

Queer as Fact – Episode 14 – Rosa Bonheur

A: Hello and welcome to Queer as Fact. I'm Alice.

H: I'm Hamish.

E: I'm Eli.

A: We're a twice-monthly queer history podcast coming out on the 1st and 15th of each month. Every episode one of us will talk about a person, a place, or a topic from queer history. This week we're talking about 19th-century artist Rosa Bonheur.

[intro music plays]

A: We don't have many content warnings for this episode. We do talk a bit about the Franco-Prussian War, including some of the deaths involved in that, but otherwise that's pretty much all. So if that's something you don't want to hear you can check out any of our other episodes. We have content warnings at the start of all of them.

Rosa was born Rosalie-Marie Bonheur in Bordeaux, in France, in 1822. Her father Raimond was poor artist who made his living teaching art, and her mother was the illegitimate child of an aristocratic merchant. The family was quite poor and in 1829 they moved to Paris for Raimond to find work.

So in 1832 Raimond joined a religious and social reform movement which was called the Saint-Simonians. They focussed on improving the world through education, industry and fine arts, and one of their main focusses was equality between men and women. So Raimond's beliefs as part of this movement influenced Rosa throughout her life, and she said later, "To his doctrines I owe my great and glorious ambition for the sex to which I proudly belong, whose independence I'll defend till my dying day."

H: Wow! That... that's very progressive! That's really good!

A: Yeah! She comes from a very progressive family.

E: I love it when women have like, permissive fathers in history, 'cause then they can do stuff.

H: [laughs]

A: Yeah! Yeah. I mean... her father's not like, ideal, but...

E: Okay, well....

[laughter]

H: Yeah.

A: His role in the group led him to leave his family to go and live in a sort of... it's sort of like a monastery. It was a kind of Saint-Simonian retreat—

H: Mmhm.

A: —which was in the north-east of Paris.

E: Mmhm.

A: And the family was only allowed to visit two days a week, and Rosa's mother was left at home to support the four children by herself. Rosa was the oldest child and she was ten at the time.

E: So is he not giving them money anymore, or....?

A: He's not giving them money 'cause he's not working 'cause he's off in this—

E: What is he doing there?

A: —kind of religious retreat.

H: I mean, if religious retreats are true to form, men?

A and E: [laugh]

A: It's specifically specified to be a celibate retreat.

E: They all are.

[laughter]

A: Yeah. I don't think it was from this retreat that he was doing this at the time, but it was about sort of planning to go out and spread their doctrine.

H: Okay.

A: Kind of planning to be missionaries basically.

E: Okay.

A: So he's reading, he did a lot of writing on the beliefs of the group and stuff like that. But he's not bringing in money to support his family.

E: So he's like, "We should really, you know, promote equality for women. Anyway I've abandoned my wife and four children."

A: Yeah, that's exactly what happened, yeah.

E: Alright.

A: Yeah, it's pretty terrible.

E: That's fine.

A: It's not fine! [laughs]

E: That was potentially somewhat sarcastic.

[laughter]

A: The government didn't like Saint-Simonians and the group was broken apart by the government later in 1832. They were charged with various things, including embezzlement, but also including having a public gathering of more than 20 people.

H: [laughs]

A: So I don't think the embezzlement charge is a genuine reflection on the group. [laughs]

H: Hm.

E: Mmhm.

A: But after being involved with that Raimond struggled to find work because of stigma, and the family remained very very poor, and the next year in 1833 Rosa's mother died. I'm not sure exactly what she died of. The sources usually just say she died of exhaustion.

E: Okay.

H: Wow, that's certainly a valid medical term.

A: Yeah.

E: Mm.

A: Rosa just before her mother died had scarlet fever and her mother nursed her through scarlet fever, so she may have caught scarlet fever and died. It may have just been poverty and malnutrition and overwork. But she died, and she was buried in an unmarked grave, which was something Rosa was very upset about throughout her life, and Rosa said, "My mother, the most noble and proud of creatures, succumbed to exhaustion and wretched poverty while my father was dreaming about saving the human race."

Rosa never married, as we'll see, and it's probably that witnessing her parents' marriage and how that affected her mother's prospects in life influenced her view of marriage, and she said, "Had I ever married, domestic cares would have swallowed me up as they did my mother."

Rosa's father, as men at the time kind of were, wasn't expected to raise his children, being a single father, so her sister was sent away to live with an aunt, and Rosa after being put in various apprenticeships that didn't work out for her, was sent off the boarding school.

Her father meanwhile, joined the Knights Templar.

H: Okay!

E: "My weird organisation went away. I need a weirder organisation."

[laughter]

A: Yeah. The Knights Templar were not the original Knights Templar from the Crusades—

E: Really.

[laughter]

A: —which had been destroyed. [laughs] But they were a French anti-monarchist group.

E: Mmhm.

A: And Rosa was also inducted into the Knights Templar and she was very inspired by that, she was given a little uniform and a little sword.

H: Aw.

E: How old is she?

A: I think she's about 11 or 12.

E: Okay. I didn't know this occurred.

A: [laughs]

E: She's a tiny sword?

A: I think it's a wooden sword.

E: That would be wise.

A: Yeah.

H: Mm.

A: But she's very inspired by it and she went off to school with her little sword and she played knights with all her friends and she destroyed the school flower beds and she got expelled.

E and H: [laugh]

H: That's great.

E: Yeah.

A: So having been expelled from school, Rosa had always actually wanted to study art, and so her father, once she'd finally been expelled from school, allowed her to study art. She was kind of quite happy about this development.

H: Mm.

A: Her father was her art teacher. She loved most of all painting animals, and she says, of her love of animals, "You just cannot imagine how much I loved feeling some fine cow lick my head while she was being milked."

