

Chapter 73 : Grand Duchess Maria Pavlovna the Younger (1890-1958) – "The Scandal Princess"

In the spring of 1907, William was informed that there were probes of a marriage between him and Grand Duchess Maria Pavlovna, granddaughter of Tsar Alexander II and at the time 16 years old. It was the Bernadotte's last arranged marriage in the old style and has over the years attracted much interest. The writings have followed three veins - how the marriage came about, "the pomp" and how it dissolved. The main sources are Princess Maria, her son and grandson (Pavlovna 1930; Bernadotte 1966; Bernadotte, 2006). Further information can be found in short biographies, newspaper articles and memories. Wilhelm himself has not written anything about what happened, but there are clues about his attitude. His first love he depicts like this:

During the summer holidays he accompanied his parents to Särö. It was probably during the international lawn tennis competitions in 1903. There he met his first love Helfrid Hammarberg (1885-1975; 1909 m. Kempe).¹ He has described the romance in his short story The old pine. It appears that at that time he took his duty to marry some one royal so seriously that it never occurred to him to enter into a relationship with her. That would have been to break the laws of both God and man. Not surprisingly, Helfrid wanted an explanation:

[PW:] You know the curse that rests over my calling. In the cradle it was laid, to the grave it follows me. Our families can never be bound by blood. For the laws of my fathers are harsh; In my youthful thoughtlessness, I promised to keep them. And that oath is sacred.

[HH:] Can't you break the double curse, she wondered.

[PW:] No, for the first is a promise I once made to my mother. As long as she's alive, I'll keep it. And the other, no power on earth can subjugate. Higher beings have written these laws. It is true, as you say, that this is a curse. But if it were not laid down in my heart, it would feel strangely empty and dead.²

At the end of his life Wilhelm cursed the consequences of this attitude: first never even questioning his obligations and then lacking the confidence to follow through on his convictions. However, prior to his marriage to Maria Pavlovna, he still had good royal intentions. Let's start from the beginning...

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Grand Duchess Maria Pavlovna the younger was born April 18, 1890, in Saint Petersburg. She was the daughter of Tsar Alexander II's youngest son Grand Duke Pavel Alexandrovich of Russia (1860-1919) and Princess Alexandra of Greece and Denmark (1870-1891). Maria also had a brother Dimitrios (1891-1942). After his wife's death in childbirth, his father moved to Paris and began a relationship with the divorced colonel's wife Olga Karnovich m. Pistohlkors. In 1897 they had children and in 1902 they married. As the marriage took place against the wishes of Tsar Nicholas II, the father was punished with an entry ban, his fortune - the part that remained in Russia - was seized and he lost custody of his children. Until then, Maria & Dimitrios had lived the semesters in Paris and the summer holidays with their uncle

¹ Asplund 1965: s. 46.

² prins Wilhelm 1919: ss. 7-38.

Sergei at Crimea. In 1902 he became their guardian and they moved in with him in Moscow. When Sergey was killed in an attack in 1905, Tsar Nicolaj became their guardian. However, those who determined her future were the three sisters Princess Augusta, Elisabeth and Irène of Hesse. Augusta was Tsaritsa and wanted to marry her off according to her royal station. Sergei's widow Elisabeth (Ella) was responsible for Maria's upbringing, but wanted to get rid of her to devote herself to a religious life. Irène wanted to help her sisters.

Maria wrote her memoirs (Pavlovna 1930 & 1933). There are also two longer biographies (Horvatova 2005; Wendt 2013) and a number of short biographies (Radziwill 1916: ss.210-216; Swahn 1930: ss. 172-176; Knagg 1932: ss. 223-245; Reimers 1957: ss. 72-81; Elgklou 1978: ss. 167-171; Ohlmarks 1979: ss. 118-119; Skott 1996: ss. 242-243; Sundberg 2004: ss. 248-249; Ershova & Dergatjeva 2007; Lindqvist 2010: ss. 97-100; Norlin 2015: ss.197-200; Widestedt 2015).

