

Chapter 21 : “1976 - Saturday June 19, 12:18”

Approaching Christmas, Silvia hosted a large dinner at the castle with 160 guests wearing a Dirndl dress. None of the invitees knew in advance that she would be there. The dance lasted until 6 in the morning when the last 10 exhausted guests left Vita Havet (the banquet room). Christmas proper she as usual celebrated with her parents. Then she and CG spent a week at Mauritius. Silvia was picked up in Paris. He scuba dived. She fished. The relationship remained secret in the sense that there was no official confirmation that it would lead to anything. Otherwise, it was probably one of the most talked about relationships in Swedish history. Silvia continued to refuse interviews about her private life, but she was happy to speak at length about her interests, for example this phone conversation with journalist Sten Hedman at Damernas Värld:

- “Even if there is so much talk of money [in connection with the Olympic Games], the ideal remains. It must mean something positive that all nations can meet across borders and socialize as sportsmen and friends. In any case, no one can claim otherwise. I believe in the Olympic idea because I am a citizen of the world myself. I have lived in Sweden (at the age of 8), South America (Brazil), Spain and West Germany. And now I am experiencing Austria. People are the same everywhere, only the problems vary, but if people can meet, they can perhaps solve their internal problems by talking about them. ... The people of the world interest me. I have experienced quite a lot and have got to know so many fine people so I still believe that this society will be able to survive. Somewhere there is a purity and authenticity that money, power madness and war cannot destroy. Not under any conditions.” “How should we work for that?” - “Through internationalism, by travelling and meeting others. Look at the technology, in the late 60s we approached technical perfection, man reached the moon among other things. Then we suddenly found that oil was running out and so our lives changed.” “Do you talk about these things when you meet our king?” “Yes, of course.” - “What are his views?” - “Ask him yourself. Now I have to cook dinner.”¹

During the Winter Olympics February 4-15, 1976, Silvia spent most of her time at the Chancery. When she needed to go out, her closest boss, Emmy Schwabe, served as a combination body guard and lady-in-waiting chasing away the journalists. Silvia was in black pèlerine coat, black high heel boots, bare head and in all photographs looked absolutely fantastic. She and Schwabe arrived an hour before the opening ceremony in a yellow Mercedes. It was cold and windy. Silvia was offered two welcoming toasts out of the surroundings pocket flasks to get warm. She went up to the vip-stand and greeted Prince Bertil and Lilian Craig. Silvia and Lilian had found each other very sympathetic. They felt marriage wise to be “in the same boat”. Lilian was very relieved that she now had some kind of official status and was able to participate at Prince Bertil's side. At the last Winter Olympics, she had been squeezed in among the rest of the congregation as one spectator among many.

CG arrived on the 10th because he and Prince Bertil used to share responsibility and then followed their official program which left little time for anything else. During the Olympics, CG and Silvia are said to have met in a nearby sports cabin where CG proposed. The

¹ Sten Hedman. Silvia: Begär inte att jag skall lämna ut något av mitt och Carl Gustafs privatliv. Damernas Värld, 1976:9.

alternative version of the proposal is that CG waited until Zermatt after the closing ceremonies:

We can reveal when King Carl Gustaf proposed to his Silvia. It should always be done in some scenic place. In their case: a ski lift high up in the air in Swiss Zermatt just two weeks before the engagement! According to information divulged to DV, Carl Gustaf started with the question:

- What will happen now after the Olympic Games?
- I do not know, Silvia had answered
- Come to Stockholm and marry me, smiled Carl Gustaf.
- I'm coming, Silvia smiled back!

On the top of the hill, the king bought a bottle of Dom Perignon (champagne). They drank it in a plastic cup...²

Since CG and friends had chartered a helicopter to fly them to some good slope off pist, one should probably not take this alternative version too seriously.

