

Chapter 43 : Ebba Munck of Fulkila (1858-1946).

Oscar had previously been in love with his mother's maid of honour, Ebba Henrietta De Geer af Finspång (1853-1926; employed 1878-1880; 1880 m. Prinzsköld) but she chose another.¹ According to one version the marriage was arranged, but that seems unlikely. Otto Prinzsköld was Queen Sophie's chamberlain and they knew each other. Another version is that they were separated through Oscar being sent on an expedition to the Mediterranean. No other previous relationship is known.

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Oscar's meeting with Ebba Munck is widely publicized, but the depictions are largely based on second-hand information and speculation. I start from the "biographies" (Mannström 1922; Knagg 1932: ss. 283-295; Jansson 1948: ss. 118-140; von Steyern 1962: Part 1, ss. 89-100; Bengtson & Cedergren red. 1953: ss. 66-73; Ohlmarks 1979: ss. 112-113) and supplement them with additional information. Oscar was interviewed much later about what was true, untrue & exaggerated which has been taken note of. Ebba kept quiet for the rest of her life. There is a chapter about the wedding in Oscar II's memoirs, but this has been censored by King Gustaf VI, on the grounds that it was a family matter. The Bernadotte Archives also houses Oscar & Ebba's correspondence. Nor is this public.

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Ebba Henrietta Munck af Fulkila (1858-1946) was born on October 24, 1858, as daughter of the colonel, later postmaster of Jönköping, Carl Munck of Fulkila (1808-1882) and his wife, baroness Henrietta Cederström (1819-1912). An acquaintance: "Miss Ebba was simply adorable, with her happy, friendly way. She danced a lot and no serious inclination was then noticed. Most often she was extremely excited and almost frisky. With her, all etiquette was went out of the window."²

In 1882, Ebba became Victoria's maid of honour. Her predecessor Anna Lagerberg had been dismissed for insubordination but it actually got worse with Ebba. In February 1884, she got engaged after for a long time being courted by Gustaf's adjutant Baron Woldemar von Rosen (1854-1928). "Ebba was not a good choice, her mother was a widow and lived in small circumstances. The hubby's father opposed it."³ In early 1885, when the announcement was to take place, the father sent an ultimatum to the son, urging him in strong language to break off the engagement "or put him in an early grave". Woldemar was completely paralysed and did not even reply to letters. Ebba was in Norway and asked her brother Bror, a junior lieutenant in Småland Hussar Regiment, to investigate what was going on. On February 5 or 6, the brother visited Woldemar's residence and concluded that it was over. The breach of promise was a public scandal. Woldemar was dismissed with immediate effect from his court position and received a year's leave from his regiment to travel abroad until it calmed down. Ebba also travelled abroad. She and Victoria's Norwegian lady-in-waiting Alette Wedel Jarlsberg (1853-1929) spent a few months in England. There are many more versions. Most of them seem to be based on a mix-up with Oscar's previous love object Ebba de Geer:

¹ Hadenius & Nevéus 1960: s. 217. [Källa: Otto Prinzsköld.]

² N H-th. "Prins Oscar då – prins Lennart nu." Husmodern 1931:8, ss. 18-20,52.

³ von Steyern 1962: del 1, s. 89.