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The following is Maria's version of how the marriage with Wilhelm came about:

In March 1907, Princess Irène contacted Victoria, whom she knew personally. Victoria asked her for some photographs. May 14-30 Wilhelm visited incognito as a tourist. He was received by Ella, who conversed him while Maria sat quietly and listened. He was then invited to a small dinner. He and Maria were placed next to each other, and this time they conversed albeit hesitantly. Maria had a favourable impression but was shocked when Ella the next day conveyed Wilhelm's proposal. Wilhelm wanted an answer as soon as possible, but it took a few days for Maria, bedridden with decision anxiety, to make up her mind. In the end, it was a rather pitiful yes, with the proviso of waiting a year until she turned 18. Wilhelm was informed and arrived on a second visit. Mary looked miserable. The couple were for the first time left alone.³

The prince, visibly moved, made me some questions about my health, then suddenly took my hand and asked me, if I felt sympathy for him. After I answered yes, he hesitated for a moment and continued:

- Would you like to accompany me to Sweden?

I said yes once again. And he brought my hand to his lips. The situation was as difficult for him as it was for me. At the same time, I heard my dog scratching on the door, and was happy to find a topic of conversation, I asked the Prince to let him in. He rose and did so and then came back to me.

- I suppose you are tired, he said, I will now leave, so you can rest. He bent down, kissed me on the forehead and left.

The it was over.⁴

After that they met several times, but were not left alone. On June 15, they were engaged at the palace Peterhof in St. Petersburg. No one in the Swedish royal family seems to have attended. Oscar II was ill, Gustaf was regent and Victoria was at Solliden. Probably some form of protest that she had not been consulted. After the engagement, Maria got a Swedish teacher Maria Wigert. Wigert described her and Maria's summer stay in Crimea as follows:

³ Pavlovna 1930: ss. 17-52.

⁴ Pavlovna 1930: s. 121.

Grand Duchess Maria spends the day thus: She rises early, and often begins her studies at six o'clock, with Swedish grammar, literature and history; At eight o'clock, a carriage pulls up and we and the suite wind our way down to the sea, where we take a refreshing bath. You swim in waves and afterwards make your self decent. If the wind is too strong, you take a swim in the pool. At nine o'clock or so, we head home for breakfast, and the Grand Duchess continues her Swedish lessons for yet an hour or two. The old Norse hero spirit appeals greatly to her, and she has already learned parts of Frithiof's saga by heart. As she in addition to her native Russian speaks French, German and English and is a fast learner, the work does not present any difficulties. At noon we have lunch on a large balcony and then coffee on the terrace overlooking the big blue waters. Someone then reads today's newspaper, one converses and the ladies do handwork. The Grand Duchess has a great talent for female handicraft and already rejoices at the beautiful Swedish examples. Then you retire or the Grand Duchess plays a duet on the mandolin with her brother or some Russian or German song.

Then the Grand Duchess listens for an hour to some interesting Swedish book, during which she make a beautiful watercolour of some flowers she has picked at the beach. At four a.m. tea is taken, whereupon we usually take a ride on the small quick amblers, which are used at Crimea. Sometimes the Grand Duchess with her brother makes visits to one of her numerous relatives who own villas here. She also socializes with her aunt, married to Grand Duke George, and with the Emperor's sister Xenia, married to Grand Duke Alexander. At half past eight, dinner is served, after which you gather in the salon for the evening circle. At the latest ten o'clock they bid good night after a day of general satisfaction.⁵

During Wilhelm's round the world journey with Freya, the couple corresponded and he celebrated Christmas in Moscow. The death of King Oscar II on December 8 delayed the marriage for six months. Meanwhile, Maria began to regret it. When Ella was hospitalized after Christmas, Maria decided to send a letter to Wilhelm annulling the engagement. Wilhelm was very understanding but hoped that she would reverse her decision. A few days later, Princess Irène arrived:

Very kindly but very firmly she explained to me that it was impossible to break an agreement that had political significance. Too many people were already involved, the wheels were turning and the wedding day set. I would cause to great a scandal to cancel.

Crying I tried to explain my reasons and fears, but she showed me how unfounded they were. Finally, she presented her last argument that if I stood by my decision, it would be the death of my aunt, and I would be responsible.