It would, of course, have looked nice if CG instead had visited Silvia's parents and asked for her hand in marriage, but they did not meet in person until the official engagement at the castle. Silvia informed her parents herself, reportedly on February 9 in the middle of the Olympics, according to other information at a later date. During the phone call, Silvia appears to have handed CG the receiver and he and Walther actually spoke. Silvia seems to have sounded so happy that Walther became worried. According to (un)reliable sources, Walther, at this or some other time, warned his daughter that not even a queen was invulnerable to the facts of life.³

After the closing ceremonies Silvia and CG went on a skiing holiday in Zermatt. Silvia cleared her desk and arrived two days late. The host was Tore Bergengren who brought a servant to bring some style to the engagement, Zermatt is a rather shoddy place, better known for its ski slopes than for its luxuries. After Zermatt a lot of things happened. Olympic hostess Cecilia Nilsson, now upgraded to lady-in-waiting, introduced her to court procedures and as kindly as possible pointed out that her wardrobe should perhaps be supplemented before the official engagement on March 12. Money was not an obstacle. Silvia took language lessons = plodded through a linguaophone course Swedish for Germans provided by CG the year before and she received private language lessons, possibly by her lady-in-waiting. The wedding vows should be uttered in Swedish and must be comprehensible to the audience. She had not wanted to study Swedish before in earnest so as not to look like taking CG's marriage proposal for granted. After the official engagement, she returned to Innsbruck. Previously, she had followed certain safety procedures outlined by Swedish and Austrian secret service. Now she had her own bodyguards. She packed and discarded. The colleagues gave her a trousseau with linen worth 50 thousand SEK. On Friday April 23, she arrived at her new capital carrying 890 kilograms of possessions in a sturdy wooden box. However, we must not anticipate the events ...

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² Sten Hedman. I förlovningsvimlet. Damernas Värld, 1976:13.

³ Hamburger Abendblatt, 1976-03-13.

Silvia's family knew about the engagement but didn't know the date. Perhaps it was the same with Prime Minister Palme. Five days before the engagement, Silvia called Walther (according to another source, 8-10 days before). In the evening prior to the engagement, CG contacted Prime Minister Olof Palme in his office and asked to visit him. Palme had no objection to the engagement. It has since been claimed that he should have ordered secret service to conduct an investigation into Silvia's background. But as has been commented on. As king CG could marry whoever he chose. The constitution only applied to princes and princesses.

The following day, the Sommerlath family, parents, sons and wives, arrived on the morning flight from Copenhagen in a chartered plane. No one had alerted the press, supposedly because Silvia asked them not to. Her reasoning seems odd: If she spoke to a single journalist, she felt morally obliged to speak to all journalists and that was not possible.⁴ More likely it was CG's doing. They got engaged the afternoon of March 12, toasted in champagne at about 18 hours and finished off with a dinner. Silvia received Sibylla's engagement ring with diamonds. CG received a simple golden ring. Afterwards, he was asked why he never wore it. CG claimed it was personal, but it seems to have been too small. To avoid leaks, the kitchen was also kept ignorant of the engagement. The staff had to follow Kajsa Vargs recipe "You use what you got". Outside, it was cold but the news had seeped out so far that about twenty brave people met up in the courtyard to pay tribute to the two (among them my mother). No luck though.⁵ In addition to the Sommerlaths, CG's closest family was invited, those who lived in Sweden. Two more people, the court physician and politician Gunnar Biörck and the industrial leader Marcus Wallenberg, were present as a special honour but ate at a separate table together with Mistress of the Robes Astrid Rudebeck (1893-1982).⁶

The engagement communiqué was not made public until 14:37: "The Marshal of the Realm has announced that today the King entered into an engagement with Miss Silvia Sommerlath, daughter of director Walther Sommerlath and his wife Alice, born de Toledo. The announcement is this evening followed by a family dinner at the Stockholm Castle." By noon the next day, the news had spread so far that about a thousand people gathered in the courtyard to cheer. At least they remained calm, which was more than could be said about the large number of journalists and photographers being refused entry. The court's newly appointed press spokesman Jan Mårtensson had been completely disconnected:

Wedding Stuff

After returning from America [CG's public relations trip], a wedding was imminent. Silvia Sommerlath from Heidelberg had made her official entry into Sweden just a few months earlier. Everything had been very discreet and I did not meet the future queen until the night before the engagement, when she just arrived in Sweden. I had accompanied the king to Uppsala at some event on Norrland's student nation and on the way home we drove past Villa Beylon on Haga, where Christina and Tord Magnuson live. The king had been playing secretive and I would soon understand why. Because at Villa Beylon, his beautiful fiancée was waiting.

⁴ Aftonbladet, 1976-03-12.

⁵ Svenska Dagbladet, 1976-03-13.

