

RONNY

They must have met some time in 1929. He a tall, dark and brown-eyed thirty-seven-year-old cosmopolitan archaeologist, with one foot in Paris and one in Stockholm. She a petite brown-haired and brown-eyed twenty-six-year-old corresponding secretary at the Swedish-Russian Trade Commission in Stockholm.³⁰² They got married in Stockholm's City Hall on 23 November 1930.³⁰³ In her loose-fit crêpe-de-Chine dress surrounded by his family and friends, she looks a little anxious on the wedding photo beside her new husband, looking just as tense in his tail tuxedo with arms crossed over his chest.

She was born in Grodno in Poland (now Belarus) on 27 October 1903, as the first child of Semen Seymour Sokolsky and Mathilde Sokolovskaya. Her first name was Ronny, but they called her Ronichka or Ronja. Two years after Ronny was born, the family was extended with the twin brothers Alexandre and Semen Jr, and another ten years later with a sister,

302. This chapter on Ronny, and a later chapter on Renée, has been based mainly on a compilation and interpretation of fragmentary data found on documents, in letters, and on the back of photographs in Olov and Renée Janse's personal archive (NAA: Janse 2001-29; Per Janse archive). Thanks to a grant from Birgit and Gad Rausing's Foundation for Humanistic Research in 2014, we were able to pursue further investigations into Ronny's earlier history and family, and have help to translate archive information. At this point we made several attempts to find and contact relatives in Russia, and access information at the Russian Embassy in Stockholm and Russian-Swedish Trade Commission in Stockholm, but without success.

303. Stockholms stadsarkiv, Janse: Lysnings- och vigselbok Hedvig Eleonora, 6/11 1930; Lysningsbevis 238; Vigselprotokoll 1199.

Liubov (later married Dobray). The family, which we believe were Orthodox Christian and Ronny later described as bourgeois, moved around in Eastern Europe during her childhood years, and she attended grammar school in “various places”. They eventually settled in the city of Ekaterinodar in southern Russia, not far from the Black Sea, where Ronny went to high school and spent her teenage years.

These were turbulent times in Russia, and the Civil War broke out in 1912 when Ronny was fourteen years old. Ekaterinodar, which had been an important trade centre for southern Russia since the late 1880s, was taken over several times by opposing parties, and was eventually given the more communist-sounding name Krasnodar, following the October Revolution 1920. The Sokolsky family, however, seem to have been doing rather well, at least initially, and all four children got a higher education. Alexandre studied to become an industrial engineer, Semen an aviation engineer, and Liubov studied medicine and became a physician. At the



Fig. 25. Wedding photograph 23 November 1930. Top from the left: Birger Nerman, Ann-Mari Janse, Ture Nerman, Nora Nerman, Per Janse, unidentified female, Otto Janse, unidentified female, Einar Nerman. Bottom from the left: Unidentified female, Ida Nerman, Thure Janse, Ronny Janse, Olov Janse, Signe Janse, Kajsa Nerman.



Fig. 26. Ekaterinodar in the early 20th century seen from the south.

time of the revolution, when she was seventeen years old, Ronny began working as parliamentary reporter for the Department of Foreign Trade in Ekaterinodar. In parallel with her employment she enrolled at the Faculty of Social Science, where she studied a year and a half before her student's status was changed to auditor, and her student privileges were withdrawn on account of her bourgeois background.

She was then twenty years old and left Krasnodar for Moscow, where she assumed the same position, as parliamentary reporter at the Department of Foreign Trade. After only a couple of years in Moscow, she received a posting at the Swedish-Russian Trade Commission in Stockholm and left Russia for good. She travelled through Finland and was twenty-two years old when she arrived in Stockholm in 1925. There she began working for the Commission as a corresponding secretary. We do not know why she decided to go to Stockholm, and apart from the fact that she travelled quite extensively during the years she was based in Stockholm (to Germany and Czechoslovakia in 1926–27, and to Denmark, Holland, England, and France in 1929) it is unclear exactly what kind of work she did for the Trade Commission. We know very little about Ronny Sokolsky's family history and professional life before she married and became Mrs Janse.

But we know that both their lives were changed dramatically with their marriage. Both had been independent professional individuals, not



Fig. 27.
Ronny
Sokolsky
in 1929.

afraid to travel and settle in new places. For her, the marriage meant that she resigned from her employment and cut the formal ties with her native country. Meanwhile, her family were struggling in Krasnodar. Josef Stalin had taken over as leader of the Soviet Union after Lenin's death in 1924, and the situation for the bourgeoisie was severe. We will see in the following chapter how it grew more and more acute during the first half of the 1930s, how Ronny eventually lost touch with her family, and was left to assume that most of them had been executed around 1935.

