

Sonya's Report



THE FASCINATING AUTOBIOGRAPHY
OF ONE OF RUSSIA'S MOST
REMARKABLE SECRET AGENTS

R U T H W E R N E R

rationality Centre's decision had been necessary, I still felt that we had run away. Later I learnt that in similar circumstances relations were totally suspended, to be resumed again only after weeks or months of inactivity. Feng's murder threw a shadow over my life for a long time.

In Peking the relatively peaceful atmosphere did us good. Ernst loosened up and was less irritable. I enjoyed showing him the beauty of the city. In August we actually went on leave to Beidaihe on the Yellow Sea. We intended to enjoy every hour of those rare days free of danger. Unfortunately this was beyond me. I felt sick and did not want to swim or go for walks. Soon I knew that I was expecting a child. Before saying anything to Ernst or anyone else, I wanted to make my own decision. In China it was easy to have an abortion. Everything spoke for it, especially our kind of work. But Micha was now four years old and I yearned for a second child. In my line of business the time would never be right. If I was separated from Ernst, I might never be with anyone again from whom I would want a child. Now that it was on the way I wanted to keep it.

The timing was particularly inopportune. Within a few weeks Rolf, who had now completed five years in China, was to begin his home leave in Europe. His English employers would be paying the fares for the whole family. Centre wanted me to use this opportunity to come to Moscow and discuss my work. Besides, I was glad at the chance to visit my family in London. Whether Rolf should prolong his contract with the Shanghai Municipal Council for another five years remained an open question. Rolf was now a convinced communist and did not want to stay politically inactive any longer. I had informed Centre of this.

A second child, an infant that had to be nursed and cared for, would certainly complicate life still more, but so long as I did not leave my work, no one could reproach me. Indeed, a baby would provide excellent legal cover.

Before the European leave began, something happened that made my departure from China urgent and made it doubtful whether I would ever return. In Shanghai, a foreign comrade who had continued Richard's former work had been arrested. He remained silent throughout the interrogations and they never even

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learnt his name. His absolute refusal to speak became a sensation. The world press reported on him as Mr X.

This comrade was Kate's superior and companion. I did not know him personally and had never had anything to do with him, but Ernst and I were warned by Centre that the number of the Rhein-Metall typewriter connected with the arrested man could throw suspicion on Ernst. Neither he nor I had sold one to him or Kate. However, I was to leave at once and if Ernst found himself drawn into the affair, he could put any blame on me, as soon as I had safely crossed the border into the Soviet Union. He had sold me the machine and knew no more of it than that. We made out the appropriate invoice in my name. Ernst was to try to keep going in Peking for the present.

This made my future quite uncertain; the only thing I could be sure about was the separation from Ernst. I found the parting hard. We were not together merely because we happened to be doing the same work; our ties went deeper.

China too, I left with a heavy heart. I had lived here for five years.

When in 1949 the day of victory came, I considered it to be the most important milestone in the history of the international labour movement since the October Revolution of 1917. For me personally, it was one of the happiest events in my life.

In the 1950s, tourist trips to China became feasible and I started to save up for one. Then came the changes in China. As yet it was possible to travel there, but I felt I could not visit a country whose political development depressed me as much as the Cultural Revolution did.

Before my hasty departure in 1935, both Rolf and Ernst repeatedly tried to dissuade me from continuing the pregnancy – without success. Eventually Rolf declared that he could not leave me on my own in this condition; I was to meet him in Europe and to conceal the fact that he was not the father of the child. Ernst respected him for this, saying to me: 'If I can't be with you, then there is no one better than Rolf, and I shall feel much calmer.' I said nothing while the two of them bargained over my future. I did not want to lie about the child, and so far as the work was

Moscow and Manchuria, 1933-35

concerned, which country I went to and with whom – that decision was not ours anyway.

I was to receive my exit visa to the Soviet Union in Harbin. Ernst knew the exact date I would cross the border, after which he could blame me if questioned. In Harbin I found the Consulate closed and asked myself whether I might yet strike bad luck at the very last moment.

Everything went well. Ernst was not questioned. Mr X was later released. Kate must have conducted herself very well indeed. After her return to the Soviet Union she received a high decoration. Unfortunately she lost her baby in the eighth month. In 1937 or 1938 I met her in Moscow and also her husband, Mr X, without ever knowing his real name. He struck me as charming and highly knowledgeable about international politics. I was not curious to learn his name. Anyway, it would have been different from the one in Shanghai. I was glad to hear, years later, that within a short time Kate had two children, both healthy boys.

During the long journey by train I felt so ill that I was afraid for the unborn baby. Micha on the other hand loved these sudden changes in his everyday life and soon felt at home. On the journey his only disappointment was that he could not talk to anyone. He tried German, English and Chinese, but in vain. Once, when the train stopped, a cat came mewling along the platform and the four-year-old murmured to himself: 'Cats are cleverer than people. They all speak the same language.'