⁶ Aftonbladet, 1976-03-13.

The next day, they were engaged. The Royal Marshal's Office had decided that photographers and the press would not be involved, it would disturb the ceremony! I had not been informed of the arrangement. As a result, [the day after the engagement] the inner courtyard was flooded by protesting journalists and photographers. The palace guards had closed the doors and, referring to their orders, refused to open them. Then I adopted my reserve officer persona and shouted: "I'm in charge." The palace guards, retired police and petty officers, clicked their heels and saluted, the spinal reflex of foot soldiers. So we opened the gates and the king and future queen were understanding. A press conference and a photo session were improvised in haste in Princess Sibylla's apartment, the palace's nicest and most intimate. I dare not think of the reaction if the doors out to the courtyard had been kept closed.

There were over a hundred photographers and almost as many journalists. We therefore had to be practical. The King and his fiancée sat down on a large sofa in one of the smaller rooms of the princess's apartment. The photographers got access a few at the time, had a few minutes to photograph in peace and quiet. It was there and then and on that couch that the king [being asked "why her"?] made his pithy saying: "It just clicked".

...

When the photo session was over, the newly engaged went out into an outer room where the press waited on them for a very relaxed, successful and pleasant press conference.⁷ ... The king raised Silvia's arm in the manner of a boxing couch and seemed to be asking: She is good enough, isn't she?. He seemed a little cocky over it all. Here is the girl who is to become Queen of Sweden - please look!⁸

[Silvia's Swedish was hit and miss. During the press conference, when she was asked to describe how she felt, the answer was "- I feel groovy!"]

Silvia realized early on that love at the level of head of state was special. Two days after the engagement, she was with CG at the salmon premiere in Mörrumsån when President Urho Kekkonen appeared with an "official" mistress in tow who he bedded in Prince Bertil's summer residence. You had to keep a brave face and accept the situation. Then CG disappeared almost all April on a public relations trip to America. Meanwhile, Silvia was invited for a weekend with CG's aunt Queen Ingrid of Denmark to gain some knowledge of court protocols, suitable tailors and behaviour fitting to a queen. Princess Margaretha was also there. Silvia received two pieces of advice: Council one. "Be yourself. It is important not to lose your grip on reality."⁹ Council two. "Less is more" by which Queen Ingrid apparently meant restraint. (I give Meryl Streep the floor to explain what that means: It's a lesson I learned in drama school: The teacher asks, how do you act like a queen? And everybody says, 'Oh it's about posture and authority.' And they say, no, it's about how the air in the room shifts when you walk in. And that's everyone else's work.") She brought back a myrtle cutting, Bernadotte's "fortune branch", from a plant that Queen Ingrid's mother, Crown Princess Margaret, once planted at Sofiero Castle in Skåne. Silvia replanted it at Ulriksdal Castle.¹⁰ Asked who gave her the best advice, Silvia always replied "Queen Ingrid" on the grounds that she was the only person who always tried to answer her questions. Even the most impossible ones.

⁷ Jan Mårtensson. Att kyssa ett träd. W & W, 2000.

⁸ Aftonbladet, 1976-03-14.

⁹ Christine Samuelsson. Silvia - Drottningen. Svensk Damtidning, 1981, nr 15. [Intervju med drottning Silvia.]

¹⁰ Roger Lundgren. Ingrid – prinsessa av Sverige, drottning av Danmark. Fischer & Co, 2010.

Silvia never met Gustaf VI or Sibylla. CG and Prince Bertil told her what they knew about what was expected of a Swedish queen, not so much it turned out. CG had the attitude that Silvia, like himself, was to attend the school of hard knocks. Princess Christina, Mistress of the Robes Astrid Rudebeck and nurse Ingrid Björnberg knew a lot of stories about this school. Princess Christina's advice appears to have been cribbed from Kim Söderlund's charm school: A royal lady never stretches her legs in public. A royal lady always dresses according to "the convention." Since Silvia's main assets were charm and naturalness, this was perhaps not the best advice she could receive.¹¹ (Other dissuasive advice with Kim as the source was to train good posture by balancing telephone directories on her head and devoting two hours a day to her appearance.)