E and H: [laugh]

A: Most of her paintings are of animals; she would often have a lot of animals in her studio. There was a little stall in the corner of the family studio where they kept them so she could paint them. And her art had very wide popular appeal. One early buyer who was linen merchant that they bought clothes from said, "I don't understand much about art, but I know a good sheep when I see one."

E and H: [laugh]

E: How old is she when she's already selling paintings of sheep?

A: She's quite young. She's in her early teens.

E: Okay.

A: Yeah.

E: Are they... I'm just picturing children's drawings.

A: I can find some pictures of her early drawings that we'll put on our blog.

E: Okay.

A: And we can see how good she is. [laughs]

E: Do they get like, noticeably better, or is she just like, solid from the get-out?

A: She's quite solid from the beginning.

E: Okay.

A: But like, I don't know much about art. But I assume they get noticeably better from the beginning.

E: We can't say French, we don't know anything about art...

A: [laughs] Why are we here? She's gay.

E: Yeah, that's why we're here.

[laughter]

E: Spoilers.

A: Spoilers. So yeah, she was very successful and pretty soon she was the one supporting the family, because her father was terrible at financial management and not very successful.

H: And also a cultist.

A: And in multiple secret societies, yeah. He encouraged her to sign his name on her artworks, and sell them as his artworks. She refused.

E: Ohh, good.

H: Fair enough.

A: And she signed them with "Rosa", which was the nickname that her mother called her.

In 1836, when she was 14, Raimond was commissioned to paint 12-year-old Nathalie Micas, who was the daughter of a wealthy manufacturing family, and around this time, Rosa had had a dream in which she saw a pale, brown-haired girl descending an old staircase towards her. And when she went round to the Micas house, to accompany her father when he was doing his paintings, she saw the staircase, she recognised the staircase, and then Nathalie came down the staircase towards, and she recognised the girl from her dream. This story comes from Rosa's biography, like....

[laughter]

H: I was about to...

A: Take it with a grain of salt. This is what Rosa says happened.

Nathalie was a very pale, sickly child. Her parents wanted to have her portrait painted because they thought she was probably about to die of TB.

H: This is all very gothic.

A: [laughs] Yeah, it is. Yeah.

H: Hm. It's like the wholesome farm girl comes to the big manor house and the sickly pale woman descends the stairs.

A: Yeah, there's secret societies.

H: Yeah.

A: And prophetic dreams.

E: There's also paintings of sheep.

A: Yeah there are paintings of sheep.

H and A: [laugh]

A: That's true. So the Bonheur and Micas families became very close. Nathalie and Rosa became friends. With the encouragement of Nathalie's parents, Rosa rented her own studio so she could start kind of having her own career separate from her father. So Nathalie would come and meet her at her studio and they would work hard at art and Rosa would help teach Nathalie to draw, and then they would stop and grill food over their little cast-iron stove. Nathalie began to recover from her illness. She didn't die of TB.

H: Well that's good.

A: Which is a good outcome. So Rosa said of this time, "Nathalie would come to my little studio every morning. There we worked and lived, just the two of us, never opening the door to any flirting man."

H: Was that a problem? Were there like door-to-door Mormons, or...?

A: [laughs] Rosa's father had remarried, and Rosa's step-mother was pretty determined at matchmaking, so I think two of Rosa's four siblings married relatives of the step-mother, and she was kind of hoping to set Rosa up and Rosa was just not interested at all.

E: How old is she now?

A: So this is from when she's in her early teens to when she's about 26.

E: Okay. Is Nathalie like, the same age-ish?

A: Nathalie's about a year younger I think. Two years younger maybe. Yep, they're about the same age.

And in 1848, when she's 26, Nathalie's father died. And on his deathbed, he acknowledged Nathalie and Rosa's relationship as being very important, and he said to Rosa's father, "Let our two children stay together always. You see how much they love each other. Rosa needs Nathalie to love and protect her." Before he died he blessed Nathalie and Rosa, and he said, "Never leave each other's side my dear children, and may God keep you," and Rosa says, "Nathalie and I was always together after that."

The next year, in 1849, when Rosa is 27, Rosa's father died. Once he died Rosa left her family - so that's her step-mother and her three younger siblings - to move in with Nathalie and Nathalie's mother. And Rosa's step-mother was quite angry about this, but Rosa said, "Wasn't I entitled to follow my heart and go live with my friends? Had I married, would I have stayed with her?" But she continued to provide financial support for her family through her art.

E: So Nathalie's her wife.

A: Yeah. Nathalie is conceptually her wife at this point. Nathalie, despite having recovered from her supposedly deadly TB, was still quite sick, and she's quite sick throughout her life, and so in 1853, Nathalie's mother paid for Rosa and Nathalie to take a holiday to the Pyrenees together, and then also to Brussels. They really enjoyed the Pyrenees, but they didn't enjoy Brussels and Rosa writes that there was no bread, only potatoes, and that's her greatest complaint about Brussels.

H: Suck it, Brussels.

A: Yeah. [laughs] Sorry, Brussels. She was also really upset that they drank water with their meals, not beer or wine. She couldn't cope with that.

H: That is kind of a weird thing at that time.

A: Mm, yeah, I don't know why that was in that area. I would have assumed they would have drunk beer, but.... But the interesting thing about these is that both Nathalie and Rosa dressed in trousers and rode their horses astride, rather than side-saddle during their travels.

E: Side-saddle is just honestly such a dumb concept.

A: Yeah, I can't envision how side-saddle is a secure way to sit on a horse.

E: I've been in a side-saddle and it's bad.

A: Did you fall off the horse?

E: No, but I didn't feel stable at like any point.

A: Yeah.

H: Mm, yeah like, I've fallen off horses plenty of times astride, and I would not want to do anything sideways.

A: Yeah, and people like, gallop side-saddle.