This last argument made me hesitate, and when she saw me falter, she made me promise not to do anything rash. Then she left me to make up my mind. I was not up to the situation, and there was no influential person to help me.⁶

The next visit at the end of February/March 1908 Wilhelm pretended as if nothing had happened. The wedding took place in the Tsars summer palace Tsarskoye Selo outside Saint Petersburg. A few days before, Gustaf, Prince Carl, Princess Ingeborg arrived with a large suite in tow. Victoria was this time in Karlsruhe. The wedding, a grand affair in the Russian orthodox style, was on May 3, 1908. Since Wilhelm at the time was only fourth in line of

⁵ Wigert, Maria. "Hos prinsessan Maria Pavlovna på Krim." Idun 1907:42, ss. 523-525.

⁶ Pavlovna 1930: s. 132.

succession, Maria did not have to convert to Protestantism, probably yet another reason for Victoria to be absent.

In retrospect, the attendance of the Swedish royal house at the wedding seems to have been rather lame. The marriage was probably forced through by King Oscar II against his family's wishes as part of his personal foreign policy, but that policy died with him on December 8 1907. Gustav V's and Victoria's attitude towards Maria has been debated but all information is from long after. Swedish public opinion was divided. The public was curious about her as a person, but there was also anti-Russian agitation. Maria's Swedish reception is usually summarized as the "Russian woman" being a breath of fresh air and that everything could have ended differently if she had not had her Romanov background to live up to.

There are similarities to brother Gusty's marriage a couple of years earlier. Both seem to have thrown themselves into marriage as a way out of their parents clutches. It was also the fact that neither of them seems to have had a previous relationship, despite both having turned 23, and that there are so many parallels in their life history and that of their father – he too married at the age of 23 - that they probably competed with each other and that this contributed to Wilhelm's snap decision not to fall behind.

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William and Maria's marriage is difficult to describe. Wilhelm is silent and Maria barely mentions him in the memoirs. The contemporary gossip considered the divorce to be due to her immaturity.⁷ Russian diplomatic circles claimed that the trigger was an overly servile Russian minister who did not understand that a Romanov in Swedish exile was Swedish - not Russian.⁸ Maria wrote a diary but it has not been published. In her memoirs, she blames Victoria's physician Axel Munthe for trying to "enslave" her.⁹ 1947/48 in talks with her son Lennart, she changed her mind and instead blamed Wilhelm.¹⁰ Maria's lady-in-waiting 1908-1910 claimed that the marriage during her time was very happy and that the couple barely left each other.¹¹ In the divorce documents of March 19, 1914, the couple referred to differing minds and mindsets. Whatever the conflict was about, it must have started during Maria's art studies in the academic year 1910/11. It seems that every time Maria was left alone to make new acquaintances and experiences, the conflicts got worse.

Maria made an impression on the Swedish court upon arrival, but perhaps not in the way she intended:

The princess was very sympathetic in her strange mixture of extreme childishness and precociousness. She was lively and attentive, friendly and sweet and also very intelligent. Sometimes she was really beautiful.

...

[Victoria] was very much taken by the princess, while she seemed astonished at her absolutely natural, untroubled way, which both enchanted and baffled her. The venerated princess was accustomed to always inspire great respect, always be treated with a certain shyness. She was extremely amused by the princess, she said to me and

⁷ Radziwill 1916: ss. 210-216.

⁸ Nekludoff 1921: ss. 134-135.

⁹ Pavlovna 1930: ss. 54-114.

¹⁰ Bernadotte 1966: ss. 150-158.

¹¹ af Klercker 1944: ss. 207-310.

added: "She's cheering us up, the little cute creature, she's happy and playful as a little foal. But if she is the right wife for our dear Wilhelm, I do not know!"¹²