According to Fritz von Dardel, von Rosen had broken off with mistress A to become engaged to Ebba. After that he had acquired a new mistress B who, when the marriage between him & Ebba was announced threatened to make a scandal. Faced by this threat von Rosen had broken off the engagement with Ebba, but blamed his father.⁴ The biographer Alfred Jansson had an alternative explanation: "She was very attached to the handsome adjutant, who played the field, however. When she eventually found out that he had a mistress on the side, she demand him to end the relationship, and when he refused she broke off."⁵ Anders Lundebeck added to the story, that von Rosen then escaped abroad with his lady - a popular actress - and that after her return from Amsterdam Ebba was expelled from court and forbidden to correspond with Oscar.⁶ Anne-Marie Riiber had it to that Oscar already in 1882 or 1883 had fallen in love with Ebba and that his father sent him on the round-the-world trip to forget her. In the meantime, Victoria arranged the engagement with Woldemar.⁷ Heribert Jansson augmented Riiber's version with Woldemar having had several mistresses during this forced engagement.⁸ Woldemar himself claimed that he broke off the engagement in order not to stand in the way of Prince Oscar.⁹ Lars Elgklou contributed with the information that after Oscar meeting Ebba in Amsterdam Victoria fired her. This all the more because Ebba was secretly (?) engaged to von Rosen. And that Oscar got various missions to forget her.¹⁰ Agneta Ulfsäter-Troell continued on Riiber's track: that Oscar's circumnavigation of the world with Vanadis 1883/85 was a way to separate the two.¹¹ The latest version of Herman Lindqvist is that Oscar 1882 or 1883 wanted to marry her. Ebba was then dismissed from her position, Oscar was sent on the long journey with Vanadis, and Rosen was forced to become engaged to her. The protests of von Rosen's mistress led to the engagement being terminated and Ebba's reappointment at the court. When Oscar returned from the trip, he still wanted to marry her. Ebba was dismissed a second time, but Queen Sophia took a written promise from King Oscar II to allow the marriage, which took place on January 28, 1884.¹² I have chosen von Steyern's version because it is based on sources and the dates match.

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September/October 1885, Oscar was in Amsterdam accompanied by his adjutant captain Nils Gustaf Sundström for a massage treatment of Dr. J G Mezger against his heart problems. After a week, Gustaf & Victoria arrived with their entourage. In October/November, Gustaf returned to Stockholm. There remained Victoria, the court mistress Ebba Ankarcrona and the maid of honour Ebba Munck. They all lived in the same hotel. Victoria stayed mostly in her room and took her meals there. The others ate in the dining room. On Sundays, they visited the Norwegian seaman's church and listened to Pastor Knutsen's sermons. Oscar entrusted Ebba with his religious ruminations. Sundström & Ankarcrona were accused of closing their eyes to Oscar & Ebba's feelings for each other, but claimed that nothing actually happened. Victoria, however, had seen something inappropriate in their behaviour - it seems they were

⁴ von Dardel 1911: del 3, ss. 258-259. [1885-02-19.]

⁵ Jansson 1948: s. 122.

⁶ Lundebeck 1955: ss. 140-141.

⁷ Riiber 1959: s. 215.

⁸ Jansson 1963: s. 68.

⁹ Fleetwood 1968: s. 768.

¹⁰ Elgklou 1978: ss. 138-139.

¹¹ Ulfsäter-Troell 1996: s. 265.

¹² Lindqvist 2006: s. 452.

acting too familiarly - and had asked Ankarcrona to express her discontent. Ankarcrona spoke to Ebba and asked her to be a little more careful. This she seems to have mentioned to Sundström who passed it on to Oscar. Oscar interpreted this as Victoria personally rebuking Ebba for something that was his fault and sought out Ankarcrona for an explanation. She gave him the same advice as Ebba to be a little more careful. Oscar took offence. The remainder of the stay, he avoided the company. Apparently Victoria had hit a sore spot.

After their return they hardly saw each other - Oscar was in Karlskrona - but the emotions apparently continued. They met again during a train trip to Gothenburg September 1886 where they allegedly “behaved foolishly”. Oscar spoke to his father, who was positive to the connection, but asked him to wait until he was sure of his feelings. After six months, Oscar was confident enough to confide in Queen Sophia's lady-in-waiting Märta Eketrä and she to his mother the Queen. April 5, 1887 - the day his mother was to undergo a dangerous cervical surgery - Oscar also spoke to her. Afterwards, the story was told as she from the operating table promising him her support provided she survived. The fact that his father had allowed himself to be persuaded in connection with the operation, Oscar however dismissed as a fabrication.¹³ In the autumn of 1887, the adjutant handed Ebba a proposal which she enthusiastically accepted. At the same time, she resigned her position. Only now did Victoria realize what was going on. At first, however, she took matters calmly because, after a conversation with Oscar II, she assumed that he would not give his permission. Meanwhile, Ebba worked at “the Queen's Hospital” (possibly Queen Louise's Children's Hospital) “where she conquered all the nurses' hearts”.¹⁴