H: How?

E: How do you trot side-saddle? You can't post side-saddle can you?

A: I don't... I've never been side-saddle on a horse.

E: You just have to go straight from like zero to sixty on a horse.

[laughter]

H: No in-between.

E: Yeah.

A: I don't really know, but anyway, they didn't ride side-saddle.

E: Anyway, yes.

A: 'Cause side-saddle is dumb.

E: Yep. They rode horses sensibly.

A: They rode horses sensibly but actually at this time it was illegal for a woman to wear pants in France.

H: Oh, really!

A: So this was quite a big deal, and they risked fines and possibly even jail time.

H: Wait, weren't they in Belgium?

A: On their way.

H: Right, right.

A: When they were in the Pyrenees.

H: Okay, yep.

A: But you could seek a permit to wear trousers—

E and H: [laugh]

A: —for health reasons.

E: Okay.

H: I would very much like to get a copy of this form.

A: I have a copy of this form and I'll post it on our blog. [laughs]

H: Please!

E: Oh good.

A: [laughs] I mean I have a copy of Rosa's permit that she got.

H: Okay.

A: It's not entirely clear how she managed to get this permit, 'cause there were no health reasons why Rosa couldn't ride a horse side-saddle.

H: I mean, given the state of health education she could have just said, "I have some sort of hand-wavey lady problems" and they'd be like "I'm too embarrassed to ask what that is, so let's go."

[laughter]

A: That's probably true.

E: Did you have to get a certificate or something?

A: Yeah, yeah.

E: Yeah? Okay.

A: She has like a signed form that I assume she had to carry with her, I guess, if like a cop stopped her and was like, "What's those pants?" she would have been like "It's fine!"

E: "Here's my pants permit"? Oh man.

A: Yeah. [laughs]

H: My trouser licence.

A and E: My trouser licence. [laugh]

A: Yeah, so her and Nathalie got their trouser licences. This instance of riding her horse astride is not the only time we see Rosa wear men's clothing. She's pretty often in the habit of wearing men's clothing. She also had quite short hair which had been cut when her mother died because she had no mother to look after her long hair, and so she's generally described as appearing quite masculine, but Rosa liked to make it clear that she didn't not wear women's clothing out of any disdain for it or out of any disdain for her female identity or femininity, and she actually said, "I strongly disapprove of women who refuse to wear normal clothes because they want to pass themselves off as men. If I

thought trousers suited women I would have given up on skirts altogether. But that's not the case. Women's clothes are quite simply always in the way."

E: So wait – why does she not like women wearing men's clothes? What was the reason she gave in the middle there?

A: I think she says, "I don't like it... I strongly disagree with women who wear men's clothes to pass themselves off as men" but there are definitely instances of Rosa passing herself off as a man, which we'll come to.

E: Well I suppose we should talk about the reasons for those then and then return to this.

A: So yeah, we'll talk about this a little bit; I'll give you some more background and reasons and then we can think about that. Rosa's reasons for wearing trousers other than the fact that skirts are physically inhibiting, is she spent much of her time in male sphere, so for her work she would go to horse fairs, and she would go to slaughterhouses to see animals and to paint animals.

E: She went to slaughterhouses to paint animals! [laughs]

A: Yeah, she did. She painted some sort of like "On the way to the slaughter" kind of painting and stuff.

E: Hm.

H: *Half cow in moonlight.*

[shocked laughter]

H: Sorry.

A: Yeah, and she enjoyed going out riding and hunting, and so trousers made it easier for her to physically move around, also easier for her to sort of stay safe and not draw attention to herself as a woman in a space without any women in it. Another thing she liked about wearing trousers was it enabled her to smoke without judgement.

H: Huh.

A: So it was more acceptable for men than women to smoke.

E: So is she being perceived as a man when she's smoking and in all of these all-male environments or is she just less immediately notable?

A: It's... Sometimes people do meet her on the street and think they're speaking to a man.

E: Uh-huh.

A: Sometimes it's just, you know, if you glance at the room you don't go, "Oh, there's all these men. And this woman."

E: Yes.

A: So it's just not an obvious stand-out. So it's not all the time one or the other.

E: Okay.

A: In terms of smoking, she often wore trousers under her skirt, either 'cause she'd gotten changed quickly or for ease of changing back into the trousers, and in terms of smoking there was one point

where she was in Paris and she was smoking, and her agent said to her, "Rosa, you can't do that. You can't be smoking in public," and she just kind of pulled off her skirt, and was like "Don't worry, I'm in trousers now!"

H: [laughs]

A: And continued smoking.

E: And just held the skirt?!

A: [laughs]

E: Held like curtains-amount of fabric over one arm while smoking?

A: I think she was like, at or near her carriage.

E: Oh, okay.

A: And just kind of like went into the carriage. [laugh]

E: Imagine her handing it to the agent.

A: Yeah.

E: And being like, "Take care of that."

A: [laughs] She also enjoyed, once she got more famous from her art, she enjoyed dressing in male clothing, walking around the streets, not being identified as Rosa Bonheur, and like, striking up casual conversation with people where they might happen to talk about what they thought of Rosa Bonheur.

E and H: [laugh]

E: Okay.

A: [laughs] Ah, yes.

E: "Seen any good horse paintings lately?"

[laughter]

A: Yeah, I'm not really sure if she just kind of waited for this to drop into conversation or if she was like, "So what do you think of that artist?" [laughs] I'm going to stop here 'cause that was most of my background on her wearing trousers, if anyone had any additional comments they wanted to make about that, now we know as much as we can about her reasons.

E: I mean I still don't really get the distinction she's making between...

A: No, I don't either. I don't either.

H: Do we know what the context of that statement was? Was someone saying, "I don't approve of you wearing pants!" and she's like "I.... I... I certainly don't approve of people wearing pants either, good buddy."

