

History is Gay Podcast
Episode 26: A Royal Troublemaker in King Kristina of Sweden

Leigh: Hello and welcome to History is Gay, a podcast that examines the underappreciated and overlooked queer ladies, gents and gentle-enbies that have always been there in the unexplored corners of history, because history has never been as straight as you think.

[intro music]

Leigh: Hello folks, welcome back. I'm Leigh, and I have a very special co-host today.

V: Hello! I'm V.

Leigh: Hi V!

V: Just the letter, literally the just letter, like Cher.

Leigh: Yeah, just non-binary Cher.

V: Non-binary Cher. That's me.

Leigh: Yes. V is a wonderful friend who you already know through their amazing artwork. They have created some beautiful artwork for us. All of our geographic queers gear, they are responsible for it, and it is now your duty, now that they are on this show, to convince them to do what I've been urging them to do for months and months and months, which is making me a quagmire queer shirt because-

V: You can't make me do it!

Leigh: Please? I know that it's hard to draw a swamp, but I believe in you.

V: Okay. No, but okay, so the thing is, yes it's hard to draw a swamp. It's harder to pick what kind of swamp to draw though. Like when you think beach, beach is easy. It looks like a beach. There's sand and there's waves. You know what a beach looks like. Underwater? Yeah. Okay, there's water. There's seaweed. And there's also sand, lots of sand in these cases. With a

swamp? There are so many different kinds. You don't understand. *I studied ecology.* [yells] There are so many different kinds of swamp!

Leigh: We're gonna put up a poll on the Twitter, and the History is Gay listeners will vote on what kind of marshy marshy quagmire swampy, swampy, fun time V will have to draw. Because we love them.

V: Yeah, yes. Sorry you cut out there for a second, but I'm assuming you said that we love the listeners, which is true.

Leigh: I said we love you.

V: Oh, you love me! Oh, that's nice. Aw, well, I love the listeners.

Leigh: Yes, you do love the listeners. I mean, I also love the listeners. Always, always be happy about the listeners.

Leigh: So anyway, yes, welcome to V. This is their first time actually on the podcast and they're going to be our guest host today for our awesome topic. Today we are talking about somebody that we've been wanting to get into for quite some time. Queen, or King, depending on how you want to look at it, Kristina of Sweden, who is one of the best known queer "women", we'll talk about that soon, of the early modern period, who had an intimate affair with their lady in waiting, abdicated the throne to adventure around Europe in men's clothing and generally fuck shit up from the Gothic homeland of Sweden all the way to papal Rome, like you do.

V: We love them very much.

Leigh: We really do love them very much. We're very, very excited. Also, I want to thank everyone who is listening for their patience in getting this episode, this month turned out to be a dumpster fire in many different ways. One of which being I just wanted to have a little bit of a somber moment here for a minute, just because I have a platform and I'm going to abuse it. Um, so, one of the reasons why this podcast is a week late, is I was... I am an alumni of Saugus High School in California, which saw a shooting last week, I guess if you're listening to this it'll be the week before, and that was really shocking and was really difficult to kind of wrap my head around. So I just want to say to anybody and everybody who's been through gun violence

or has dealt with something like this before, that I love you and that community is behind you. And I never thought I would be so um, feel so connected to my hometown again, which, Santa Clarita is an interesting place in and of itself. But yeah, I just uh, want everybody to stay safe and to talk to their politicians and get guns under control, and make sure this stuff never happens, again, because we're the only country in the frickin world where this is happening again and again and again and again and again and again-

V: and again!

Leigh: -at this rate. Um, yeah, I just- I felt like if I've got a platform to talk to people, I at least felt like I needed to mention that. It hit home really closely and I have a couple of friends who were teachers of mine when I went and are still teachers. They had some just terrifying experiences. And it's, yeah, I don't know. I just I don't really know where I want to go with that, but I just wanted to acknowledge that, and, uh, fuck the NRA, and... yeah.

Leigh: Anyway, um, with that, let's get back to fun stuff. Um, speaking of content warning kind of stuff, content warning for this episode, mostly pretty tame but we did want to have a quick discussion about pronouns. As you noticed, we used they and them for Kristina, again with kind of what we did with Claude Cahun and the Public Universal Friend. There are elements of Kristina's story that indicate that they may not have been fully comfortable with their assignment as female at birth. So we decided as a team to use they/them pronouns when we specifically are referring to Kristina, and anytime that Kristina is being referred to by someone else's voice, either their own, or somebody else from a primary source or another text that we're reading, we'll be using the she/her pronouns, because we want to preserve the history of that, and the way that Kristina was perceived at the time. This is not an attempt to misgender them at all. We have no idea what this person really thought of themselves, and there's been a lot of debate among historians for years and years and years about how to classify Kristina. That's our decision tonight.

V: We do what we can with context.

Leigh: So yeah, little aside there, that's our thing, but just you know, don't be surprised if you hear different pronouns throughout. And then lastly, because I've talked so much, the format for this episode, obviously, it's going to be people focused. We'll start off with a not-so-brief bio because Kristina did a whole bunch of stuff, and then we'll go into Why Do We Think They're Gay, and as usual, we'll end the podcast with How Gay Were They; our personal ranking about how likely it is that they weren't straight. And yeah, that's what I've got. V, do you have any cool announcements that you want to talk about before we dive right in?

V: Um, no. Not that I can think of off the top of my head.

Leigh: Okay cool. Yeah. Not a lot going on. We have merch still. Yay, stickers are up there.

V: Put my art on your bodies!

Leigh: Yeah! Put V's art on your body or your water bottle or your laptop. Lots of different options. All right. So that is our intro. Fun stuff. And now I'm going to continue talking. I'm not used to doing this much talking in a row. Whoo! So we're gonna start off, we're gonna dive right in. Before we talk about Kristina herself, we're gonna talk about a little bit of historical context. We're not going to go super into detail because we've already done a bunch of stuff on medieval Europe. And yeah, there you go.

Leigh: So generally we're dealing with 17th century Sweden here, which at the time was in the midst of what we call the 30 Years War, which was a big fuck-off war that raged across Europe from 1618 to 1648. Hey, look at that. It's 30 years. Wow. And it mainly pitted Protestants against Catholics. One of the most prominent empires in Europe at this time was the Habsburg Empire of Spain, which had dominated Europe for more than 100 years. But at the time that we enter Kristina's life, Spain had sort of begun a long decline.

V: RIP

Leigh: Sweden's greatest enemy at this time was the Austrian Habsburg Empire, which was a Catholic power that stretched basically from Poland to areas of Czech lands and from Bavaria to Croatia. We didn't have, yet, a

unified Italy, but there were a whole bunch of different like magnificent Italian cities and papal Rome, and they were experiencing their own artistic renaissances, so like France and Italy were the place to be if you wanted to like consume art and be cool and hoity toity. Sweden itself was relatively underdeveloped during the 17th century, despite it having a vast military prowess. It was still operating as basically a medieval land. So you know, we've kind of reached like a Renaissance in a lot of other places. But in Sweden, it's like still mostly rural, they're relying on foreigners for capital, it's cold, and everybody's just wearing furs and Kristina herself would attempt, during their reign, to kind of drag Sweden into maternity and emulate the great artistic prowess they admired throughout England and France, which we'll talk about a little bit more. So it's your turn to talk.

V: It is! It's my turn to talk, finally, I'm so excited. Oh my god. Okay. Yeah. So this was also during a period where scientific thought had sort of begun to take a greater hold across Europe, with "natural philosophers" striving to prove explanations of the natural world instead of just like theological ones, which was pretty rad and in terms-

Leigh: [in a weird voice] yay science!

V: Yeah, love me some science. [another weird voice] As someone who studied ecology.

Leigh: [laughs]

V: I mean, mostly it was botany. But you know, I worked in a lab for ecology- anyway, we're talking about Sweden in the 17th century.

Leigh: [same weird voice] Plants!

V: [laughs] Plants! In terms of attitudes towards queerness. Let's talk about the gay people. Um- [laughs]

Leigh: [laughs]

V: Sweden was a pretty religiously Lutheran in the 17th century and some scholars suggest that the lack of laws against homosexuality are specifically

so that people wouldn't get any ideas. Cuz you can't do the thing if you don't know it exists, right?