The couple had an apartment at the castle and spent the summer months at the estate Stenhammar while waiting for their residence Oakhill on Djurgården to be completed. There is no record of William's interest in the operation of Stenhammar. The farm - agriculture, livestock farming, tree felling, greenhouse & kitchen garden - was managed by a trustee. Maria had her maid Tanja with her, and at first there were some visits from Russian relatives. She was also invited to balls and there were courtesy visits. The natural thing had been that someone in Wilhelm's suite had arranged for her to socialize with her peers, but this never happened. The household took care of itself and she did not have any duties. She rode, drove, played tennis, sang, painted and stitched. Maria's later version was that Wilhelm was so shy and unenterprising that it took several months before he dared to touch her. That is possible, but he might as well have wanted to give her time to get used to the situation so that the sex was mutual, and regardless of what Maria 40 years later claimed they seem to have been intensely in love. Lennart was born on May 8, 1909. Here is how it sounded when Wilhelm shortly after was ordered sea service in Karlskrona:

The two young people were despondent, and the princess cried, it was heartbreaking to see their grief! When the day came, the prince asked me to move up into his toilet room, located next to the duke's bedchamber, so that the princess would not feel so alone in the evening. It was a long day. About every quarter of an hour, she asked me what time it was. The Prince had promised to telephone as soon as he arrived, but it was far to Karlskrona, and time went so unbearably slow. After the conversation finally arrived, she calmed down somewhat, but towards evening it got worse again. I will never forget the sight of the little princess, where she sat cuddled up in her bed, with her hair in a small braid, and how bitterly she then began to cry. In vain, I sought to comfort her and was told: "Oh, you don't understand, this is an ideal marriage!"¹³ And so the tears continued to fall, and as a child she rubbed her eyes with her hands.

Maria was very fond of her father-in-law Gustaf and vice versa it seems - at least in the beginning. During Wilhelm's absence, she accompanied Gustaf during the hunting, tennis, bridge, etc. Maria wanted to lighten the often very reverential atmosphere and she became known for her drastic jokes. In front of the court staff, however, she was dignified enough. There is a hard-to-interpret statement that Victoria encouraged this attitude by instructing the court staff to address her as "Your Imperial Highness". In practice, they limited themselves to the "Duchess". In the summer of 1909 during Wilhelm's naval service, Dimitrios visited, in August she was in Russia with her son Lennart and then together with Wilhelm in Nice and Russia. She had several assignments, including opening the Swedish-Russian tourist and sports exhibition in Saint Petersburg.

Wilhelm's very modest court was 1908-1910 led by his adjutant Göran af Klercker (1872-1958) and 1911-1952 by chamberlain Nils Rudebeck (1877-1964), whom he from 1915 shared with Gusty. Maria's lady-in-waiting - Victoria's former maid of honour, Baroness Cecilia Lewenhaupt (1869-1951; m. Falkenberg & af Klercker) - left her in the autumn of 1910. Possibly it would have been her responsibility to introduce Maria into the right circles - something she failed to do. After that, Maria had two more ladies-in-waiting: 1911-1912

¹² af Klercker 1944: s. 243, 255.

¹³ af Klercker 1944: s. 285.

Countess Anna Hamilton (1889-1985; m. von Stockenström) and in 1913 Baroness Ida Rudbeck (1869-1954; m. Queckfeldt & Piper).

In March 1910, they moved house to Oakhill, a 40-room representative villa built for Maria's money. In the autumn of 1910, she followed Prince Eugen's proposal to a year as a special student at the Technical School - a then-equivalent to Konstfack (the Stockholm college of arts). Here she followed instructions in watercolour painting, leather work, calligraphy and pattern drawing. What she liked most was that the rating was anonymous so that she did not suspect that she was being favoured. The relationship between her and Wilhelm had now calmed down, but there are no details. Long afterwards, she claimed that this time she was plagued by the hypocrisy of acting happy, by her loneliness and by quarrels with Wilhelm over unclear what. She points out that her father warned her of the unfavourable impression her antics made - like dressing up, riding on a silver tray down the Oakhill stairs (according to other sources the handrail or - less likely - the balustrade of the staircase at the castle or stairs at Tjöhölm Castle) & riding men's saddle in public. Maria was completely unsympathetic to the criticism and felt persecuted. It has not been possible to find any contemporary articles about her antics - just hints - so the information about them must have spread by word of mouth. There is a cartoon in the Christmas issue of Söndag-Nisse 1910.