In December, the engagement became a matter of state. During the Christmas holidays Oscar II vacillated. Sometimes for, sometimes against, as he had the consequences pointed out to him: Oscar was 4th in line of succession, no equivalent tomorganatic marriage, and what did it mean in practical terms that Oscar lost his position as Prince? Would he become destitute, forced into exile, or what? The legislation was ill-adapted to the situation. Oscar was supported by his mother and Gustaf, while Victoria was adamantly opposed. She received letters from her mother, the Grand Duchess, who was enraged that a simple maid of honour could behave in this way. And it was all her daughter's fault! The rest of the court was divided. Those who supported that love conquers all and those who were against. The brothers Carl and Eugene were in favour because they assumed they could end up in the same situation. Their father ended up with the opinion that “a stitch in time saves nine” and forced them to sign separate assurances that they would either marry a royal or abstain.

When it started Ebba was completely unknown outside a narrow circle. She was considered unusually beautiful and pleasant, albeit too scriptural. Victoria's circle, however, felt that she lacked both appearance, head and talent, and that Oscar only had approached her because of “chivalrous compassion”. All manner of people believed to have any influence over the couple were called in to avert the marriage. Oscar was particularly sensitive to allegedly harming the royal house. In a meeting with Prime Minister Themptander just before Christmas 1887, he said he would rather remain unmarried. However, Themptander reassured him that this was not the case. Ebba was impossible to argue with. She answered all objections with arguments from the Bible and that what God united man was not allowed to dissolve. “She only fulfilled the will of the Lord, and was a tool in his hands.” It was unusually high-strung even to be Ebba. Her friends assumed that it was her defence against the “thousand pinpricks” she was subjected to.

¹³ Jansson 1948: s. 124.

¹⁴ De Geer 1929: s. 244.

On January 10 Oscar danced the waltz with her at a ball at the Norwegian Prime Minister in Stockholm, on January 11 the papers wrote about it, on January 21 they showed up together at Oscar II's birthday ball and on January 29 they got engaged. The birthday ball was crowded with the curious, who wanted to see if her stomach had grown. Ebba had laid off her bangs and combed herself flat, which made her close to unrecognizable. The elders of the court circles spoke of her as "the first nail in the royal coffin". The younger were more cynical: "The King cries, the Queen prays, the Crown Princess swears and Miss Munck says: Be the will of God - for she is spiritual, and aims to prove it with her hair style."¹⁵ It seems to have been the last time that either of them danced. In the future they refused for religious reasons.

The engagement was described as follows: "...Miss Munck looked cute and was simply dressed. The king and the queen could not suppress their emotions; but looked all weepy. Once they had decided on or agreed to this, they should have kept a straight face, the more so since they did so without considering the consequences. I hope that everything will run smoothly and the misgivings be misplaced."¹⁶ Ebba was insulted to the last: "... at the court they are strange; Imagine that for this announcement Ebba and her mother had to arrive in a small rental carriage with an usher on the driver's seat, enter the salon where the invited were gathered, wait until she was permitted to approach the royal chamber, where the rings would be exchanged; The mother had to wait outside with the other guests in the salon until this was done, then Ebba came out arm in arm with her prince. The King gave a small speech, those present expressed their congratulations, then Ebba returned home in her rental carriage and had dinner with her mother and the royals dined for themselves."¹⁷

The following day, the couple went to England to get married. Ebba arrived at the Central Station five minutes before the train's departure so there would be no demonstrations. The ceremony was to take place in the beach resort of Bournemouth on March 15 at the home of one of Queen Sophie's acquaintances and be performed by Sophie's favourite priest Gustaf Beskow. Sophie and Oscar's two brothers Carl and Eugene attended. Gustaf & Victoria were in Berlin for the funeral of Emperor William. Ebba's mother considered herself too old for the journey, but her son attended and handed over the bride. As foreigners, they first underwent a civil marriage and then a church ditto. Oscar was very much taken by his experiences, but since the situation was self-inflicted, even his mother did not have any compassion. The son would take his adversity as a man!¹⁸ Gustaf's support has been interpreted as that he was positive about the marriage, but he denied that. Rather he, earlier than Victoria, complied with the inevitable. Did the father say "A", everyone else would have to say "B". Victoria, however, won a great deal of sympathy for her opposition to the *mésalliance*. She blamed Oscar II for his inaction. She later refused to attend the wedding of Ebba's children Carl, Sophia, Elsa & Folke. Gustaf was present though.