Leigh: [a different weird voice] What is the gay? What is, the sex?

V: Who know? Who know, what a gay?

Leigh: What is a gay?

V: What is a gay? [reporting voice] That is the question we are trying to answer here.

Leigh: [laughs] Tune in next week.

V: But yeah, there were no official bans on any like same sex sexual acts, although about 20 men were still tried in court for sodomy in the 17th and 18th centuries-

Leigh: Booo!

V: and surprisingly, the same cannot be said for women who obviously have no sexuality.

Leigh: Cue eye roll. Yeah, we've certainly talked about that before on this podcast.

V: Oh boy have we.

[laughing]

Leigh: Woah! You can't do a sexual sin if you don't have sexuality, am I right?

V: Exactly.

Leigh: This is at the point where I would love to have a patriarchy jingle but Buffering the Vampire Slayer kind of has that cornered. [laughs] It's okay, we'll stick with our colonialism jingle. So yeah, so let's dive a little bit into the very, very long bio that we have for Kristina because they did a whole

bunch of shit. So we'll start with their early life. Kristina was born on December 18, 1626 at *Tre Kronor* castle in Stockholm, Sweden, to King Gustav II Adolf and Maria Eleonora of Brandenburg. And Maria Eleonora was not Swedish by blood so there was like a- there was a bunch of stuff when they got married, and she was not happy with Sweden, and people were like, 'ah, why is this German lady hanging out here?' We don't have time to go into all of that. But if you read some books on Kristina, you'll read a whole bunch of fascinating stuff about that.

Leigh: By the time Kristina was born, their parents were desperate for an heir and were hoping for a son after several failed births. In Kristina's own autobiography, they described their birth like this:

"I was born with a caul and my face was pallid, my body was entirely covered with hair and I had a deep, loud voice. This led the midwives attending me to take me for a boy. For a time the King was deceived."

Leigh: So when they were first born, the midwives you know- like this baby coming out, covered in a caul, which is kinda like a sack basically. They announced to the king that the Queen had just given birth to a boy and everybody was really excited. Yay, we finally have an heir! When the mistake was discovered their aunt Catherine informed King Gustav of the mistake by basically walking up to him wordlessly with the naked baby Kristina in her arms, being like 'uh! Sorry!' And Gustav, according to legend and according to Kristina's own words, said,

"Let us thank God, this girl will be worth as much to me as a boy. I am content, she will be clever, for she has deceived us all."

Leigh: Unfortunately, mama was less cool with the mistake. And it was determined that the truth should actually be kept for her for several days after the birth. Maria Eleonora was not the most stable of people, which we'll talk about a little bit later. When she learned that Kristina was born a girl, she reportedly tried to attack Kristina. And, you know, after four pregnancies and the deaths of three infants, she was pretty understandably *inconsolable* to find that she hadn't born a son.

Leigh: Before Gustav left to fight in the 30 Years War, he secured Kristina's inheritance to the throne, basically told everybody 'Hey, we're probably not

gonna have a son. Uh, so Kristina's gonna be the heir, don't fight me on this,' and gave the orders that Kristina should be educated as a prince, should he not return from the war. He said that if he died, Kristina should actually be cared for by Catherine of Sweden, his half sister. Aunt Catherine that we had talked about before. And then unfortunately, as if he predicted it, at less than six years old, Kristina's father died, oh so- Kristina was less than six years old, daddy was a bit older. Her father died in the Battle of Lützen on November 6, 1632, leaving Kristina the Queen heir. The death of Gustav sent shockwaves through Europe as he had been an important leader among the Protestants against the Catholics.

V: Yeah. After that, upon the death of Gustav, Maria Eleonora's behavior got a little more erratic. She insisted that her husband's body not be buried until she could be buried with him. Not only that but-

Leigh: Like you do.

V: Like you do. You know, normal. Not only that but that the coffin remain open in a room lit by candlelight and the windows blocked with black velvet, which if that weren't bad enough, she visited frequently and regularly *patted*, for 19 months. She was allowed to do that for 19 months. Which is- I'm gonna go with unhygienic. That's the word I'm gonna go with for that.

Leigh: Just a good old fashioned corpse petting.

V: You know, love to pet a corpse.

Leigh: Love it. Love it. Love to pet a corpse. [laughs]

V: [laughs] Oh, god. Yeah. Luckily, though, before he died, Gustav had warned that Maria Eleanora was not to be allowed any influence over Kristina. Which was probably the right decision given corpse time.

Leigh: Yeah, so the senators that were entreated with Kristina's care were kind of divided over what to do like, 'Oh, do we? Do we let Kristina stay with their mom, or do we send them away? I'm not really sure.'

V: 'There's not a clear answer here!'

Leigh: 'There's not a clear answer to this!' But there became a clear answer when she eventually tried to gain power through her child, who she had up until this point mostly ignored. She forced Kristina to live alongside her during coffin time with daddy, and dismissed Catherine from the castle. Aunt Catherine, who had looked after Kristina for the past two years. She became obsessive and smothering and overwhelming. And although Kristina claimed to have loved their mother "*tenderly enough*," their respect for Maria began to fade when she "*seized me, in spite of my tutors, and tried to lock me up with her in her apartment.*" Super fun times, being locked in an apartment with your mom who has just come back from petting a corpse? It's a great time. Fantastic.

Leigh: Uh, Chancellor Axel Oxenstierna, who I'm gonna call Axel Oxen-

V: We're gonna call Axel-oxy.

Leigh: Oxy-boy!

V: Axel-axel-oxen-free!

[laughter]

Leigh: Axel Oxen, uh, eventually forced Maria into exile at *Gripsholm* Castle.

V: It was a castle about 50 miles away from Stockholm. And Oxy-boy was Gustav's right hand man, he was his Chancellor and was basically like, 'hey, you should take care of my kiddo instead of my crazy wife. Please, thank you.'

Leigh: Yeah. Which you know, was going pretty great. Like after Maria was exiled and Catherine was, you know, back in the saddle hanging out with Kristina, and then aunt Catherine died, in 1638, and the Royal Regency council, led by Axel Oxy, actually decided that instead of having like, one head lady and waiting and one governess, that they would have two have each. Specifically so that Kristina wouldn't play favorites later on in life. So they basically gave the 12 year old four foster mothers instead of just one.

V: It's a good way to have you know, a balanced perspective on the world.

Leigh: Yeah, you know, who doesn't want four moms?

V: [laughs]

Leigh: Oh, imagine all the photos though.

V: Oh, yes, all of the photos in 17th century Sweden.

Leigh: I'm talkin' bout four moms in general. Come on.

[laughter]

Leigh: So in terms of education, as we mentioned before, Gustav had left instructions that his daughter was to receive, "*the education of a prince,*" and to take plenty of exercise, which was not commonly recommended or emphasized for a girl during this time period. Kristina was taught a bunch of things. They were fluent in so many languages. They were fluent in French, German, Italian, Dutch, Latin and Greek, and had some knowledge of Hebrew and Arabic as well. Later on in life French would be like their favorite language ever. And in general, they were far more interested in like, "masculine activities" than feminine, and excelled at hunting, fencing and horse riding. Kristina was also obsessed with the ancient world and loved reading classical Roman and Greek texts and history, and often like imagined themselves as like a commander going into battle.

V: God, what a nerd.

Leigh: What a nerd! They were extremely talented and several people claimed that they were a political genius, even as a child, and their aesthetic taste was impeccable. They did a lot of shenanigans as soon as they realized like, 'Oh shit, I'm in charge.' They had a ravenous desire for knowledge and invited talented scholars to their court throughout their entire life, including Rene Descartes, who would later die there. More on that later, we've got a whole story on that. And so Chancellor Oxenstierna, Axel oxy-boy, was instrumental in Kristina's education, especially in regards to teaching them politics and statecraft. Not stagecraft, statecraft. In Kristina's own words about their education, they said:

"Between what I was taught and what I wanted to learn myself, I was able to learn everything that a prince should know and everything a girl can learn in all modesty. I loved my books with a passion, but I loved hunting and horse racing and games just as much. The people who had to look after me were at their wit's end because I absolutely wore them out, and when my women wanted to slow me down, I just made fun of them. Every hour of my days was occupied with affairs of state or study or exercise."

