

## **Chapter 82 : Louise von Battenberg (1889-1965).**

After the death of his first wife Margaret May 1, 1920, Gusty November 3, 1923, married Louise Alexandra Marie Irene Mountbatten (1889-1965; b. von Battenberg), great-granddaughter of Queen Victoria. They are said to have been brought together by a mutual acquaintance, Princess Helena Victoria, the granddaughter of Queen Victoria.<sup>1</sup> There are unconfirmed reports that Gusty had originally intended to marry Helena, but that she declined.<sup>2</sup>

In 1917, following the change of name of the Royal House of England from Hanover & Saxony-Coburg-Gotha to Windsor, Louise's father had to relinquish his German prince title and accept the lower rank of marquis. According to Almanach de Gotha, her daughter was not royal enough for a marriage of equals. It was also this that her grandmother countess Julia von Hauke (1825-1895) was not of royal birth - the marriage was morganatic - but seven years after the marriage she became Princess of Battenberg by decree. This attracted the attention of professor of law Carl Axel Reuterskiöld, led to a newspaper debate & that the Foreign Ministry was asked to investigate the issue. The Foreign Ministry made its own judicial review and also requested an opinion from the British Government. The verdict was that Louise did not belong to any German royal house, but through her mother, the English. This was a borderline case, but there were both Swedish and English precedents on counting the women's line - Queen Josephine e.g.<sup>3</sup> Gustaf V had already given the son his permission, so the ruling was welcome. Prince Sigvard quotes a German comment about the ruling in his memoirs: "Keine Hexerie, nur ein bisschen Behendigkeit".

The interest in Louise has been limited. There are two longer biographies (Fjellman 1954 & 1965) & some short biographies (Swahn 1930: ss. 130-136; Knagg 1932: ss. 246-265; Fjellman 1952: ss. 40-47; Samuelsson 1969: ss. 14-18; Fjellman 1973: ss. 40-48; Ohlmarks 1973: ss. 148-149; Elgklou 1978: ss. 178-182; Lagerqvist 1979: ss. 108-124; Palmstierna 1982; Fridh 1995: ss. 194-218; Heymovski 1995: Page 44; Skott 1996: ss. 130-131; Grundberg 1999: ss. 134-137; Ulfsäter-Troell 1996: ss. 365-375,394-431; Sundberg 2004: ss. 256-259; Lindqvist 2006: ss. 500-515; Bloom 2009: ss. 114-115; Rangström 2010: ss. 383-397; Norlin 2015: ss. 188-194). The lack of interest is supposed to be due to her being perceived as a substitute for Margaret.

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Louise Alexandra Marie Irene von Battenberg was born July 13, 1889, at the summer palace of Heiligenberg in the Grand Duchy of Hesse (now German state Baden-Württemberg), a few miles from Lake Constance. Her father was Prince Louis of Battenberg (1854-1921; from 1878 British citizen; from 1917 Marquess of Milford Haven). Her mother was Princess Victoria of Hesse-Darmstadt (1863-1950). Despite her German origin, her father became a British admiral and the family moved between his various postings, but spent the holiday in the wife's family castle, where Louise was born. She had an older sister, Alice, and two brothers. The sisters were taught at home by Mother & a governess and attended Fräulein Texter's "finishing school" in Darmstadt, where they learned French & domestic sciences. Louise was tall, scrawny and nick named "the shrimp".

<sup>1</sup> Palmstierna 1982.

<sup>2</sup> Knagg 1932: s. 250; Bernadotte 1975: s. 51; Fridh 1995: s. 197; Skott 1996: s. 127; Sundberg 2004: s. 253; Rangström 2010: s. 387.

<sup>3</sup> Aftonbladet 1923-07-01 & 1923-08-09; [Hovrättsrådet] Gustav Olin. Kronprinsens förlovning och successionsordningen. Svenska Dagbladet, 1923-07-18 & 1923-08-09.

World War I turned Louise's world upside down. In 1912, her father had been appointed 1<sup>st</sup> Sea Lord, Commander of the British Navy, but his German heritage forced him to resign. Louise was at this time in St. Petersburg with her aunt the Tsaritsa, possibly to be introduced to some suitable cavalier, but mother & daughter had to go home to England over Stockholm. The mother left her jewels, the spare capital, in what she believed was safe storage with her sister.

