *Life is not too good just now!*

I kiss you in my thoughts filled with the most painful longing! Completely and utterly and without reservation, *Your* little witch

MOPE TO VERA

Leningrad, 13 September 1938

My trip here was quite comfortable and I was terribly tired after I had to work all day before leaving Moscow to get my Swedish and Finnish visas, which I finally succeeded at around 7 in the evening. I feel that the knowledge of having this running around and waiting behind me is quite a relief. After my arrival this morning, I had a quick breakfast and then inspected merchandise until around 4 o'clock. It is much colder here than in Moscow and right now, there is a storm raging outside which lets everyone hear that autumn is here.

Later today, I went to see the film "Professor Mamlock," which, based on a novel by Friedrich Wolf—until now, this author was unknown to me—was filmed here during the time of the auction in July. It shows the beginning of Nazi rule in Berlin and the horrifying excesses against Jews.¹²⁷ It was almost too harmless compared to what those swine actually perpetrated. Nevertheless, a very real psychosis took hold of me and when I left the cinema; I thought at first that I was surrounded by SA or SS-people. That is proof of the success of the play and the terrible time that one had to experience under the rule of that rabble so that one still has not completely freed oneself from the inner pressure that was put on us. And that in the fifteenth month of freedom!

127 Friedrich Wolf's play, *Professor Mamlock* (1933) tells the story of a Jewish professor of surgery who remains blind to the threat of Nazism. The play was intended as a wake-up call. In the Soviet Union, it was made into the film by Adolf Minkin and Herbert Rappaport, and it was this version that Mope went to see. In 1961, Friedrich Wolf's son, Konrad, directed a new version of the film in East Germany.

I really do not expect much from Norbert's visit in London. Aside from the fact that the climate would not agree with him and he would have to make up with a number of exams, there will hardly be a chance for him. I hope that he will find something reasonable as soon as possible. What is to become of the Goldschmidts? The fate of the siblings occupies me very much and I would be more than happy to hear something positive very soon. Carl and Lies Rosenfeld's future also weighs heavily on my heart and I feel deep sympathy for them. I wonder which one of the two will bring Georg to London and where and how should he be housed? I am sure that the boy will adjust to the new milieu quickly and one should try to help him to get over the initial feeling of homesickness.

It is rather late already and my sweetest one's husband is very tired and wants to place himself into the horizontal. I no longer believe in my beloved's traveling here and when I hear the storm whistling outside, I would be ever so worried about letting you fly. And it will be much more beautiful if both of us are free and unburdened by work and enjoy our vacation together than if I were occupied by work from early until late and my little witch would have to wait for me and I would be exhausted. Most passionately and most, most lovingly, Your Mope

VERA TO MOPE

London, 16 September 1938

Yesterday, I did not write to you after I received your longed-for telegram which let me know that you had applied for your exit visa. There was another telegram today that gave me your address as Hotel Metropole in Moscow and was supposed to tell me, I guess, that my beloved seems to think that mail from me will still reach him there, and I do hope ever soooooo much that the time period still between us is too short now to let letters from me come into your possession. My Mopelein, this waiting is becoming downright horrific and the restlessness and worry pursues me day and night and makes me feel more than *downhearted*! I talked to your dear mother in detail on the telephone yesterday and as always, her loving compassion and care made me feel better.

My love, it seems that there is something like telepathy after all, because around 8 p.m. (10 p.m. where you are), I went outside with Muttlein to get some fresh air and made some more observations concerning the moon and said to Mutti that I was wondering if my

Mopelein was having another conversation with the full moon; and it seems that he was and at about the same time as I did.

Actually, I no longer have the words to tell you how much I need you and how much I worry about you being so far away from me at this particular point in time.

Completely and utterly, *Your* little witch

MOPE TO VERA

Train Leningrad-Moscow, 15-16 September 1938

Right now, I am sitting in the train again and despite fierce protests from Schapiro, I will apply for my exit visa tomorrow, something I telegraphed to my darling just before I left the hotel. Schapiro had the audacity—or should one consider it stupidity?—to telegraph me that some other business clients of his want to come here around the 20th or 25th of the month if the situation has cleared itself up by then. I do not believe that the customers will make the trip, and that the desire is the father of the thought where Schapiro is concerned. Of course, he uses all his influence on those clients in order to talk them into making the trip.