The wedding was to take place on June 19, because this was the Bernadotte tradition. Until CG's return from America on April 29, Silvia lived with Prince Bertil and Lilian Craig. CG called every morning (=night in America). Silvia left for the castle at 10 o'clock. There was a lot to be done. She felt lazy, like a contented cat, and engaged in letter writing, purchasing stuff for the castle apartment, Swedish lessons, studying royal lineages and not least the wedding planning.¹² The amount of fan-letters rose from 15 kilos per day to 70 kilos. Anyone who congratulated her on the engagement received a thank you cards. In 1977, she proudly explained that she now not only thought in Swedish but even dreamed in Swedish.

During the engagement interview, Silvia was very well dressed, which seems to have been due to Princess Christina and the wife of the Head Chamberlain, Signe von der Esch, herding her around at NK and other places. Before the wedding, Princess Birgitta helped her out. She also secretly visited Paris with her mother and two sisters-in-law. They spent nine hours visiting fashion houses: Nina Ricci, Hermes, Lanvin, Albina, Christian Dior, Balmain and Mare Olivier (who specializes in bridal dresses). In addition to everything else, Silvia ordered a wedding dress by chief designer Marc Bohan at Dior: Simple cut, ivory-white mulberry silk and a gruesomely long trailer which, according to Silvia, preferably should have even longer to match the veil. When it was finished, she and Lilian Craig picked it up. Just in case, Dior sent a representative to help out on the wedding day.

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CG's bachelor party after returning from America was organized by friends Anders Lettström and Anders Philipson on Ingarö in the Stockholm archipelago and proceeded in relative calm. CG and his entourage dressed up as Vikings and fought in noble competition in various styles. The losers seem to have been transported by boat to the other side of the bay to be comforted by Aje's girls (=crossed the Styx to be rewarded by shield maidens in Valhalla?). Everyone had a very pleasant memory of the party.¹³ CG also had a bachelor party with his adjutants - a rather wet affair that started on the man-of-war Vasa's gun deck and ended up at the Maritime Museum. At the same time Silvia celebrated with her Swedish acquaintances: "I only saw the beginning of the hen party, when Silvia was dressed up in a selection of the Swedish Winter Olympics team's clothes with added flags and crowns. The party was in the sign of sport, with the future bride's friends representing all the worlds continents in different attire. Cecilia wore her host uniform from Innsbruck."¹⁴

¹¹ Svensk Damtidning, 1978:16.

¹² En månad till bröllopet. Vecko Journalen, 1976:21

¹³ Carl V Andersson & Nathalie Joo. Ritualer från 1500-talet gör Victoria redo för bröllopet. Expressen, 2010-05-16.

¹⁴ Bengt-Herman Nilsson. Skidspår och stickspår : memoarer. 2007.

A few days before the wedding, the German section of CG's and Silvia's family arrived. Princess Birgitta with family, CG's cousins on his mother's side, Silvia's family and friends, those who passed the eye of the needle. They all came in the same plane and were met up at Arlanda by the bride and a motorcade. The bridesmaids visited the church to familiarize themselves. During rehearsal, an unfortunate flower boy stumbled and lost two milk teeth. Silvia kept tabs on the guest list, the placement schedule in the church, the ceremonial, the location of the TV cameras etc. Lennart Hyland who was there in the same errand got the impression that she wanted to be in command.

Prior to her marriage, Silvia was formally a foreigner. On the day before the wedding, CG awarded her the Seraphim Order, since under the new constitution, it could only be awarded to foreigners. They then went to the town hall where Silvia received her Swedish citizenship and was welcomed with a reception in the garden of the town hall. The communist Municipal councillors did not attend the occasion. In the evening of the same day, the Parliament and the Government hosted a gala performance at the opera with the theme of the glory days during Gustav III. The most notable segment was the premiere performance of *Dancing Queen* by ABBA. Afterwards there was a dinner with dancing at Drottningholm Palace. CG and Silvia opened with the Imperial Waltz. Silvia then spent the night at Stockholm Castle.