The fact that Louise was not married despite her 25 years of age seems strange - her sister Alice had married Prince Andrew of Greece and Denmark at the age of 18 - but it is said that Louise was secretly engaged to her brother-in-law Prince Christoffer. Louise's parents refused to provide money, and the couple would have been forced to live in a rented apartment. Meanwhile, King Manuel II of Portugal proposed, but was rejected.<sup>4</sup>

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During World War I, Louise first worked in "Soldiers and Sailors Families Association" and "Smokes for Soldiers and Sailors" with collections. Then in "Voluntary Aid Detachment" (VAD). After a brief nursing school, she was shipped to France, where she served from March 1915 to July 1917 at the Hôpital Anglais in Nevers, near the front. Louise was not a physically strong person, but she obviously did her best. Two colleagues:

Although capable, she had to start from the beginning. First, she would do all the most crude chores, scrub floors, polish lights etc. And then start in the infirmary. There she had to make beds, wash patients and prepare the wounded, who were mutilated, bloody and muddy from the trenches, for the operating table. Then she helped redress simpler cases, assist at the operating table and take night watches.<sup>5</sup>

Princess Louise, Miss Wheatley says, had no strong constitution but she was tough. She worked at least as hard as her comrades. Took care of the wounded, did all the rough work that was needed. There was never any question of her skimping, except once when she had to do so because she had mumps. Miss Wheatley took care of her then.

Miss Wheatley puts to rest the myth, which has sometimes appeared in Swedish newspaper articles, about the Queen hold the hand of the dying. "We never had time for that. But helped the most severely wounded to write home to their families".

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At Christmas one would try to arrange some kind of entertainment for the wounded. Earthley-Wilmot - they always called each other by surname - wrote a play.

Wheatley was *poilu* [foot soldier] in uniform, with the hair stuffed under the uniform cap, and pipe in mouth.

- You would never have gotten Princess Louise to do that. She hated performing. Some small role you could make her do but she was very bad actress.<sup>6</sup>

After recovering from the mumps, Louise served September 1917 to September 1918 at The Princess Club Hospital in Bermondsey, central London, and finally three months at the

<sup>4</sup> Fjellman 1965: ss. 32,71-72. [Louises systerdotter Theodora av Baden & bror Earl Mountbatten.]

<sup>5</sup> Elsa Djurklou. Prinsessan Louise som sjuksköterska. Idun, 1923:43, s. 1015.

<sup>6</sup> Fjellman 1965: ss. 63-64. [Louise arbetskamrat sjuksköterskan Miss Ida Wheatley.]

French Military Hospital for bone tuberculosis at Palavas-les Bains outside Montpelier. After the war, she engaged in social work, as a kindergarten teacher in the labour district of Battersea. For her service during the war, she received four decorations: The British War and Victory Medals, the English Red Cross Medal, and the French Médaille de la reconnaissance.

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The family fortune had been invested in Russian railway and/or mining shares, but was lost in connection with the revolution. The Russian branch of the family was shot. Louise's family moved from Kent House on the Isle of Wight to a villa near Southampton in 1918. In 1921, her father died of a heart attack. The family then moved to Kensington Palace, a kind of noble boarding and retirement home. The next year, the youngest brother married wealth, but seems to have been unwilling to entertain the sister for the rest of her life. Louise had previously said that she would only marry out of love, and never with a king or widower, but now she did just that. One might suspect that the economy played a role. As a spinster, she would have spent the rest of her life as pauvre honteux or worse.

She knew Gusty from before. They had met for a few hours August 11, 1914, when she and her mother were in Stockholm, and then on occasionally in social life. Close acquaintances they were not, but when Gusty began wooing her, the acquaintance agreed that it was for the best. Louise hesitated but was persuaded. They became engaged July 1, 1923, and married November 3, 1923. Until then, she was taught Swedish by Miss Märta Isberg. Isberg let know that Louise was simple, good, natural, wise, intelligent, happy and at the same time serious. Furthermore, she was lively, pleasant, delightful, good at dancing, interested in art, literature & theatre, spoke good French, worse Greek & Russian. But she was not a blue stocking as the press had suggested.<sup>7</sup> There, however, Isberg seems to have been wrong. Louise was deeply affected by the contemporary debate about women's rights and her only public statement relates to that particular subject.