A: I'm not entirely sure. I can't recall the exact context of that quote I'm afraid.

H: Okay. 'Cause I could definitely see something like that being defensive.

E: Mm.

A: Mm, that's true, that's true. Well we'll continue, and it'll come up again if you have any more thoughts.

E: So she's just kind of being like, "Oh, I just do it for ease. I don't do it to pass myself off as a man. Anyway I'm going to go to this horse show now where coincidentally I will be taken as a man for the entire duration."

A: Yeah, yeah:

H: Yep.

A: Yeah.

H: I mean she also might have just been carrying around a double-pocketful of internalised homophobia.

A: Mm.

H: I think it's probably important not to try and put the best light on everything.

A: That's very true, yeah. That is very true. Yeah, so Rosa was getting more famous and she didn't really like the attention she received from being famous, she preferred to just kind of like hide in her house and paint. We know she was receiving a lot of fan-mail, because she used to not like reading her fan-mail but Nathalie used to bring it to her and read her the funny parts of the fan-mail.

H: That's kind of cute.

A: And eventually Rosa decided that she was going to move out of Paris, and to the country, to a house so she could be far away from everyone. She said, "It had to be far away from any commotion, and so isolated that I could let myself go and live in the forest and the fields." So the house she found was chateau in the town of By, which is hell to google because it's spelt B-Y, and is just the word 'by'. She bought the house in 1859 and she moved in at the end of that year along with Nathalie and Nathalie's mother. They also had a maid called Celine who worked at the house and Celine apparently – Rosa doesn't like, actively confirm this but it probably happened – used to take out their horse and cart and drag it along the driveway to make it look like Rosa had left the house for the day so no visitors would come and see her.

H: [laughs]

E: Hm!

A: Okay, so this is a good moment for us to talk a bit about Nathalie, now that the two of them have got their own nice little house together. One friend of Rosa and Nathalie talks about seeing the couple and says, "Nothing was more comical than seeing this couple together. Rosa Bonheur, who in her blouse looked a lad, and that tall, lank, pale woman with her head crowned by a big hat with black and red plumes, who pronounced with a prophetic and dramatic tone pompous periods which had neither head nor tail."

H: [laughs]

E: What?

A: [laughs] She was just very kind of melodramatic and very—

E: I like her.

A: —overdressed. Yep, she's good.

E: I mean I guess having TB as a child—

A: I dunno.

E: —could do that.

A: She was like, "It's gothic novel? Okay, I'm doing it."

E: Commit!

H: [laughs] Commit really hard, yeah.

E: Yeah.

A: She had a couple of hobbies which I enjoy. One of them was veterinary medicine.

E: Sure. Every little girl's dream.

A: [laughs]

H: I mean that certainly synergises very well with her partner's profession.

E: Yeah.

A: It does, 'cause Rosa kept a lot of animals and the house, and Nathalie looked after them.

H: Perfect!

E: So what types of animals?

A: I have a list, and then—

E: Excellent!

A: —some extra ones which we'll talk about.

E: Okay.

A: So one list from while they were living at this house said they had one horse—

E: Mmhm.

A: —one he-goat, one otter, seven lapwings, two hoopoes – which I think are a type of monkey?

H: Yeah, no no no. Hoopoes are a type of bird.

A: Oh, a bird. Okay.

H: It's like a—

E: What's a... Is a lapwing a bird?

H: Yes.

A: A lapwing is a bird.

H: What with the wing.

A: One monkey—

E: Yeah, well, you know, I thought it was worth confirming.

H: Yeah, fair.

A: Yep.

H: Like it could be a lizard or something, I'd believe.

A: I'd believe that.

E: Yeah.

H: I'm pretty sure it's a bird.

A: I assumed it was a bird.

H: Yeah. I've heard the word before and I've been like—

A: —“Sounds bird.”

H: Yeah.

E: I mean I suppose the other thing I would believe it is like, an insect of some sort and we can probably rule those out.

H: Mm.

A: Yeah. One monkey, one chimp, one donkey, two dogs. I'm trying to think what else she had. She had lions at one point.

H: Oh wow!

E: Multiple lions but only one horse?

A: [laughs] She gets more horses that was just like a specific—

E: Okay.

A: —list from one time.

E: Yep. I was just imaging her like, painting the horse and just painting it different colours to pretend she was painting multiple horses.

[laughter]

A: She also had Shetland ponies.

E: Oh!

A: There's a little sketch that a friend did of her with her Shetland ponies in the forest.

H: So at least 1.5 horses.

E: Yes.

A: So 1.5 horse. The otter used to escape from its tank and crawl into Nathalie's bed and Nathalie would get in bed and be like, “Ohhh nooo!”

H: That's adorable!

[laughter]

E: That is quite cute.

H: Do we know, because as we've learned this is an important source of comedy material—

A: Yes?

H: —do we know what the monkey's name was?

E: [laughs]

A: No, I know that she had both a squirrel, when she was a child, and a boar when she was an adult, called Kiki.

H: Okay.

A: She had a dog called Wasp.

H: [laughs]

A: I'm trying to think of other ones. Her lions, one was called Nero, one was called Fathma.

E: Okay.

A: But no, I don't know the monkey's name.

H: Fair.

A: Oh, I do have another story about the monkey, and I'm trying to remember if this was when she was living in this house, or earlier when she was a child if she had a different monkey. But the monkey, because it was a monkey, used to try and imitate her and do what she was doing and so the monkey would try and paint.

E: Ohh!

A: And so sometimes when she went out it would get at the paints and start painting her canvas for her.

E: Oh my God!

[laughter]

A: Yep.

H: That's fantastic.

E: Excellent. You could sell that for a lot of money these days.

A: You could!

E: Yeah.