V: So they were pretty cool even from a very early age. And in 1644, Kristina came of age at 18 and took some power from Axel Oxy, although the coordination was delayed because they were still in continued war with Denmark. But then in 1645, there was a peace Congress to negotiate the end of the 30 Years War that you know, we mentioned earlier. And Kristina sent their own delegate, Johan Salvius, to oppose Axel Oxy's son, also named Johan.

Leigh: Everyone is named Johan!

V: Everyone is named Johan! Everyone. Oh my god. So Johan went to go fight with Johan, who was sent to argue to continue the war. They wanted- they being Kristina- wanted peace at any cost, Axel Oxy wanted a good deal for Sweden at the end of the war, but Kristina got their way, which was pretty rad.

Leigh: Yeah. And at this point, the main goal of Kristina, like with wanting peace, was at this point when they were when they were quite young, it was 'I want to do exactly the opposite of what Axel Oxy is doing, because I'm resenting him because he has so much power and he's been ruling my life. It's now time for me to do stuff.'

V: [valley girl voice] "Oh my God. He's ruining my life."

Leigh: Yeah, there were so many times where they were like, 'I'm gonna do this thing because the opposite of what you want to do, ayyy!' Did a lot of subterfuge as like a 15 year old.

V: You know, like any good 15 year old does, yeah.

Leigh: So, after they came of age, many people close to Kristina started to urge them to marry. But by the time they were 20 they still had not shown *aaannnyyyy* inclination towards marriage to anybody, like- like anybody. Although, they did announce that they had decided *not* to marry Karl Gustav, their first cousin, as advisors had hoped, and instead named him as heir to the Swedish throne. People weren't initially happy about it, but after much deliberation, in March of 1649, the *Riksdag*- I can't pronounce this.

V: Yeah, *Riksdag*, which is basically like the governing body-

Leigh: What they said.

[laughter]

Leigh: They finally agree to accept Karl as Kristina's formal successor, viewing it as a simple formality, and was absolutely sure that Kristina would eventually marry him. He would have no hereditary rights and would be replaceable if need be. Kristina, on the other hand, viewed this as a major victory, they could rule, remain on the throne as long as they lived, and didn't have to worry about marrying or bearing children. So the coronation took place on October 22, 1650. It was a huge and absolutely spectacular celebration as Kristina tends to throw, as we will see, that cost Sweden a lot of money. We're talking like there were even gladiatorial animal combats, bears and lions and calf and a buffalo.

V: They couldn't be content with their regular lions, tigers and bears. They had to go the extra step.

Leigh: No, like this coronation ceremony basically bankrupts Sweden. Kristina plays hard and fast money.

V: [groaning in agreement and sympathy]

Leigh: They don't really think about- Kristina is literally the person that needs the conversation 'Money doesn't grow on trees, honey.'

Leigh: But even though Karl Gustav was coordinated, everybody was still convinced that Kristina was gonna stay on the throne, which is partially why

everybody was super shocked when rumors started to fly that they didn't intend to stay on the throne for very long.

Leigh: So basically what happened was Kristina originally you know, said 'hey, I want to name Karl as my successor,' and it would be you know, kind of a formality and he wouldn't have any hereditary rights, so if he had died, then it would go to somebody else. But Kristina then later decided, and this is when they were really thinking about abdication, said 'hey, I have a demand, Karl Gustav must be made hereditary prince as well,' to which everyone was like, 'Oh, geez- uh, that's a lot-

V: 'oh no they're serious'

Leigh: 'No, no, that's too much.' Um, cuz if they die, then it's gonna end the *Vasa* dynasty that Kristina's father was part of, and that Kristina was part of, it would just be gone, dead. So they did not like that.

V: But they did it anyway.

Leigh: Yeah, after losing a lot of popularity with the populace for A, spending a whole lot of money, most notably by increasing the nobility from 300 houses to 600 houses or so over the course of 10 years-

V: which to be fair was also partly Axel Oxys fault. He also participated in that and it was mostly for like, I think people who were involved in the war? Right? As like rewards?

Leigh: Yeah, it's- look, so much of like-

V: I didn't say they were good with money, I didn't say they were good decisions. I said they were... understandable decisions.

Leigh: Yeah. So there was that, and there was also the execution of someone named Arnold Johann again. So many Johanns.

V: oh, god! So many!

Leigh: So many Johanns, and his son, in 1651. Plus with Kristina's increasing disillusionment with Lutheranism, and their intention to convert to

Catholicism, and this was like a secret thing. And then whispers started flying. They were interested in it. They were writing back and forth to Catholic authorities. They were like sneaking in Jesuits to Stockholm, and be like, 'no, they're- they're foreign merchants. Yeah, it's totally fine.' Practicing Catholicism in Sweden was illegal and a super no-no. And so everybody, you know, once they started to be like, 'Hey, wait a minute, is Kristina thinking about switching to Catholicism,' that was a bad thing, because the religion of the ruler dictates the religion of the country. So if you are a Lutheran country, and you don't suddenly want to become a Catholic country, you might have a little bit at stake there.

V: [laughs]

Leigh: So basically, after you know, all of these things are going on and they're kind of losing popularity, Kristina announces that they're going to abdicate the throne in February 1654. And went through many, many a time of being like yes no yes no with the court and finally said, 'Nope, I'm doing this.' So on June 6, 1654, Kristina officially abdicates the throne to their cousin and named successor Karl Gustav. And as part of the crowning Kristina was supposed to have their regalia ceremonially removed, piece by piece, and everyone they asked was like, [in a deep voice] 'No, no, I won't do it. I won't do it.' Like multiple people. It was like, knocking down dominoes. So they apparently removed their crown themselves, which is baller as hell. That might that part might just be legend, and they made- this was the fun thing, they made damn well sure that despite their abdication, it was most important to Kristina, that they had continued to status as a sovereign. So as Veronica Buckley writes in her biography of Kristina,

"she was to remain a queen, though a Queen without a realm, and on this she insisted. The members of her court were to be subject to her and she herself was to be subject to no one, no matter where she should be. This was the first article in her abdication agreement before any mention of her appanage-" So like, getting money, *"-before any reference to her successor, and it was vital to her."*

V: So all of the perks with none of the responsibilities.

Leigh: Basically.

V: Aww yeah!

Leigh: Sounds like a pretty good deal. After abdication, they pretty much immediately fled the country. We're talking like, a day together supplies and then just 'whoop, bye-bye!'

V: Well, so they had been shipping like pieces of art and like furniture and silverware and stuff to, uh, I think Germany?

Leigh: I think they first started trying to go to Denmark.

V: Oh, it was, yeah! It was Denmark then Germany. They had been *preparing*.

Leigh: Yeah, it's likely- people say that the reasons for their abdication remain mysterious. They claimed illness and that, like, [mockingly] the weight of the crown was too much and blah blah blah, but it's more likely that a combination of their continued pressure towards marriage, even though they secured Karl as their heir, they were still of marrying age so they were never gonna get that off their back. As well as their general boredom for actual government contributed to their desire to abdicate, they mostly just wanted to rule instead of actually governing. So they fled to Rome and publicly converted to Catholicism, though they weren't the perfect convert, as they hated public displays of piety.

Leigh: So from there, Kristina bounced around different cities for a year or so, traveling from Sweden to Denmark to Germany, settled in Antwerp for a few months, where they took to throwing lavish parties every night, like a baller.

V: Aw yeah!

Leigh: They quickly ran out of money and had to sell some of the things they had shipped out from Sweden before their departure. Look, real bad at money.

V: So bad with money. I thought I was bad with money.

Leigh: Yeah, like consistently having to sell their own belonging and other people's belongings and shit that belonged to their country.

V: They continue to I nearly bankrupt people that they stay with also, which is *wild*.