Until the art courses, Maria mainly met people from the the court, guests and employees. Much later she summed it up as "The princely circles resembled each other almost everywhere at that time. I did change country, but I did not change environment. A princess, who distinguished herself by her intelligence or by her desire for intellectual activity (if this activity extended beyond the banal realm of charity) endured the envy of her peers, and was spared neither criticism nor mockery."¹⁴ But... "The Swedish people's attitude towards their house of princes & princesses seemed to me, who came from Russia, quite strange. They seemed to look at us with sympathy but as if we were large children, and the smallest feature of our character, good or bad, was commented on in every way but without malice. In Russia it was different."¹⁵ - "In Russia we belonged to the Immortals, but the Russian says You (Du) to his God and approaches him confidently hat in hand; but if a human trait or error is discovered, it is never forgiven. This feeling is missing in my [Swedish] compatriots - makes them more complicated."¹⁶ In other words: The Swedish social control of royal conduct was more both subtle and more difficult to ignore. In truth, you had to be both blind and deaf not to perceive what the people expected of you. However, everyone was aware that it was theatre and should be treated as such.

During the art courses, Maria met Swedish peers with the same interests as herself. They were curious but too busy to pay her much respect. Mary's quarrel with Wilhelm seem (my interpretation) to have been attempts to find out about the situation, protests that she (by Wilhelm?) was treated as an immature child and attacks on the Swedish court and royal house as a collection of narrow-minded fogies & nincompoops. She also visited the Russian embassy where she spoke to Russian minister Vasily Sergeyev and his wife about her problems. The wife tried to get her to accept the situation and make the best of it. Maria was uncompromising. She made no secret of the visits that gave rise to many rumours, for example that she passed on Swedish state secrets.

¹⁴ Pavlovna 1930: s. 146.

¹⁵ Pavlovna 1930: s. 163-164, redigerat.

¹⁶ Pavlovna 1930: s. 164, redigerat.

In the spring of 1911, Gustaf suggested that she and Wilhelm as his delegates attend the coronation of King Vajiravudh of Siam - an absence of six months. Maria's interpretation was that Gustaf wanted to give them a second honeymoon to help them patch up their marriage. The rest of the world interpreted it as a kind of temporary exile. The trip aggravated their conflicts by Wilhelm devoting himself to hunting and writing and she having to cope with herself - a good training in independence it turned out. She was even courted by others and learned to appreciate it. The tourist aspects of the journey have been depicted by Wilhelm and his hunting cousin Lewenhaupt.¹⁷ Wilhelm also seems to have been inspired to a volume of love poems.¹⁸

Despite the love poems, the sex & everything else was bad. During her journey, Maria kept a diary and wrote: "Wilhelm's total indifference annoys me tremendously, everything about him is so boring, so common. Throughout this journey, he has only sunk deeper. He is only interested in what he sees at the moment. He only lives for the day, does not think, does not discuss, never gets upset. He is very pleased with himself and thus Gott sei Dank happy. I feel how my courage and determination to continue my life with this man begins to abandon me. A terrible thought - year after year in Stockholm with this young man and surrounded by that idiotic family! My God!" Since Wilhelm must have spent all his free time in front of the desk during the trip instead of with her, Mary's irritation is understandable. She had lengthy and upsetting conversations with him that it could not continue in this way but in vain. "Wilhelm just moved away, and when he saw no other way out, he began to cry like a woman."¹⁹

They returned in time for the Stockholm Olympics May/July 1912. Maria also opened her heart to the newly appointed Russian minister Aleksander Savinsky, a good friend of her father. By that time, the marital conflicts had accelerated to the point where Savinsky recommended divorce. Neither the visits to Savinsky were a secret. When Gustaf heard of them, he forbade them. There was an argument with Gustaf, in which Maria said that if so she intended to seek a divorce and return to Russia. She wrote about the matter to Tsar Nicholas, but the Tsar rejected it completely. Neither did the Tsaritsa support her. She travelled with her son Lennart to her father in Paris and stayed there for so long that Gustaf and Prince Eugen went down to speak her to her.²⁰ In the winter Gustaf once more sent her abroad. This time to Capri to accompany Victoria. On Capri, Maria met Munthe, who questioned her about her state of health and reported back to Gustaf and her foster mother Ella. Maria so opened up to Munthe that she later regretted it. According to Maria, there was a plot to use the pretext of some illness to make her spend half the year abroad as Victoria's companion.²¹

The portrayals of Munthe as a psychiatrist are too incomplete to understand his actions. Comparing the treatment of Victoria & Maria with the treatment in 1910 of Crown Princess Margaret's friend Clare Frewen (m. Sheridan), it appears to consist in isolating the patient & through long conversations giving the person a different attitude to life.²² Such is anxiety inducing. To keep them there, he used to refer to their "albumen", probably a now forgotten term for mild mental disorders. There is no record of him testing for it in the urine.