A: But at the time you could not. [laughs]

H: Do we need a monkey?

A: I think we do need to get a monkey.

E: We need a new microphone. We have to get a monkey as an in-between step.

A: Yeah.

Nathalie's other interest was engineering.

H: Okay!

E: She has a such serious hobbies.

A: She does, yeah. She's not a chill person in any way. So she designed a new brake for steam trains, and in the gardens of their chateau she built a little steam railway so she could test out her new steam train brake, and she used to invite all her friends over to come and ride on her train and test the break.

H: That is fantastic!

A: And sometimes it wouldn't work.

H: [laughs]

A: And they would all just kind of fall out of the train.

[laughter]

E: So she started a train and was like, "Maybe it'll stop, maybe it won't!"

A: Yeah.

E: "Get on!"

A: Yeah. And her friends were like, "Okay!" and they did.

[laughter]

H: "Seven slightly muddled in horrible train accident."

[laughter]

A: Yeah, sounds like it was a very small train and nobody got hurt. Eventually she like successfully designed this steam train brake and she patented it, and no-one would take it seriously 'cause she was a woman and she wasn't a qualified engineer.

H: Lame.

A: Lame, yeah. Like a year or so later another man designed essentially the same thing and it went into use.

H: I can see the like, this person isn't a qualified engineer thing, though.

A: I mean she could prove it worked with her home railway.

E: That's such commitment.

A: Yeah.

E: "I'll just build a little railway in my yard."

A: Yeah.

E: "Where my lions live."

A: [laughs] Yes.

Rosa owned the house—

H: Mhm.

A: —and Nathalie's mother had a thirty-year lease on the house, on her rooms of the house, which was set up so it would transfer to Nathalie on her mother's death. And Rosa said, "You understand that the point of all this mumbo-jumbo was to set up a union that nothing short of death could disrupt."

H: Well that's pretty clear.

A: Yep, that's pretty clear. It's getting clearer in a minute. So Nathalie and her mother looked after the kitchen, looked after the animals, did the housework, and that gave Rosa time to focus on her painting. And Nathalie kind of worked as Rosa's agent, negotiating the sale of her paintings and stuff like that.

E: I feel like Nathalie has four jobs.

A: [laughs] Nathalie does have four jobs and she's also like, quite sickly. Yeah, so Rosa did absolutely see this as being a marriage, and she said, "What would my life have been without Nathalie's love and devotion? Yet people tried to give our love a bad name. Had I been a man, I would have married her and nobody could have dreamed up all these silly stories."

E: So they're married.

A: So they're married.

E: You always have women who have wives.

A: Yeah, there's just a lot of women out there who just had wives, and everyone was just kind of fine about it.

E: We just accidentally do this so often.

A: Yeah, it was quite common. She does say "Nobody would have dreamed up all these silly stories" and I'm not clear on what the silly stories about the couple were, or what sort of problems they faced as a female couple living in this time. I think it was probably things like – and we see this later on in her life – Nathalie being accused of just kind of living off Rosa and stuff like that.

E: Well if she'd been allowed to patent her steam engine brake...

[laughter]

A: That's true. She could have brought in money for the family.

In 1880, when Rosa was awarded the title of Commander of the Royal Order of Isabella the Catholic for her art she wrote to her sister she said, "Nathalie is as proud as the wife of an old soldier."

H: So she was getting a lot recognition for her art!

A: Yeah! She was quite famous. Queen Victoria actually at one point – one of her paintings, *The Horse Fair*, Queen Victoria requested that it come over to England and Rosa went over with her painting to England to show it to Queen Victoria. Like, she was incredibly well-known.

H: Wow!

A: Yeah. She has been called the most famous female artist of the 19th century. I'd never heard of her.

E: Neither had I.

[laughter]

H: To be fair, I don't know that I actually know any female artist from the 19th century.

A: That's true, I don't think I could name a *more* famous one, so yeah.

E: I barely know painters from the 19th century though.

A: Like Monet and stuff?

E: Yeah, but like, "Monet and stuff."

H: [laughs]

A: Van Gogh?

H: And, um... the big English landscape painter.

A: Turner?

H: Turner, there you go.

A: Yeah.

E: Oh man, that's such a generic name that I'm vaguely aware that there's like, an English landscape painter, but if you ever asked me his name I'm just like, "Mmmmm?"

A: Yeah.

H: Yeah, you could just like throw names at the wall so it looks like we know painters. Smiths! Scott!

A: [laughs]

E: Johnson!

H: Parson! [laughs]

A: So during the time they lived together, both Nathalie and Rosa received several marriage proposals from men which they always turned down.

E: Just like, random dudes, or....?

A: There's no like, specific men that came up in her biographies, that's like "this man she was quite close to and wanted to marry her" so yeah, I guess just random dudes.

E: Cool. I mean I guess once you get like rich and famous....

A: Yeah, that's probably true. Once you're rich and famous.

E: Yeah.

A: And there's like, two single women who are rich and famous—

E: Yeah. Yeah yeah yeah.

H: Mm.

A: —you're going to propose to them.

H: Someone rocks up and is like, "Hello, I'm attractive. I would like to exchange that for money now please."

A: Pretty much, yeah. But Rosa always said that the vows that they'd made on Nathalie's father's deathbed saying they would stay together forever, were very important to them, and that she was never going to leave Nathalie for a man. She also said, "In the way of males, I only like the bulls that I paint."

[laughter]

E: Alright.

A: In 1870, in August, France declared war on Prussia.

H: That will go well!

A: That goes terribly.

E: [laughs]

A: [laughs] Prussian soldiers were advancing towards Paris. By is in between Prussia and Paris. Prussia invaded quite successfully. [laughs] Rosa describes her reaction to this as "I had a patriotic fit." So she was very determined to defend her home. She rounded up weapons and all her friends who knew how to shoot from like, hunting together and stuff like that. She had them undertaking military exercises in her home.