And me, am I dirt? Should it actually come to war, those people would want to be at home and with their families.¹²⁸ Whatever happens to me and what my sweet one is going to do plays no role at all. The main thing to him is that the capitalists who help to fill his pockets feel safe and secure and are satisfied. I received another telegram from him in the afternoon in which he suggests to wait with the application for the visa (he means the exit visa). Should I leave, he might lose part of his earnings after all and because of that, he does not care about whatever happens to the two of us. In any case, the fur season has reached its end and there is no more decent merchandise to be had, or very little. So it would really be best to come home, even if circumstances were normal.

I also believe that, after Chamberlain has visited that criminal, a way will be found to satisfy everyone. Unfortunately, it will happen at

128 Hitler threatened to go to war in order to annex the Sudetenland of western Czechoslovakia, and, as a consequence, the political situation in Europe had become extremely edgy. As part of his policy of appeasement and wishing to preempt a war, British Prime Minister, Neville Chamberlain, met with Hitler at Berchtesgaden on 15 September. This was a prelude to his ill-conceived Munich Accord that was signed by the two leaders on 29 September.

the expense of the Czechs and on top of that, the "Great Albion" will embarrass itself with that step for all times to come. It is a shame that an English prime minister lends himself to being a poor matchmaker between a painter gone crazy¹²⁹ and a state that is being led under the same auspices of democracy as England itself, and abandons the principles which control his own government and probably appear incontrovertible to him where his own country is concerned for the smaller and weaker partner.

I did not write to you yesterday. Although I really did not have all that much to do, I was so agitated until I heard about the trip of the Prime Minister that I was unable to have one calm thought and also could not sit still enough to begin something rational. All of us colleagues were together the entire time and were trying to decide what action might be most prudent. Of course, all of us came to the same result that the ones living in Europe should try to get home as fast as possible. The Americans whose continent will hardly be dragged into any kind of affair for the time being can wait with greater calm to see how things develop.

Now, I will finally get into the horizontal because I am rather tired and I suppose that my neighbors will soon begin complaining about the clatter of the typewriter which is something I do not want to happen. I hope to finally and truly embrace you soon and give you all the tenderness which has been waiting for our reunion in vain for so very long.

Completely and utterly your Mope

MOPE TO VERA

Moscow, 20 September 1938

It is a horrible feeling to be without news for days on end. I go to the National every single day and ask for mail in vain. I will continue writing to you on a daily basis, because I want to spare you this worry, although I really do hope that I will leave here on the 24th. I do not think that it is possible before then because of the exit visa which was promised for the 23rd. If I do not leave on the Sabbath, I will have to stay here for a few more days. There is no plane on the 25th (Sunday) and the Jewish New Year begins on the 26th and 27th. I would not work on those days anyway,

129 Hitler was a one-time house painter.

and aside from that, the exit visa would probably expire by then. So there is no other possibility and apart from that, the unending longing for my sweetest darling urges me to get home as quickly as I can.

If everything remains quiet and we receive the necessary visa to France in time, the two of us will spend our vacation on the Riviera. That way, we will not be lacking sun and warmth and we will not have been cheated entirely out of our summer, as my sweetest one seems to fear. To me, the main thing is that I will have you with me again and can take joy in you, which is something I have been slaving for these last four months.

So you do not like Norbert *at all*? I think that you do not know him well enough yet since he does not deserve such a derogatory verdict. Because of his religiousness, he is always feeling tense, which shows in his entire demeanor, but he is a quintessentially good man and his religiousness which is not founded in knowledge, not like in Fred's case, contradicts inwardly with his intelligence, which is something he will not admit to himself. In his desire to respect himself, he becomes loudmouthed and I am sure that it is that which you like least. And his fixed opinion on the so-called homeland in Germany can be explained that way.

I am so excited in anticipation of our conversation and I feel such immense longing to hear your beloved voice, but I can understand so very well that you might not bring yourself to write to me following our call. I usually feel like that as well, because "writing" is such a poor substitute for "talking" as a means of expression and is so very slow and takes even more time to get to you that you cannot really call it communicating. Your Mope

VERA TO MOPE

London, 21 September 1938

These lines are accompanied by just *one* wish—that they will no longer reach you there and that I can tell you about all of my wishes for you and all my love for you, my most loved one, in person and nestled in your arms. Why do I reach for a sheet of paper once again? Because I just have to talk to you, my love, and tell you how indescribably and infinite my longing for you is, you, my most beloved! Completely and utterly and without reservation, *Your* Lilongo