Leigh: Yeah, you do not want Kristina of Sweden doing your bucks. Um, Archduke Leopold Wilhelm of Austria invited them to his palace when they ran out of things to sell, where Kristina officially converted to Catholicism on Christmas eve of that year. They did not publicly announce their conversion for fear of alimony from Sweden being cut off, so the pope couldn't support them openly at the time, because they hadn't announced their conversion either. They did, however, publicly announce their conversion in Innsbruck, Austria, and this was in November of 1655. And five days later departed for Rome. So long process there, and we're like, we're skimming over so much stuff y'all.

V: Oh my God. They did so much. Holy shit. But, you know, for someone with a life that's *so hectic*, it makes sense that hey, guess who planned Kristina's route through Italy? Are you guessing? Did you guess *the Vatican*? Cuz it was the Vatican.

Leigh: [in a funny voice] I'm thinking real hard.

[laughter]

Leigh: Yeah, when you're sponsored by the Pope, things are pretty good.

V: Oh- yeah, cuz it was a big deal for like a ruler, even one who had abdicated, to have converted to Catholicism. So the pope was very happy about that, at least for a little while, and had the Vatican plan Kristina's route through Italy. And they entered Rome on December 20, 1655. December 22, the pope gave them their confirmation, and gave them their name, Alexandra, I believe, which was the "female version" of his own. [Excited voice] And granted them their own wing inside the Vatican, which was decorated by Bernini, with whom they had become lifelong friends literally the day before, after entering the city on a couch that he designed for them. I am so jealous. Oh god!

Leigh: V is a fan of Bernini.

V: [almost distressed voice] Bernini is my favorite sculptor, you don't understand.

Leigh: Art nerdery happening. [laughs]

V: [distress noises] No seriously- okay, no. If you haven't seen a sculpture by Bernini, pause this episode and go to Google and search B-E-R-N-I-N-I, because *oh my god-*

Leigh: [laughing]

V: Don't you laugh at me, Bernini's fabulous!

Leigh: [laughing then coughing]

V: Guys, they're laughing at me.

Leigh: [coughs] I'm coughing!

V: [laughs] Anyway, god- for several months, Kristina was like the only focus of the Pope and his entire court because of the aforementioned really big deal. But then, Kristina decided that it was time to... try to become the ruler ruler of Naples. Which was then a disputed territory between France and Spain. You know, you get bored of not ruling for like three years and then-

Leigh: you're like [funny voice] 'I think I'd like to be king again.'

V: 'Yeah, so why not king of uh, huh. Oh, over there looks good.'

To be fair, it was a disputed territory between France and Spain. And their plan was to convince France, which had officially given up its bid for Neapolitan rule back in like 1559, to conquer Naples, install Kristina as queen, and upon their death, Kristina would then pass the rule to France. They went to France to talk to the French about it, and they super shocked the French court while they were there. La Grande Mademoiselle, said that they

"surprised me very much. Applauding the parts which pleased her, taking God to witness, throwing herself back in her chair, crossing her legs, resting them on the arms of her chair and assuming other postures such as I

had never seen taken but by Travelin and Jodelet, two famous buffoons... She was in all respects a most extraordinary creature"

V: -to which I have to say, fellas, is it a gay to sit wrong in a chair while in the presence of nobility? Cuz it certainly seems like it.

[laughter]

V: But the way that they behaved at French court shocked and appalled several people and intrigued many others. And in September of 1656, September 22, they got an agreement in writing from Queen Anne, who was regent of France at the time, that they would be supported, and so they headed back to Italy.

Leigh: Yay! So fast forward, going back to Italy, waiting to hear about taking over Naples like 'Okay, come on. Let's do this.' Things didn't move quickly enough for very impulsive Kristina. So they returned to the French court a year later to try to make them turn words into action. Their trusted servant, Italian nobleman, Gian Monaldeschi, sent copies of their letters to the pope, we don't know what was in them. And this was a big betrayal, it's like [yelling] 'what are you doing?' So they had him *stabbed* in the palace after confronting him with evidence and, against the wishes of their advisors, claimed sole responsibility for the act. This was like- this was the thing, like chased him through the place. He got stabbed multiple times, he got his head bashed in-

V: He was wearing chainmail. So-

Leigh: It was a whoooole thing. So, while it was like, technically totally legally fine, like, 'hey, they're a ruler, they can do this.' It went over very poorly, because even though they're sovereign, it's like, 'hey, but this is like a foreign weirdo coming here and basically committing a grisly murder, even though they didn't stab them themselves. I don't like this.'

V: 'Not in France!'

Leigh: It essentially ruined their reputation permanently in France and in Rome, because the Monaldeschi family was powerful enough there to do that. So with all of that, kind of a little bit of disgrace, you know, Kristina is

a little bit bored again, so in 1660, three years later, Karl Gustav dies. And since stuff didn't work out with Naples, Kristina goes, 'Hmm, well, you know what... I specifically abdicated so that my cousin could takeover. And now that they're dead, I should be ruler again.' And Sweden was like, 'No, no, no, you're Catholic now. That's not going to work.' So they actually ended up renouncing the throne again. So Sweden would continue to fund their existence, because again-

V: [Whining] 'but guuuuys, God said it's my turn on the throne.'

Leigh: [also whining] 'It's my turn again!' Uh, and as if three attempts at trying to rule the country weren't enough, Kristina's last play for a throne is in 1668, when John Casimir II of Poland abdicated the throne. And since Poland had an elected monarchy, Kristina was eligible through their mother and being Catholic, Kristina was supported by the pope, yay, but lost the election to someone who was native to Poland, cuz that makes sense. Like 'we don't want the weird queen who keeps spending all of everybody else's money and has a bad reputation.'

V: Yeah. Boy. Yeah. So after their several failed attempts at becoming a reigning monarch again, they decided to go back to Rome, and essentially they became the head of the counterculture movement there, until they died. They founded the city's first public theater since ancient Rome. They held performances in their palace when the new pope was like, 'hm, no.' Kristina even dared to have female performers. They acted themselves- they were presenting female at the time, so they were also fucking with the pope's rules. Blatantly forbidden by the pope. So, you know, suck on that.

Leigh: Suck on that... Father! Ultimate father, whatever. I don't know- we're two Jews, we don't know what [unintelligible].

V: Yeah, speaking of which, they publicly supported Jews, which is very nice. They forced the pope to pass an edict saying that you weren't allowed to chase us through the streets during parties. So, yay.

Leigh: That's pretty good. They were actually- they had said in a lot of their writing like 'Jesus conversed with the Jews,' and they had actually looked into many different religions before converting to Catholicism-

V: B.C., before Catholic! ... sorry.

Leigh: like Judaism and Islam, [laughs at joke] and yeah they were just kind of interested in, like, 'what else is going on?' I mean, religion for them, kind of a means to an end in a lot of ways.

V: That's fair. Anyway, they died, unfortunately, as most humans do- except Keanu Reeves. I'm not convinced.

Leigh: [laughs]

V: In 1689, at the age of 62, after falling ill. They wanted a simple funeral, but the pope insisted on doing, you know, big public things. So their body was on display for four days, thankfully not 19 months, and fancy rites and rituals that were held for them. And they were buried in the same graveyard as the popes are. One of only three non-men in history to be buried there. And a monument to Kristina stands in St. Peter's Basilica to this day.

Leigh: Hoo! All right everyone. We did it! Episode over! No, sorry, We have so much more.

V: Oh, god, so much.

Leigh: Yeah. So huge bio over. Y'all want to get to the gay stuff?

[laughter]

Leigh: We teased a little bit about this before. So, so folks, why do we think they're gay? So there are lots of ways to approach Kristina as a queer figure, which is why we love them so much and also is why so many historians are like, [weird voice] 'I have no idea how to categorize this person!' You know, from being a potentially intersex royal to their super gay relationships and 'eww marriage!' attitude, to their masculine presentation and behavior. There's lots to go over. So we'll start off with: were they intersex? We talked at the top about the circumstances of Kristina's birth. There is a possibility that Kristina could have been born intersex, leading to the inconclusive assignment of their gender at birth, why everybody was, you know, so confused. Why they thought, 'hey, we have a son. No, we don't!' But of course, we can't say for sure. Like there's not really a way to do that now. It

could be that the midwives were just kind of surprised at the unfamiliarity of a hairy and loud baby. Be like, [funny voice] 'Ah, yes, this baby is loud and strong, it must be a boy!' Cuz, fucking patriarchy.