In 1926, Louise accompanied Gusty on an eight-month round-the-world journey. In America, she spoke to the journalists. She evaded the issue of divorce, but answered questions about women's emancipation in general: "I certainly believe that women should be involved in business and other professions if they are competent to do so. The same applies to politics, although I believe that thorough education in this field is necessary. Women are as intelligent as men and, provided they have been properly educated, they can claim as much respect and admiration as men if they are devoting themselves to this. However, I do not believe that women should neglect their homes. The home is, after all, the most important thing, isn't it?"<sup>8</sup>

She was a member of Zonta, 1<sup>st</sup> Honorary Member of the Fredrika Bremer Association, host of the 1953 Professional Women's Congress & keen to point out her professional background as a nurse. Her library shows that she was humanist and followed the daily debate. Unlike Margaret, she also read Swedish literature.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Salt Lake Tribune, 1926-07. I: Ulfsäter-Troell 1996: ss. 408-409.

<sup>8</sup> Salt Lake Tribune, 1926-07. I: Ulfsäter-Troell 1996: ss. 408-409.

<sup>9</sup> Dahlström 2006: ss. 185-223.

Louise's life after the wedding largely coincided with Mary's life. She was introduced to her husbands circle of friends, followed him in the representation & studied Swedish. Over the years, her Swedish became quite idiomatic, although the pronunciation was bad. She spoke quickly, with strong English accent & often you did not understand it. There was the ulterior motive that she would become the new mother of the family, but that was not the case. The details are unclear but the older children seem to have refused.<sup>10</sup> On May 30, 1925, she gave birth to a girl, but the child was stillborn.

Queen Victoria was much abroad and her charity work (working chairman, honorary chairman and patron) was 1928-1930 transferred to Louise: the Sophia Hospital, Crown Princess Lovisa's Children's Hospital, Eugeniahemmet (for the disabled), "The Queen's Aid Committee (formerly the Queen's Central Committee)" & "The Association for the Promotion of zeal in work". During World War II was added "Winter candles" (a collection for candles & carbide lamps), "the Christmas Field Gift" (also known as "The Crown Princess's Gift Committee for the Neutrality Guard") and "Rådan" (a home for Finnish war children). As Queen, she became honorary member of the Dancing Association, the Fredrika Bremer society, the Academy of Letters & New Idun; the patron of the Stockholm handicraft society, the Women's Voluntary Defence Service, Prins Eugéns Waldemarsudde, the Stockholm Lyceum club & the Swedish Red Cross; president of the National Association Against Tuberculosis.

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*A royal person must be healthy or dead.*  
Louise Mountbatten and Others

October 29, 1950, Louise became Queen of Sweden. She was unhappy in the role. There was too much focus on her person. "People look at me like I'm something extraordinary. I don't look any different from what I did yesterday, do I?" This has since been interpreted as evidence of her democratic personality, but rather indicates that as a high-society family girl, always in the background, she was unaccustomed to the situation. She did not lack charisma. There is a story that her royal aura mixed with kindness was so striking that you felt like the insignificant subject you were. One lady-in-waiting commented on this with "None of this is a surprise to me. The Queen is royal right up to her fingertips and at the same time she is natural, unaffected and truly democratic. It is somehow as self-evident for her to put on a hefty work apron as it is to dress in ermine and court gala."<sup>11</sup> Most writings were in the same style - how Louise without batting an eye alternated between tiara & ermine-lined trailer at the formal opening of the Parliament and then "willingly queued in some department store, mixed with commoners and was always plainly dressed".<sup>12</sup>

Louise suffered from stomach problems, atherosclerosis, blood clots & heart fibrillation. In 1949 and 1951 she suffered two heart attacks. On March 7, 1965, she died in the aftermath of an operation. The obituaries were positive: loyal to her friends, liked children, unsentimental, humorous, moody, loyal to her duty. In her circle of acquaintance she was remembered as life mate, housewife, hostess, encyclopedia, work-a-holic & not very easy to get along with.

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<sup>10</sup> Bernadotte 1975: ss. 60-61.

<sup>11</sup> Fjellman 1952: s. 43.

<sup>12</sup> Ohlmarks 1973: s. 148.