The wedding morning they had breakfast with the family and the royal main guests: Queen Ingrid of Denmark, King Olaf and Queen Margarethe of Norway, Queen Fabiola of Belgium. CG was content with two cups of coffee, a boiled egg and a toasted bread roll. By then they both had butterflies. Silvia was helped by her mother and former nanny Ingrid Björnberg into the wedding dress. In order not to make too minimalistic an impression, Silvia also wore a tiara, a veil and a bouquet: white orchids, lilies of the valley, and Madagascar jasmine. The tiara was decorated with cameos, pearls, red gold and brilliants, and had also been worn by the princesses Sibylla, Birgitta and Desirée at their wedding. Behind the diadem, she put the Bernadotte's "fortune branch". She guarded herself against any "tears of joy" with a small handkerchief attached with rubber bands around her left wrist. Meanwhile, CG visited Storkyrkan nearby. He was dressed in an admiral's uniform and wore his Orders: The Order of the Seraphim, the North Star and the Sword. The bridesmaids had worries because they had not tried their dresses in advance and one of these was gone.¹⁵

At noon it was time: First to the altar were seven-year-old James Ambler, son of Princess Margaretha, and five-year-old Amelie Middelschulte, daughter of Silvia's friend Beate. Someone had told the children not to walk too fast up to the altar rail and they really took it slow. CG gave them a push to speed things up. Then it was Princess Birgitta's son Hubertus, together with Sister Desirée's daughter Helene and Silvia's niece Sophie. The last of them was Silvia's niece Carmita, who according to German custom carried the wedding ring on a velvet cushion. Walther Sommerlath gave his daughter a kiss and let her go.

Sports reporter Lennart Hyland referred to this altar walk as if it were a sports event: "The bride and groom are approaching the altar. They're there now!" which everyone made a lot of fun afterwards. The wedding was conducted by Archbishop Olov Sundby in the presence of preacher Hans Åkerhielm and Silvia's uncle, doctor of theology Ernst Sommerlath. On each side of the chancel was placed the crown of the king and the queen respectively. The ceremony lasted three quarters of an hour. In the porch, CG kissed his bride. In enlargements

¹⁵ Roger Lundgren. *Ingrid – prinsessa av Sverige, drottning av Danmark*. Fischer & Co, 2010.

you can see that Silvia is closing his eyes. Why so was the question asked afterwards in the columns. Best answer: Because love is blind.

Outside, the course mates from the Naval Academy formed a sword hedge until a horse-drawn chariot. In this it was a procession through central Stockholm until the National Museum, 19 minutes, escorted by the King's Guard on horseback and then ceremonial giggering in the king's sloop Vasaorden, five seconds break between strokes, over Strömmen to the castle under continuous cannon salutes. Large crowds lined the streets and quays and people threw flowers. Silvia particularly noticed a group of divers, probably those from Tomtebodan, with snorkel and flippers shouting: "Good luck!" The navy foghorns were going full blast and the air force buzzed the couple: Eight planes of each Lansett, Draken and Viggen. Two SK60 drew a heart in the sky with pink smoke. There was sun, blue skies, flags on every pole and small paper flags in the hands of most. 180,000 people were crowded along the procession. 500 million viewers worldwide followed the live broadcast. The German interest was enormous: 89 percent of the population followed the wedding. That was more than at the moon landing in 1969.

SVT had 350 people assigned to the event. One of the features was reported to the Radio Board:

It is inappropriate to present Queen Silvia in a news release as unemployed, as happened in a broadcast to foreign tourists. He said: "Carl Gustaf Bernadotte, 30 years old, Stockholm, King of Sweden, married today to unemployed German-born Silvia Sommerlath, 33 years old. The bride is said to be coronated queen."¹⁶

The republican-minded associations The National Association for Drug Addicts (RFHL), New Culture and The Brewery had arranged a counter wedding. The bride had a stomach and bikini. Only 3,000 people attended. The original proposal was from DN columnist Red Top. The Graphic Trade Union and some other unions flagged red on Barnhusgatan 20 to mark the distance.

Prince Bertil's wedding address afterwards was mercifully short because... "Tell me the bridegroom who on his wedding day listens to the words of wisdom of older generations." CG and Silvia disappeared for a month to Hawaii and East Africa.¹⁷ The critical voices afterwards were easily counted. Aftonbladet journalist Åsa Moberg dismissed Silvia as "the beautiful German who bedded the Swedish throne". Technically correct but maybe no blockbuster. Expressen's wedding kiss sold better: 957 thousand copies.

¹⁶ Svenska Dagbladet, 1976-10-08.

¹⁷ Christina Magnergård Bjers. Drottning Silvia. Ekerlids förlag, 2001 [baserad på intervjuer med Silvia m fl].