Leigh: A 1965 exhumation of Kristina's body- I love that somebody's like 'Alright, let's-

V: 'We gotta figure this out!'

Leigh: 'Let's make up this 17th century- I love historians, and archaeologists. So an exhumation of their body found no conclusive positive evidence for them being born intersex, but it's undeniable that Kristina bucked gender roles and norms whether or not there was any sort of biological thing going on. Kristina did say of themselves that they were, "*neither male nor hermaphrodite, as some people in the world have passed me for.*" Throughout their entire life, there were rumors and pamphlets distributed, calling them a lesbian and an atheist and a prostitute and a hermaphrodite, and all this shit.

Leigh: So this this leads us to a discussion of Kristina's feelings around their own gender and sex.

V: Yeah, which are stored and many. There are a lot of factors that show that Kristina had, at some level, a really deep discomfort with their own femininity and assignment as a woman. So many of their own writings show that they were vocal about not feeling entirely female. So from a young age, Kristina decried *all* elements of womanhood, and declared that "*of all human defects to be a woman was the worst.*" Ah...

Leigh: Yikes! Yikes, Kristina.

V: Big, big yikes.

Leigh: Um, yeah, ugh. Do you want to read this quote? Or do you want me to read it?

V: Oh, god. I-

Leigh: Alright, I'll read it.

V: Thanks. I can't bring myself to do it!

Leigh: [laughs] They write:

"As a young girl I had an overwhelming aversion to everything that women do and say. I couldn't bear their tight-fitting, fussy clothes. I took no care for my complexion or my figure, or the rest of my appearance. I never wore a hat or a mask and scarcely ever wore gloves. I despised everything belonging to my sex, hardly excluding modesty and propriety. I couldn't stand long dresses and I only wanted to wear short skirts. What's more, I was so hopeless at all the womanly crafts that no one could ever teach me anything about them."

Leigh: You ever fail so hard at being a girl?

V: [groans]

Leigh: Mood.

V: Yeah, god. And they weren't the only ones who noticed that they weren't a big fan of womanhood. An ambassador who was really close to Kristina in their 20s noted that Kristina had *"no interest in her own feminine allure. She will not permit the slightest allusion to it."*

Leigh: This is literally Janet. Not a girl. Not a robot, not a girl.

V: Kristina even believed that womanhood was- you thought yikes before, well, they believe that womanhood was not fit for sovereignty.

"It is almost impossible that a woman should perform the duties required on the throne. The ignorance of women, their feebleness of mind, body and understanding makes them incapable of reigning."

V: So like, that's a thing.

Leigh: So with that, where do we place Kristina? Right? Like they certainly had no doubts in their own ability or righteousness-

V: No, considering they tried to rule no fewer than four times.

Leigh: They were like, 'I'm great at this!' So are they so unique that they're the exception to their own rule or are they not identifying with like femaleness at all?

Leigh: In Kristina's autobiography, in which they are addressing themselves to God, they write about their own physical and psychological makeup, specifically thanking God for... letting them be born a woman. They say,

"I Thank You, Lord for letting me be born a woman, the more so as you have shown me the grace of not letting any of the defects of my own sex be inherent on my soul, which you will in mercy have made altogether male, just as the rest of my being."

Leigh: So it's clear that Kristina did have some sense of like their own soul, their own being, being not...

V: Not female.

Leigh: -and more on the male side.

V: There's some gender fuckery involved.

Leigh: There's some gender stuff. Growing up and receiving their princely education coincided well with what Kristina themselves most enjoyed. Even their toys as a child were more like masculine in nature. They had like little army men over dolls, and they described them as "*pieces of lead that I used to learn military maneuvers.*" They would like, set them out, [laughs] like a little battle formation. And again, like more people- the way that Kristina acted and behaved were far from feminine. They were walking and sitting like a dude.

V: [laughs]

Leigh: Adopting martial poses when talking of military action, like hands on your hips and-

V: Power pose.

Leigh: -standing with like one foot in front of the other. They apparently ate and swore like a soldier, and they had a deep and gruff voice. A chaplain

from Rome recorded a telling description of Kristina saying that there was "nothing feminine about her except her sex". I like the uh-

"I see her on horseback nearly every day. Though she rides side saddle, she holds herself so well and is so light in her movements that unless one were quite close to her, one would take her for a man."

Leigh: And this is where I think, really- I mean, we've seen Kristina talking a little bit about herself, and mostly people being like, 'that person doesn't seem particularly feminine.' This is where I think it gets really interesting, because as soon as Kristina abdicated the throne and left Stockholm for the Danish border, they made a transformation. They literally threw off the clothes of their femininity.

Leigh: Some historians posit this as like a method of disguise designed to hide in plain sight in case the Swedish authorities decided to you know, spy on them and like- they knew that there were spies all over, but decided to like renege on their financial commitments, but considering everyone pretty much knew who Kristina was and where they were going, what they were up to, and considering Kristina spent the rest of their life in these fashions, I'm much more want to say that this was more of an act of alignment for them. They put on men's clothing that from then on would be their preferred attire. They cut their hair off into the like loose male bob fashion of the day, and buckled on a sword, like you do, and to go the extra mile. They even adopted the name of one of their companions, Count Christoph von Dohna, which they didn't keep for very long. And supposedly, upon reaching the border between Denmark and Sweden, they crossed onto the Danish side of the stream and reportedly exclaimed "*Free at last! Out of Sweden and I hope to never come back.*"

V: Except when you try to reclaim the throne later.

Leigh: Hey, you know, hindsight is 2020. So the last bit that we have about gender fun is basically from this point on, so 27 years of age, Kristina would be reluctant to wear any women's style, hair or clothing, preferring flat men's shoes, usually boots, and a sword and wearing a feathered hat.

V: [I don't know how to describe this tone of voice but boy do they mean this] God they sound so cool.

Leigh: It sounds so cool. I want to dress like Kristina.

V: I know!

Leigh: One of the most detailed descriptions of them we have is from the Duc de Guise, who was the former captor and King of Naples, who accompanied Kristina on their journey to the French court. He writes in this letter to his friend, he's been like staring at Kristina and taking them in. He writes,

"I'm dreadfully bored at the moment but I would at least like to amuse you by sending you a portrait of the Queen I am accompanying. She is not tall, but she is shapely, with a large rump," Rude.

V: Rude.

Leigh: *"-fine arms and pretty white hands, but more of a man than a woman, and with one shoulder higher than the other, though she hides this so well with her bizarre clothes and her way of walking that one really could lay odds on whether the defect is there at all. Her face is long, but not to a fault, and all her features are long too and quite pronounced, her nose aquiline, her mouth rather large but not so disagreeably so, her teeth passable,"*

V: What- what makes passable teeth? Uh, who knows.

Leigh:

"Her eyes really beautiful and full of fire. Her complexion, despite a few pox marks, quite clear and pretty."

Leigh: Here's where we get into the gender stuff.

"Her face is nicely shaped but framed by the most extraordinary coiffure. She wears a man's wig, very heavy and piled high in front, hanging thickly at the sides and fair at the ends. The top of her head is a mass of hair, at the back it looks vaguely like a woman's coiffure. Sometimes she wears a hat. Her bodice is laced crosswise at the back. It is almost laid like a man's vest, with her shirt showing all the way between it and her skirt. The skirt is very badly fastened and not very straight."

V: [laughs] Me neither.

Leigh: "She always wears a lot of powder and lots of face cream, and she hardly ever wears gloves. She wears men's shoes and she sounds and moves like a man as well. In short, she is quite extraordinary. I don't think I have forgotten anything except that she sometimes wears a sword and a buffalo hide collar, and her wig is black."

Leigh: So very obviously, kind of like what we saw with the Public Universal Friend, deliberately weaving men's fashion into their clothing and, you know, wearing what they could get away with basically. And gender isn't the only thing that is queer about Kristina. Uh, Kristina was also totally interested in ladies! As well as dudes, to a certain extent, which we'll get into. You know, we already talked about Kristina being like, 'Um, no. No marriage. No marriage for me. Thank you,' which we'll get into a little bit more because there's even more to Kristina than just like attraction and gender.