In the painful relation to the Soviet Union, she found an unexpected connection with Ture Nerman's wife Nora. Nora (born Hedblom) was a daughter of a wealthy industrialist from Hudiksvall who had married a naturalized Trotskyist diplomat, Grigorij Alexandrov in 1910. They had two daughters: Tanja and Mimi, and had divorced just before she met and married Ture Nerman in 1921. Alexandrov later remarried, had another daughter, and took all three girls with him when he emigrated back to the Soviet Union in 1928, two years before Ronny and Olov got married. He was arrested for treason in 1937 and executed a year later. The daughters remained in the Soviet Union, and the separation was a major trauma for Nora. In his earlier years Ture Nerman had been a keen communist, singing the praises of Lenin and the October Revolution, and was one of the founders of the Swedish Communist Party. On a well-known press photo he is seen walking next to Vladimir Lenin on his visit to Stockholm in 1917. But his marriage to Nora and the developments in the Soviet Union after 1924 gave him reason to take a strong stance against Stalinism, and in 1939 he instead joined the Social Democratic Party.

As a couple, Ronny and Olov also formed a warm and close relationship with Birger and Barbro Nerman, who married in 1932. A letter from Olov to Birger ends with: "P.P.S.S. Ronny kisses Barbro and Birger heartily, because a greeting is not enough for her Caucasian temperament." Letters from Ronny to Barbro have been kept in Birger Nerman's archive, and here we get a glimpse of Ronny's characteristic, intensive, lively, and enthusiastic tone, with a Russian accent, and with underscores and exclamation marks in abundance:

How are You, dear Barbro? It will be wonderful to hear about You soon. Do You still smile so sweet and warmly? How are things with little Birger? We shall be glad to hear that You have not abandoned us and forgotten. I have a feeling, that it is years that we have nothing heard from You, dear friends.

How ar [sic] Ture's! Hope well. If you visit them in the country, then send our heartfelt greetings – the red front! [illegible]! Hitler!

What fun stories from Arne's & their excavations?

Will You not soon come to Paris, it would be so great to see You, dear little sweeties!³⁰⁴

In letters from this period we see that married life seems to have done them both good. The tone is warm, loving and cheerful. Olov's letters have suddenly a more mature character and he seems overall more content. They lived in a third-floor flat at Polhemsgatan 18 in Kungsholmen in Stockholm (fig. 28). In the summers they passed the time with “boat trips, swimming, walks, log burning, and garden work” at the Janse family's summer house in Skagshamn near Valdemarsvik, and visited Ture and Nora Nerman in their summer house on Blidö in the Stockholm archipelago.

Most of the autumns, winters, and springs they spent in Paris, where Olov worked as before, and they had a rich and active social life among the academic and art-collecting bourgeoisie. Ronny writes to Barbro Nerman that “Olle was so heartily and warmly greeted here in French circles and so sought-after, that I can say that my heart was overfilled with proudness [...]”. They stayed first in a “nice flat” on Rue Saint-Honoré in the city centre, with “a good maid who cooks good food”. A little later they moved to a flat on Rue des Sablons, with a terrace where they planted flowers. Beside her “conjugal duties” Ronny attended courses in the history of French art and literature at the Sorbonne and the École du Louvre. In February 1933 she writes that she is very pleased with her courses, but has “not yet lost her desire to work and earn”. It is clear that Ronny was a professional woman with many skills, who enjoyed working and being busy. The life of an idle bourgeois wife was not something she desired.³⁰⁵

Olov lectured as before at the Sorbonne and the École du Louvre.

304. Letter from O. Janse to B. Nerman, n.d., possibly 1932. Riksarkivet. Kartong 2. Korrespondens Brev II 1923–1934; Letter from O. Janse to B. Nerman, 11 July 1932. Riksarkivet. Kartong 2. Korrespondens Brev II 1923–1934; Letter from Ronny to Barbro Nerman, 18 February 1933. Riksarkivet. Kartong 2. Korrespondens Brev II 1923–1934; Letter from O. Janse to B. Nerman, 22 January 1934. Riksarkivet. Kartong 2. Korrespondens Brev II 1923–1934.

305. Ibid.



Fig. 28. Ronny smoking a cigarette in the window at Polhemsgatan 18, 1929.

Together they planned and carried out an excavation in Villambis, at the estate of the Swedish Count Wrangel, in the autumn of 1933. And they planned for their upcoming expedition to Indochina. They visited the *Exposition Coloniale* in Vincennes in 1931, and formed the necessary support network of institutions and wealthy patrons. Ronny played a crucial role, creating and stabilizing relations with the female parts of the social networks, which are often officially invisible in the historical archive material, but were of utmost importance in reality. It was, for example, Ronny's close affinity with Marie-Rose Loo that formed the strongest bond in what would be a long-lasting and important friendship between C.T. Loo and Olov Janse.³⁰⁶ In July 1933, Olov added a P.S. to Birger, in a letter from Ronny to Barbro Nerman:

306. Throughout the following chapters we will return to the Ronny's pivotal importance for many of the professional pursuits that were carried out in Olov Janse's name. We will also return to the friendship between Marie-Rose and C.T. Loo, and Ronny and Olov Janse in the chapters "Darling, Dearest" and "Renée".

An acquaintance of ours Mr Jacques Orcel visits Stockholm at the end of this month and brings our best greetings. It would be really great if Birger would show him the museum and assist him with advice. Mr Orcel is a prominent art collector and patron.

With this starts the next phase in Ronny and Olov Janse's lives and careers: the Indochina expeditions.