¹⁷ prins Wilhelm 1913; Lewenhaupt 1935.

¹⁸ Wica 1912.

¹⁹ Bernadotte 1966: s. 153.

²⁰ [Om skilsmässan.] Göteborgs Aftonblad 1913-11-18.

²¹ Jangfeldt 2003: ss. 425-435.

²² Sheridan 1928: ss. 80-92.

In 1913, there were no newspaper reports, but she played hockey in her sister-in-law Margaret's women's hockey team. May 24-27, she, Wilhelm and her son Lennart participated in the celebration of the Romanov 300th anniversary. Mary's brother Dimitrios invited Wilhelm to a regimental party. It was dancing, entertainment and so-called block boozing. Wilhelm bravely defended the Swedish colours but passed out in the wee hours.²³ They spent the Summer at Stenhammar. October 15, they were to attend the inauguration of the "Völkerschlacht" monument to the Battle of Leipzig in 1813, and Maria to continue to Capri to keep Victoria company. This was explained by Gustaf with symptoms of her "albumen".²⁴ Maria suspected the worst of Capri and Munthe's intrusive presence. After she and Wilhelm had crossed the German border, she announced that she would leave him. Wilhelm seems to have made no attempt to dissuade her. In Berlin, she disappeared from his life. The incoming Russian minister received the following explanation:

I have just from the lips of [Russian Foreign Minister] Sazonov found out the real reason why [Russian Minister in Stockholm] Savinski was forced to leave Sweden. The Grand Duchess Maria (daughter of Grand Duke Paul of Russia), who had six years earlier been married off to Prince Wilhelm of Sweden (the king's second son), was about to be separated from her consort. The Grand Duchess used a foreign trip and informed her consort from Berlin that she did not wish to live with him, but that she would go to her father in Paris. It was no scandal, not even a romance that caused the Grand Duchess's divorce! The main cause was that the young Russian Grand Duchess, who from her earliest youth had been accustomed to the free and independent life of all members of the Russian Imperial family, found her existence too narrow in the rigid environment of the Swedish royal family. Life seemed to her petty, boring and ultimately unbearable. Her husband did not have the necessary influence over his wife and for some time the young couple had considered the issue of divorce. They had remained "good comrades" and together discussed the future divorce. Nevertheless, when she left her consort, the Grand Duchess was actually very nervous and to some extent deeply saddened. The royal family and court also felt offended in their pride. Savinski had during the 18 months he had been in Stockholm won the young Grand Duchess's complete confidence and become what the old comedies call "confidant" and pressed for divorce long before it took place. He could not therefore stay at the Swedish court.²⁵

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Maria's and three other Romanov exile memoirs have been studied as documents of their time.²⁶ All four had it in common that:

- They did not care what impression they made on the environment.
- They were ignorant of their own country and felt no need to learn.
- They felt worthless because their education was so useless.
- They never compromised that their position was of God.

Maria was apparently a Romanov in exile - a representative of Europe's last absolute kingdom - and she behaved as such. Added to that is what must be attributed to her youth

²³prins Wilhelm 1951: ss. 132-149.

²⁴Widén 1984: del 1, s. 336. [Dagbok, 1913-09-23.]

²⁵Neklodoff 1921: ss. 134-135.

²⁶Kent 2002.

and that through her French upbringing she was partly "Europeanized". For this or some other reason, after the revolution, she managed to create herself a new career. Maybe she had help of her Swedish experience. Maybe not. But the other Romanovs gave up. Maybe Maria had listened to Sophie & Victoria: You can't just float around. You have to prepare yourself for the revolution.