V: There's so much—

Leigh: So much. In addition to their, like childhood affections for Karl Gustav, who we mentioned, and there was a man named Magnus in their youth that they like were totally infatuated with, who rejected Kristina due to their lack of femininity. So shortly after they had to, like get over Magnus, one of their ladies in waiting soon caught Kristina's eye in a big way, which is where we start talking about the lady lovin'.

V: I'm so excited. If you know anything about Kristina before this, then you probably know about Ebba Sparre. I mean, if you're listening to this podcast, that that's probably what you know about Kristina. [laughs] I'm just saying. But, Ebba Sparre was a very beautiful 15 year old girl who had been sent by her father to become Kristina's handmaiden. So when Kristina was 18, they became very infatuated with her, and called her Belle, constantly talking about her beauty to *anyone who would listen*. The two often shared a bed, not unusual at the time for two unmarried "women", but Kristina loved the provocative possibilities of this, insinuating to prudish visitors that "*Belle's inside was as beautiful as her outside*," and introducing Belle to the English Ambassador Whitlock as their bedfellow. Yeah, Kristina loved a good bawdy joke, and this went a long way to convincing everyone that they were lesbian. Not to mention their reluctance to marriage.

Leigh: Yeah. Kristina really loved a dirty joke and swore like a sailor. I would have gotten along with Kristina pretty well.

V: Same. But their affections for Ebba were not just a joke, because their surviving letters make it clear that their passion was romantic, and it seems that Ebba returned Kristina's affections, although we don't know their physical relationship, which we will talk about more in just a second.

Leigh: Yeah, Kristina did love to tease Belle though. Belle was basically the exact opposite of Kristina, like she was maidenly and very fair, and like super feminine. So there's even a story, that has an illustration to go with it too, which we'll put up on the website, where Kristina basically convinced Belle to read a raunchy passage out aloud from a dirty book, that they were so pleased with themselves with this prank. So, Veronica Buckley details this story, saying

"she led her one day to the chamber of Claude Saumaise, a frenchman and a favorite of the queen who had absented himself for some scholarly rendezvous on the pretext of illness. They found him sitting up in bed with a risque book in his hand. Recognizing the title, Kristina disingenuously asked Belle to read a passage aloud from it. Belle began confidently, but was soon blushing and stammering to a loud roar of laughter from the queen and a quiet smirk from the saumaise."

Leigh: So it was like, [high voice] 'hey, this seems like a really cool innocent book. Why don't you read some of it?' And then suddenly, suddenly you're reading porn. Yeah, Belle remained Kristina's loyal friend for the rest of their life, and Kristina even interfered in Belle's marriage, choosing her husband as someone who would, you know, kind of keep her close to the court and therefore close to Kristina. There's even a fun gossip story, we don't know the truth of it, but it suggests that Kristina ordered all of the guests at their wedding celebrations to *"get naked and dance."* So, some reputation Kristina was gaining for herself.

V: Yeah, when they went back to Sweden to try to get the throne again, they actually tried to see Ebba Sparre but the Sparre family did not let them. But one letter from their Palace in Rome in 1656, at the age of 30, depicts Kristina's lonely mood and decision to write home to Sweden addressed, a la

Belle, the lonely king without a castle still had not found anyone to replace her. And Kristina writes,

"how happy I would be if I could only see you Belle, but though I will always love you, I could never see you, and so I can never be happy. I'm yours as much as I ever was, no matter where I may be in the world. Can it be that you still remember me? Am I as dear to you as I used to be? Do you still love me more than anyone else in the world? If not, do not undecieve me. Let me believe it is still so. Leave me the comfort of your love and do not let time or my absence diminish it. Adieu, Belle, Adieu. I kiss you a million times."

Leigh: Just gals being pals.

V: Gals being pals, you know, but as infatuated as Kristina was with Belle, Belle was followed by a number of other beautiful young women who captured Kristina's eye and heart, including some other handmaidens, Jane Ruthven and Louise van der Nooth, but-

[door slamming and banging noises]

V: [panting] Feudal Lord, handmaiden joke. [gasping for breath] Thank you.

V: -none really held a candle to Belle. Elector Edvard of Bavaria wrote a letter about Kristina, saying *"she dearly loves beautiful women. In Lyon she met one who very much pleased her. She kissed her everywhere; on the throat, the eyes, the forehead, very passionately, and she even wanted to kiss the tongue in her mouth and to sleep with her,"* which the woman however, did not want to do. [laughs] Consent is key.

Leigh: Consent is very important. Kristina also took a fancy toward the Marquise de Ganges, writing to her the most extra of letters-

V: Oh god it's so extra!

Leigh: writing, *"Ah, if I were a man, I would throw myself at your feet, submissive and languishing with love. I would pass my days there, I would pass my nights there, to contemplate your divine attractions and offer you a tender, passionate and faithful heart. But since I am not, let us limit*

ourselves, beautiful Marquise, to the purest and most confident and the firmest of friendships. On my side, that is all I think, but my burning desires are not satisfied. Your beautiful eyes, you know, are the innocent authors of all my suffering. They alone can in an instant repair the damage and make my happiness by their softening. Would you, alas, refuse me one of your gracious looks? [dramatically] No, no! As sensitive as beautiful you will listen with kindness to the tender moans of my deep suffering, and I shall spend the rest of my life in painful enchantment."

Leigh: And here we get with a little bit of fun gender stuff. *"While waiting for an agreeable metempsychosis to change my sex, I want to see you, to adore you, and to tell you of it every instant. Until now I have searched for pleasure everywhere and have hardly tasted it. If your generous heart would take pity on mine, upon my arrival in the next world, I would caress it with constantly renewed delight. I would savor it in your victorious arms and make it last eternally. In this sweet hope, I live the days of my life and my happiness grows thinking of you."*

V: Just gals being pals.

Leigh: Just gals being pals. This was apparently a pretty short lived fling, though, so [laughs]

V: Yeah. Also though, the year between the first time they went to France and the second time they went to France to try to get the throne to Naples, on their way back the first time they met Ninon de l'Enclos...

Leigh: French.

V: I can't, I can't. French is the hardest for me. I can't. Um, who seems very cool. I did a little bit of reading about her, in addition to her. So she had- she was an atheist, pretty much. Her opinions on organized religion had her exiled to a convent, from which Kristina had her released. Nobody knows what happened to have Kristina do that, but Kristina did always like free thinkers. Uh, we like to think there might have been a crush there. And then later on in life, Kristina often chose paintings and sculptures of naked women to decorate their apartments, like you do.

Leigh: Hashtag Nice.

V: Nice.

Leigh: So we come around to our last bit of evidence of different spheres of Kristina's queerness, which is, we saw Kristina was vehemently disinterested in marriage as we saw when it came to the question of providing a successor for their throne, and the pressure that they endured to marry. So when they approached their advisors telling them that Karl Gustav would be their successor, they said, *"I am telling you now it is impossible for me to marry. I am absolutely certain about it. I do not intend to give you reasons, my character is simply not suited to marriage. I have prayed God fervently that my inclination might change, but I simply cannot marry."*

Leigh: Kristina also made their distaste and aversion to the idea of sex with a man very clear in what is perhaps the best quote ever. *"I could not bear to be used by a man the way a peasant uses his fields."* Amazing.

V: [sighs in admiration] So good.

Leigh: So where a lot of historians kind of stop there and say 'okay, Kristina isn't interested in men. Kristina is lesbian, etc, etc.' This distaste in sex and kind of uncomfotability with physical relationships didn't just extend to men, as like a flat out preference for lady boning. As we discussed, while Kristina was interested in women, this didn't preclude an interest in men, right? We had Karl Gustav. They were infatuated with the count Magnus De la Gardie in 1645, and there were more later in their life. It seems that despite their love for bawdy jokes, and raunchy humor, Kristina doesn't really seem to have, *"followed any of their passions to their natural conclusion."* "Natural conclusion."