E and H: [laugh]

A: So she planned to organise all her friends who could shoot into a citizen militia—

E: Mmhm.

A: —to help fight off the Prussians. And she took her citizens militia to the mayor, and then she says, "However sad he was about the deplorable state of the nation, the mayor couldn't hold back a smile that froze down to the depths of my soul" when he saw that there was a women trying to lead a citizens militia, and he told he she should confine herself to rolling bandages and sending supplies off to the front. But she didn't. She regularly trained with the local home guard, which was all male except for her.

E: Hm.

A: And she would go out with her neighbours and they would go and shoot Prussian sentinels in the forest.

E: Okay.

H: Wow.

A: [laughs] Yeah.

H: [laughs] You've made this sound way more sporting and jocular than it must have been.

A: [laughs] Well, I think that was something I was going to say is the tone of this part of her biography, which is – I'll a bit more about this later, but I'd say something like a ghostwritten autobiography—

E: Mm.

H: Okay.

A: —is very kind of jovial and I had to kind of look up the Franco-Prussian to be like, “Oh no! They were really like genuinely at war and people were dying, and people were starving to death.”

H: Huh.

A: But she's like, pretty like jovial about it, and occasionally she also writes letters saying, “I might die soon”, but yeah, the tone was weird.

E: I definitely thought this would be a kind of Enid Blyton-vibe episode, and it has been, just also she's shooting people in the woods.

A: Yeah, yeah. I was confused by how serious this situation was when I was doing this research.

H: *The Famous Five Conduct Guerrilla Warfare.*

A: [laughs]

E: Oh my God.

A: She talked about – and I don't know if she ever did this – wiring her home with explosives, so if the Prussians invaded the town she could blow it up and they wouldn't get it.

H: Oh wow!

A: I don't know if she ever did. It wasn't clear, but I hope she did.

[laughter]

H: I'm definitely imagining Nathalie like, 20 years later being like, “Darling...”

E and A: [laugh]

H: “Did we ever diffuse those...”

[laughter]

A: Yes... Yeah I feel like Nathalie was probably in charge of the explosives.

E: Yeah, woah, yeah.

A: [laughs]

H: Oh, I want to read this adventure novel now. Hm. I suppose you feel like, 25 people picking off loan sentries in the woods, and it seems like you don't have much danger coming back at you and it's kind of like going out for some partridge shooting, boys and girls!

A: [laughs]

H: I can see how that would be kind of fun and pastoral and everyone'd get to put their hunting boots on—

A: Mm....

H: —and go and shoot living people with families.

A: Mm, yeah...

E: If she's couching this in like, you know, this deep deep patriotism as well...

A: Mmhm. So actually, Rosa was quite safe because the Prince of Prussia, Frederic Charles, was a fan—

H: [laughs]

A: —of hers.

H: Wow.

A: [laughs] And one day, during the war, somebody came and delivered her a letter which was a letter of safe conduct from the Prince of Prussia, saying, you know, "Yes, we've taken over your country but we're not going to harm you or your home."

H: Okay.

A: And Rosa was very angry and she tore up the letter, and she said, "I won't be treated any better than the peasants in my village. I'm not standing for this."

H: "But darling, I already started unrigging the explosives!"

[laughter]

E: This whole thing is just Nathalie putting up and taking down explosives.

[laughter]

A: At one point, Frederic Charles actually dropped by the house.

H: No!

E: Did she take him hostage?

A: So he turned up at the door...

E: Yeah?

A: And the maid, Celine, was there...

H: Mmhm.

A: And he was like, "Oh, I'd like to come in and see the studio. Like, I'm a massive fan," and they were like, "Get out of here." And so he left, and then Rosa was talking to Celine later and she was like, "You got rid of him, right?" Celine was like, "Yeah, yeah," and then Celine was like, "Oh, he wanted to take some paintbrushes as a souvenir, and I was like, "No! Get out of here."" And Rosa was like, "Aww. You should have just given him paintbrushes."

H: [laughs] I... I can't get a read on this at all.

A: No. Nor could I.

E: Yeah, okay.

A: But yeah, so she did get safe conduct, despite tearing up her letter, and so there was one story, her servants went into town with the wagon to buy some food for them, and the Prussian soldiers in town tried to requisition their wagon, and the servants knew about this safe conduct, and they sort of went, "No no no, that's Rosa Bonheur's wagon! You can't take this wagon!" And then Prussian soldiers went, "No, we need this wagon. We need to get the wounded out, like, we need to save people's lives." And the servants were like, "Well, you're soldiers and you've taken the wagon now..." And the next day they brought it back, and they were like, "Look, we were sorry, it was an emergency, but now we've saved those people, we've brought back your wagon, 'cause like, we respect you, and our prince is a fan."

H: [laughs]

E: Okay...

H: Oh man, 19th century, not even once.

A: Yeah, so like, it's weird. It's weird.

H: I can definitely imagine that for weeks afterwards every wagon in town was Rosa Bonheur's wagon.

E: [laughs]

A: Yeah, there's another similar story about her horse.

H: Mmhm.

A: Not the same story, but like, there's a similar thing where somebody's riding her horse and then they're like, "Oh no, I'm riding Rosa's horse!" and the sentinels are like, "Sorry. Sorry. Keep going."

H: [laughs]

E: Mm.

A: So, yeah.

E: That does contribute to her having this kind of like, adventure romp through the war.

H and A: Yeah.

E: You know, there's not really a consequence 'cause your wagon will just come back tomorrow.

A: Yeah, she herself is perfectly safe.

H: Do we know if she was still actively leading a militia at this time?

A: I got the impression she was actively leading a militia throughout the war. It was a very short war.