There being was no law of morganatic marriage, the Themptander government improvised a Swedish equivalent. The thinking was not exactly crystal clear.¹⁹ Oscar lost his hereditary title of prince of Sweden-Norway and instead received a personal prince title. This meant that: (1) He was excluded from the succession. (2) He had previously been a citizen of the

¹⁵ Fleetwood 1968: s. 768.

¹⁶ Bengtson & Cedergren red. 1953: ss. 71-72, källa: statsminister Themptander.

¹⁷ von Steyern 1962: del 1, s. 96, källa: Louise af Ugglas.

¹⁸ drottning Sophia 1888.

¹⁹ Kjellén, Rudolph. Prins eller enskild man? Några ord i en statsrättslig fråga. Ny svensk tidskrift, 1890:1, ss. 46-59; Hadenius & Nevéus 1960: ss. 207-225.

Union. Now he must choose his country and chose Sweden. (3) He lost the honours and privileges associated with an hereditary prince - Duke of Gotland, the Seraphim Order, his appanage and adjutant - but was allowed to keep his foreign Orders. (4) He regained his civil rights, which meant that he was allowed to vote and make a living from an office. Before, he had not received any pay. Losing his adjutant meant that Oscar had to pay himself when he bought something. Before, the adjutant had been in charge of the money. It was a bit embarrassing at the beginning when he forgot his wallet at home and had to borrow from the surroundings or make the purchase on credit.

The personal nature of the prince title meant that Ebba & the children went without. The children would not even become nobles. It could have been solved by ennobling Oscar to Count but the regulations made it impossible: If a commoner is ennobled it is the person himself who holds the dignity (=the title is personal). However, if a member of a noble family is elevated to a higher dignity (from noble to baron or from baron to count) a new line is created with a corresponding hereditary title. When Queen Sophie's half-brother Adolph became Grand Duke of Luxembourg, he 1892 awarded Oscar the noble title Count Bernadotte af Wisborg, which under Luxembourg law both included Ebba and was hereditary. As a close relative, Ebba should have addressed Victoria by first name, "put away the titles", but Victoria insisted on "Your Highness" because Ebba was not a real princess. She seems to have reasoned that Oscar's personal prince title corresponded to something like an honorary doctorate. Difficult, then, to put any value on Ebba's putative princess title.

Oscar was not so interested in how his family was to be addressed, but used to present his daughters as Miss this and that, not the Countess.

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Ebba followed Oscar on his inspection and mission trips. In 1894 and onwards she sat on the board of the Friends of the Same Mission. From 1898 to 1945, she served on the board of the organization Female Mission Workers (KMA), was the chairman of KMA's youth activities, the so-called "Dawnbreakers", and from 1900 the chairman of the "Book Mission for Sailors". 1921-1945, she led a sewing circle for Financial Support to the Swedish Soldier Association's Stockholm Division. Ebba was also a member of the women's committee of the YMCA and was chairman of the YMCA from 1897 to 1912. Over the years, she became more and more non-conformist and even sat on the board of the Salvation Army.

In the summer of 1904 the whole family was in Swanage outside Bournemouth and met Lord Radstock who led the children's mission there. Radstock is usually attributed an indirect influence on Ebba via Queen Sophie & Oscar. He does not appear to have made any impression on the children.

Ebba died on October 16, 1946. The following year, her eldest son Carl was asked to write something about her for the collection *My Mother*. Carl remembered that she raised the siblings to diligence, truth, obedience, Godliness and politeness. That said, Ebba was a type of woman close to extinction. About the women's movement of the 40s she thought like this: "I don't understand those crazies. They do everything to copy men. They want to go in pants, cut their hair short, smoke and drink, and now they want to decide over the men too. I have always stuck to home and let my husband decide, and therefore we have also been happy for 50 years."²⁰

²⁰ Oljelund red. 1947: ss. 34-38.