Leigh: As Veronica Buckley puts it, she says, *"where men were concerned, she understood her own reticence to being used. Where women were concerned, she bought a lot of pictures and gave a lot of presents and wrote a lot of flowery letters, but physical love itself she never seems to have sought."*

V: In their 40s they fell in love with a cardinal named Decio Azzolino who had been appointed Kristina's representative in the Catholic Church, you know, the Catholic Church that was in love with them for a while. The whole

church, like all of it. The physical church. That was a bad joke, please cut that out. Anyway [laughs], they would be close with the cardinal for nearly 30 years. Veronica Buckley again notes that at the beginning of their flirtations, "*Kristina abandoned [their] manly dress and took to wearing gowns once again, their femininity somewhat awakened,*" but this was in some ways a safe way to explore. Buckley says, "*she may have felt that she could enjoy a flirtation protected from any real consequence, in theory at least, by the cardinal's vow of celibacy. If so, it was the first time and the last that Kristina would play the coquette.*" It's most likely they engaged in a romantic friendship.

V: So Kristina's squeamishness over sex was enough to actually at one point- and out of character, give thanks to God for their "worst defect of being a woman," which they believe saved them from their life of sexual depravity, considering their passionate nature. They said, "*My ambition, my pride, incapable of submitting to anyone, and my disdain, despising everything, have miraculously saved me. I admit that if I had not been born a girl, my temperament might have led me into terrible disorder. But you, who all my life have made me love glory and honor more than any pleasure, you have saved me from the misfortunes that I would have been plunged into, by chance, by freedom of my rank, and by the ardor of my temperament. I would no doubt have married if I had not recognized in myself the strength that you have given me to resist the pleasures of love.*"

Leigh: So that's, that's so interesting that Kristina is specifically saying if they had been born a different way then they would have been a highly sexual person. Cuz they're already a very passionate person by nature, we saw that in the letters to Belle and to the Marquise. And so I think it's really interesting that in this way, Kristina is grateful that they're born this certain way, which really leads me to think like, oh, hmm, somebody is very squeamish about sex and sexual attractions. And it's also very possible that Kristina's magnetic draw toward Rome and Catholicism had something to do with their aversion towards sex and marriage. Kristina had come to view the Roman Catholic Church as like a haven from all of their troubles and could protect them from it all. Catholics valued the celibate life after all, and so they most likely wouldn't be pressured to marry and bear children, unlike the Lutheran ideals of 'let women bear children unto death.'

V: So like Leigh was saying earlier, religion as a means to an end.

Leigh: Yeah! So in conclusion, we awesomely, may have had a biromantic asexual, genderqueer, King of Sweden, and we're. all. for it. Like all the things! So many, this is gonna be a long episode folks, cuz holy crap!

V: Oh god, yeah. Oh god.

Leigh: Before we we reach our conclusion and we dive into what will probably be our very high ratings of *How Gay Were They*, we have some other little fun Kristina facts that we wanted to bring up. Just some things about their personality and fun stories. V's gonna start off because they're [funny voice] the artist- oh wait, no, sorry, I'm gonna talk about the art.

V: [laughs] You're gonna talk about the art, I'm gonna talk about being arrogant. Okay? All right. So Kristina basically believed that royalty was literally in their blood, like, they were innately born to rule, which is what continued to push them towards thrones later in their life after abdicating as ruler of Sweden.

Leigh: [valley girl voice] First of all, I'm a king, so shut the fuck up.

V: Yeah. [laughs] God, and that's something that we didn't talk about, I think, that their official title was king, which is pretty rad. Anyway, Veronica Buckley writes, "*Kristina had the idea that sovereignty was something she carried within herself. For Kristina, kingship was a personal attribute that had nothing to do with the rights and regalia of monarchy. The right to rule she believed was innate, she could not be divested of it. It was not dependent on possession of the Swedish crown, or any other since God himself had planted this mark of greatness on her forehead. And even in her childhood, it had inspired respect and fear and all who saw it.*"

V: And then in Kristina's own words, in 1633, following their acclamation, "*the people were amazed by my grand manor, playing the role of a queen already. I was only little, but on the throne I had such an ait, such a grand appearance that inspired respect and fear in everyone. You had planted on my forehead this mark of greatness-*"

Leigh: And they're talking to God at that point.

V: Talking to God, they're talking to God, when are they not talking to God?

Leigh: When they're talking to Belle.

V: When they're talking to the people that they're in love with, yeah. [laughs] Correct. Um, so they were... kinda a little arrogant, which was reflected in the fact that they refused to be wrong, writing, "*I could never stand to be corrected.*" They always had to have the last word. And my favorite thing that they've written, like we have some cool things that they wrote at the end of the episode, but holy shit, my favorite thing that they've ever written is "*to attack me is to attack the sun.*"

Leigh: [laughs] They're so into themselves and I love it.

V: They really are. But I mean, if I were them I also would be.

Leigh: Same.

V: We're also very into them.

Leigh: It's just like equal opportunity love of Kristina.

V: It's incredible.

Leigh: So we had mentioned that Kristina like, after abdicating and immediately running to another country, had been sending a bunch of paintings. They were a big lover of art and culture. They had so many paintings, and, as we said, brought them back and forth across Europe during their adventures, like their whole life. And they also-

V: When they weren't selling them off.

Leigh: [laughs] They also frequently sat for paintings and one of the most- usually sitting as like, being depicted as Diana or another Goddess of the hunt, because mood. One of the most well known portraits of them and we'll put this up on the website, depicts Kristina at 26 years old and it's a huge hunting portrait and like a very male style. They're sitting atop a rearing horse and holding a sword in their hand and there's like other people like a

dog and it's, it's pretty great. And this painting was of course their favorite and it hung in their bedroom until their death.

Leigh: Kristina tried super hard to make Stockholm basically the Athens of the North, attracting philosophers and scientists and artists to their court. They established like academies of artists wherever they went, and they were basically determined to show the world that Sweden had class and culture. Like their two main goals when they were ruling Sweden were end the war give, us peace in Sweden, and make Sweden a-

V: super artsy.

Leigh: Yeah make Sweden super artsy. Okay, this is why I wanted to talk about this because this is my favorite story. They literally collected- they collected philosophers and artists at their court like they were Pokémon, including, as we mentioned before, the renowned philosopher René Descartes.

V: Gotta catch them all.

Leigh: Quite literally, as we'll talk about.

V: Oh god-

Leigh: The two wrote to one another discussing philosophy and the moral world and while Kristina was fascinated with his writings, they like to dispute them often and like, treated it like a game, and also spent an excessive amount of time in between letters, which really annoyed Descartes. Needless to say, Descartes wasn't a fan as can be seen in this letter to his brother in law, who was a friend of Kristina's, after like 15 months of no response from Kristina. He just writes this salty letter that's like, *"it is enough to wonder that a queen, perpetually engaged in the affairs of states should have recalled after several months, a letter that I had had the honor to write her, and that she should have taken the trouble to reply at all let alone to reply sooner."* He's trying to be as polite as he can, considering he's taking to a king, but-

V: He's so salty.

Leigh: Very salty, and then so Kristina, after like not talking to him, and leaving him basically on read, surprisingly invites him and suggests him to come to Sweden to wait upon the good Kristina, which Descartes was *not* about. Stockholm was too far, too cold, he had zero interest in Sweden "*with its rocks and ice and bears,*" which is my favorite way to describe Sweden. He writes to his brother in law about how much he didn't want to go. He writes a letter to Kristina being like, [high voice] 'Oh, I don't know. Thank you so much for inviting me,' and writes this letter to his brother-in-law being like 'Bro. Nah, I don't want to do that.' So what does Kristina do? Remember when we said Kristina refused to hear the word no and did not like to be wrong? Kristina literally ended up kidnapping Descartes.

So Descartes- one of the reasons why he did not want to go, he was discouraged by the prospect of it because he felt like "*they just wanted to have me like some sort of elephant or panther on account of my rarity.*" Basically another addition to Kristina's philosopher zoo. Pokémon!

V: Got to literally, physically, catch them all.

Leigh: So since he didn't want to go in a pokéball of his own accord, Kristina literally kidnaps him. This weirdo sends a small armed militia-

V: [laughing in the background]

Leigh: -to where Descartes is in France to collect him and bring him to their palace. And Descartes is stuck there for several months during the bitterly cold winter, and he's enjoying himself to some extent, but Kristina is not really paying any attention to his philosophy lessons, getting bored with him, and being in the bitterly cold place that he didn't want to be, being forced to get up at like five in the morning for philosophy lessons, dies of the flu.Oops!