H: Okay.

A: It's only a few months.

H: 'Cause the other thing that I could picture happening is being like, "We dropped by the house.... It's kind of awkward now."

A: [laughs]

H: You know?

A and E: [laugh]

A: Yeah, yeah. She was very happy when they dropped by the house that her stag, sort of as they walked past the stag, jumped into the pond...

H: [laughs]

A: It was probably like, frightened by them walking past. But it splashed mud all over their nice uniforms.

H: That's really...

A: She was really happy.

[laughter]

E: So it jumped into the pond?

A: I don't know.

E: It just awkwardly was like, "Well I'm here now. I'll guess I'll pretend it was deliberate."

[laughter]

A: I don't know.

The war, which had started in August 1870, ended in January 1871. An armistice was declared, and everything was kind of fine. That's not a true statement about like, French politics, but from Rosa's point of view, that's her interaction with international affairs done.

Four years later, Nathalie's mother died, which was very hard on both Nathalie and Rosa, but Rosa also says that it brought them together and it strengthened their relationship. They lived together a further 14 years, but Nathalie had always been quite sick, and in 1889 she died at their home in By in Rosa's arms.

H: How old was she?

A: She would have been in her 60s.

H: Okay.

A: So yeah, she lived a reasonable life for someone who was supposed to die of TB at 12.

H: Yeah.

A: Rosa was absolutely heartbroken. She stopped painting for several months. She sold the villa where they had spent their winters down in Nice for a very low sum because she just wanted to get rid of it; she couldn't bear to see that place where they'd spent time together. Even five years later she said, "Since my dear Nathalie has gone from me, the world is an object of indifference." So for many years after Nathalie's death she lived largely in solitude and she took refuge in her painting.

The same year that Nathalie died, Rosa met for the first time an American woman named Anna Klumpke. Like Rosa, Anna was an artist. She was currently studying in Paris, but she came from San Francisco. In 1889, while Rosa was 63, Anna was just 29. Anna had heard of Rosa, who was very famous, while she was growing up. She'd idolised her, she had been one of her inspirations to become an artist, and like many girls in America at that time, Anna had had a Rosa Bonheur doll as a child.

E: Oh my God!

H: Of the person?

A: Of the person, yeah. A doll of Rosa, which was reasonably common for American girls at the time to have.

H: Little weird.

A: Yeah.

E: I mean, are they about to hook up?

A: Yeah.

E: Little weird...

[laughter]

H: Hm.

A: Yeah!

E: Little bit. I don't feel like you at any point successfully conveyed how famous she is, and you just occasionally drop in things like, "Queen Victoria wanted her painting" and "American girls had dolls of her!" and we're just like, "What the f—?"

A: Yeah, because she's spent her life as kind of in this little chateau kind of in this little town in France, and she often said, you know, "I could be much richer if I wanted to, but I'm not really interested in that." So she was quite isolated from the level of fame that she actually had in the world. But she was incredibly famous.

E: Do you have a picture of one of these dolls?

A: Yeah, yeah. It's on the internet. I googled it while I was researching this episode. So we'll have a look and put it on the blog. Or we can google it now and see how you feel.

So they became friends, but Anna went back to America in 1891. She briefly returned in 1895 and on her meeting with Rosa she said, "We had just stepped out of the train at Moret" – which is the station where she's meeting Rosa – "when a little old gent came right up and kissed me. I shrank back, until I recognised Rosa Bonheur." So Rosa had thought it would be fun to dress as a man to come and meet Anna and not be recognised.

H: Okay.

E: Oh, I see, okay. Cool. Does she have on like a fake moustache?

A: I don't know. I don't think she does but people often think she's a little old man at this point.

E: Yeah.

H: Certainly when everything starts to sort of wrinkle up—

[laughter]

H: —and all of your gender markers are like, pruney...

E: This sounds like someone being like, "This is how humans talk. I am an alien undercover!"

[laugh]

E: "And all of your 'gender markers' am I right, fellow humans?"

H and A: [laugh]

A: So she visited Rosa briefly in 1895. Rosa was very happy to see her, came up and kissed her at the train station, and sent Anna away with flowers and paintings. She asked for Anna to give her a portrait of herself to keep while Anna was gone. She also asked Anna to get her some buffalo grass from America, because she wanted to make a realistic painting of wild American horses in the prairies. So Anna went back to America. Buffalo grass grows in the absolute middle of nowhere, and she was like, "How the hell am I going to get this?" but she was very determined.

E: She got sent on a quest!

[laughter]

E: By her childhood doll!

A: [laughs]

H: Oh wow!

A: She did. So she ended up signing up for this – there was this Christian group that were going across America to the west coast to go to this kind of Christian conference there, and she signed up for that so she could be on the train going across the middle of America, and she kind of hoped that, you know, the journey's going to be very boring, they're going to stop on the way to make it interesting – I'll get out and get some grass.

H: Hm.

A: But as the train went along she was like, "They're not stopping on the way, they're trying to get this done as soon as possible."

H: [laughs]

A: And she had to go up to the driver and be like, "Look. This is the story. I just really need some of that grass," and they were like "Ahhh?" and she was like, "It's for Rosa Bonheur," and they were like, "...Fine."

E: [laughs]

A: So they stopped the train and she got out of the train and got her grass and everyone else on the train was like, "What the hell is going on?" and then she got back on the train, she posted her grass to Rosa. It was all good.

H: "So why are you here on this Christian mission, young lady?"

[laughter]

H: "Well I would like to bang a lady."

A: [laughs]

H: "I also need to kill five giant rats, bring her their pelts..."

A: [laughs] Anyway, she's got the grass.

H: Mhm.

A: So she sends it back to Rosa and they have a correspondence going on. Anna is a portrait artist, and she really wants to paint Rosa's portrait, but she's too scared to ask.