Leigh: To be fair, Descartes was an asshole who decided he didn't want anyone but a Frenchman treating him. He decided that he didn't trust the Swedes or the Dutchmen who were going to try to treat him so he decided the best way to get better was to drink hot tobacco juice. It decidedly *was not*.

V: In his defense, he was kidnapped there.

Leigh: He contracted pneumonia and died. So Kristina of Sweden killed Rene Descartes. So.... that's my favorite story.

V: It's a very good story. They did work together to make plans to open an academy though. Kristina did some really really cool things that I don't think we have listed here yet, but they, I believe, started the first newspaper in Sweden, which was pretty rad. They did public school-y things. I'm sorry that I'm less articulate when I do not have...

Leigh: That's okay. It's a long episode. We had to cut some things.

V: It's a long episode. It's 10:30pm. I've been awake since six. Let's talk more about Kristina. They not only liked philosophy, they also really liked watching and acting in plays, and they always took part in the starring role, usually as a queen or a goddess. Most often as Diana or Athena because, obviously, pursuing the chase and issuing marriage with equal vengeance. While Kristina was in Innsbruck as the guest of Archduke Ferdinand, a new musical drama was performed in their honor called L'Argia? I'm gonna end every single pronunciation with a question mark, I can't help it. I'm so sorry. [enthusiastically] It is a tale of love, betrayal, incest and lesbian seduction, with the heroine in trousers and a chorus of pirates, a vast corps de ballet and plenty of theatrical wizardry, all perfectly calculated to appeal to Kristina's adventurous imaginations.

Accordingly, Kristina was obsessed. They saw the *six hour long play twice*, and watched it "*with great pleasure and attention.*" To be fair, there was a chorus of pirates so I cannot blame them.

Leigh: I really love that it's like, 'Oh shit, the queen is coming to Austria? Let's uuuhhh, let's make a play about lesbian seduction, and a heroine in trousers and a bunch of pirates. Let's do that!'

V: Lots of pirates!

Leigh: Since we're running so short on time, we aren't going to go through all of the *Maxims of a Queen*. Kristina loved writing little pithy statements. We'll put them on our website, but some of our fun ones are things that they

wrote like "*life is too short for love,*" or "*it requires more courage to marry than to go to war.*" They're fun. I love it. And-

V: Can I do my favorite one? My favorite one ever really kind of sums up their life? Yeah, "*Patience is the virtue of those that lack either courage or force.*"

Leigh: Yeah, that's, that's fair. That's on brand.

V: It's extremely on brand, yes.

Leigh: So we'll wrap up here with our pop culture tie-in. We don't have a word of the week this week, but we do have a pop culture tie-in. Most people, if they are familiar at all with Kristina, are familiar with them because of the 1933 movie *Queen Christina*, starring Greta Garbo, which is very fun. They originally wanted to depict the accurate sexuality of King Kristina, but Hollywood wasn't ready. So instead it portrayed the fictional romance between Kristina and a Roman Catholic Spanish envoy named Don Antonio, who in the film was the reason Kristina abdicated and converted, but considering Greta Garbo was queer as fuck, she played it, queer as fuck, and made it real gay. So there's a lot of fun subtext in there.

V: Yeah. On the flip side, though, back in 2015, a bio drama called *The Girl King* based on a 2012 play of the same name happened. It actually depicted Ebba Sparre's relationship with Kristina, although in a very, very melodramatic, and according to critics, two dimensional way.

Leigh: [chanting] Just give us complex queer love!

V: Please. Please.

Leigh: And yeah. So that is the life and times and queerness of King Kristina of Sweden. You will also see- we have been saying it, and we will be using the spelling of Kristina with a K, you will see it elsewhere as Christina with a CH, however you want to look them up, look them up, find more information because oh my god there's so much. I read a whole book.

V: We cut so much out, holy shit.

Leigh: So with that, considering we still don't even know the sheer level of badassery of this person, I'm going to haze our lovely guest V and have them give their How Gay Were They ratings first, because they hazed me when I was on their podcast, Fuzzy Logic.

V: It's true, I did, that did happen.

Leigh: So I'm gonna put you on the spot and make you think of pithy things. So V, how gay were they?

V: You know, I'm gonna give them... [slowly] one lavish bankrupting-a-country party... of gayness.

Leigh: Only one? What is that on a scale?

V: They planned three more, but they fell through.

[laughter]

V: It's on a scale of one to one.

Leigh: So Kristina just completely tips the scale. Like, it's a scale of one to one.

V: Yeah, exactly.

Leigh: Let's see. I will go- I will stay with our traditional scale of 10, because I want Kristina to be 20 out of 10 lions, tigers and bears at a very expensive coronation and then bankrupting your entire country.

V: Oh god. They really did do that, huh?

Leigh: They really did. Multiple times. The entire Swedish government was like, 'Uuuuuh, what are we gonna do?' [sarcastically] It was great.

Leigh: Um yeah, so that's it for today's episode. Everyone say bye and thank you to our lovely guest V.

V: That's me!

Leigh: YOU may be hearing more from them in the future, we're gonna try to do some more fun things together, and again bug them about making cool merch. Cuz y'all want more fun History is Gay stuff, and I want to pay V for their cool art. So give me more reasons to pay artists like my friend. V, where can our lovely listeners hear or find you on the interwebs when you're not hanging out with me?

V: Well, when I am not looking into the super queer quarters of history, I am working on one or two or seven artistic endeavors like the History is Gay geographic queers shirts, and now stickers and phone cases? I am also usually findable at [@nikeagxy](#). That's Nike like the shoe, ag like silver, xy like the chromosomes.

Leigh: Oh now I get your Twitter handle!

V: Yeah, there you go. Talking about dungeons and dragons and taking care of yourself, or talking about my educational-ish, comedy-esque, currently on winter break podcast, [@FuzzyLogic](#).

Leigh: It's real good, y'all. You should listen to it. I was a guest on it. It is one of my favorite podcasts. It consistently makes me literally lol. It makes me laugh out loud in my car like a hysterical person and I love it.

V: [laughs] Leigh where can people find you?

Leigh: Where can people find me when I'm not nerding out about gladiatorial animal combats from a genderqueer ace biromantic sovereign of medieval Europe, or I guess 17th century Europe. I'm usually talking about comics and queer TV over [@aparadoxinflux](#) on Twitter and doing a whole bunch of other fun podcasty things. Pretty soon, I will be featured on an episode of Podcast Movement Sessions, which are a whole bunch of different interviews from my experience at Podcast Movement in Orlando back in August. There will be one episode featuring me at some point. I think the first episodes of the season drop at the end of this month. That's all I know for now. But look out for that. And History is Gay can be found on Tumblr at [historyisgaypodcast](#), Twitter [@historyisgaypod](#). And you can always drop us a line as usual with questions, suggestions, or just to say hi at [historyisgaypodcast@gmail.com](#). We're always really happy to get emails

from you. And lastly, if you enjoy the show and want to support us in continuing to make it, you can support us on [Patreon](#), where you can get access to Sappho's Salon minisodes, which I promise there will be some coming soon, special sneak peeks, the opportunity to have your voice show up on the show and more. You can become a patron by going to the support section on our website and join the ranks of our Patreon community along with the amazing...

V: Jana (or Yana sorry, pronunciation) Gibhardt Engle, and Julie Seigler.

Leigh: Thank you all so much for your support. As we say every episode, we literally couldn't do this without you. Thank you for sticking with us through our hiatus. You could also buy merch at our store featuring V's wonderful art.

V: Do it!

Leigh: So click on shop at our website. If you want to contribute in other ways, we have transcriptions now, we have a transcription project going on. So if you want to help and transcribe episodes for our hard of hearing or deaf fans, please help us out, just go to our website and click on transcriptions and you will get all the details there. And lastly, please remember to rate, review, and subscribe wherever you get your podcasts. It helps more people find the show, and we can expand this awesome community and bring even more cool people like V on. Yay. And with that, that's it for History is Gay. Until next time...

V: Stay queer!

Leigh: And stay curious.

[outro music]