E: Aww....

A: And she's talking to a friend about it, and her friend says to her, "The woman who writes you these sweet letters won't say no. Besides, doesn't she want to see you again? She said so twice, didn't she, in the same letter?" Anna talks about planning for ages to write this letter, kind of planning out the letter in her head, and then chickening out, and not writing the letter, and writing the letter and not sending the letter.

H: Oh man.

E: This is relatable content.

A: [laughs]

H: I just connected with Anna way more than I expected to.

A: [laughs]

E: Yeah.

A: But eventually she sits down, she writes the letter, and she says, you know, "It was the 14th of September, this date is seared in my brain. I finally wrote and sent this letter, saying "Can I paint your portrait?" And she just doesn't get a reply.

H: Ohh!

A: And she thinks, "What's happened?" and it eventually gets to New Year, and she thinks, "It's okay, I'll send her a Happy New Year letter and just like, pretend that never happened and we'll continue our correspondence." And she sends a Happy New Year letter, and Rosa gets back to her and says, "Oh! And, you know, you never get back to me about that portrait." And Rosa had received her letter and written her reply, saying, you know "Of course! I'd love you to paint my portrait!" and it had got lost in the mail.

E: Aww....

H: Oh.... This is such a rom-com.

E: Yeah.

A: And Rosa said, you know, she received Anna's letter, and she said, "I treasured it. I memorised it."

E: Aww!

A: "I wrote back straight away," and.... But eventually they sorted it out. [laughs]

H: Man, this would have been so much easier with texting.

E: Mm.

A: "Hey, can I paint you?" "Sure."

H: Smiley emoji.

A: Heart emoji. Anna writes in her biography, "Victory was mine."

[laughter]

H: Nice.

A: She heads back to France at the first opportunity, and she thinks she going to be gone for about three months, paint the portrait, come back home to America. Spoilers: that's not what happens.

[laughter]

A: She arrives on the 11th of June to paint the portrait.

H: Mmhm.

A: So they didn't start painting until after the 13th, 'cause Anna was superstitious and she wouldn't paint on the 13th. So the idea was that Anna would stay at By with Rosa while she painted this painting, then she would head home. Rosa—

E: They get married, don't they?

A: Yeah, they get married.

[laughter]

A: Spoilers! Rosa chose to wear a dress for the portrait, saying, "I don't like the idea of appearing at the Salon" – which was the major art exhibition in Paris – "in my smock. I want to leave posterity the image of me in women's clothes."

E: Okay.

A: But for the sittings she wore her smock 'cause she didn't want to bother putting on a dress, and she ended really like the studies – the little sketches – that Anna had done of her in her smock, and so Anna ended up painting two portraits.

H: Ah!

A: So one in a dress and one in a smock.

Rosa was a very difficult subject to paint. She refused to sit for long; she refused to sit every day; when she did sit for Anna she was very critical of Anna's work, and she would say "Oh, you know, you need to do more studies. You need to do more preliminary sketches. You can't just start straight on the canvas. That's not how people paint. That's wrong."

H: I mean that definitely sounds like somebody whose painted animals their whole life, where they don't think it's important to sit still for long.

A: Yeah, no, I think that's probably true as well, yeah. She wasn't keen to like, sit down for a few hours and have her portrait painted.

E: I'm just imagining her now moving her easel after a like, grazing cow.

A and H: [laugh]

H: On a little buggy.

A: She did specifically say that if she was painting an animal and it moved, she had to just like, accept that, and paint it in the new pose, and hope it returned to the old pose. [laughs]

E: Hm.

A: One of Anna's teachers – Tony Robert Fleury – said to her that Anna was making a mistake in agreeing to stay at By while she painted Rosa, and she should just get her studies down and then go to her own studio and paint there, and it would be less stressful and frustrating.

H: Mm.

A: And Rosa didn't want Anna to do that; Rosa wanted Anna to stay with her. And Tony said, "You may be making a mistake in letting her entice you to remain there. You'd be much freer in a rented studio. Try and change her mind. That may be hard, because she's so bossy and seductive all at the same time."

E: [laughs]

A: So Anna was getting very frustrated with that, but despite that conflict, they also grew very close and they got along very well. Rosa taught Anna to smoke without making faces.

[laughter]

E: How does she smoke? Like with a pipe or with a...?

A: I think it's a pipe.

E: Yeah, okay.

A: But she may also smoke cigars. I can't remember.

E: One in each hand.

A: And also one day Rosa was talking to Anna and said that although Rosa was very popular in America she'd never actually received any kind of awards over there, and Anna said, you know, "Well you deserve an award from an American," and so she went out to the garden and she picked some laurel leaves and she made Rosa a little wreath.

E and H: Awww!

A: And she put it on her head, and Rosa was very very happy with this.

H: That's brilliant.

A: And she hung it up on her wall and she kept it for the rest of her life. Before we continue I have to read you my favourite segment from Anna's diary in this time.

After dinner, mademoiselle had me admire her beautiful trees and took me into the paddock where she used to keep the stag that was her model for The King of the Forest.

–which is her famous stag painting–

Then she said in a brusque tone: "I see you're not taking my advice. You prefer Monsieur Tony's.

–so he's the one who said that Anna should have her own studio–

Slow down, and don't take him too literally."

As I made no reply, she unhooked a heavy chain from a grate and shot me a mischievously threatening look: "This is still good for tying up a naughty beast."

"Like an Anna Klumpke?" – I said

"That's right," she laughed, "an Anna Klumpke. I'd love to tie her up so that she'd have to start my portrait over and over again."

E: Wow, okay.

A: [laughs] Yep.

H: Wow, that, ah...

A: So that occurred.

H: It definitely sounded at first like, I got a vibe of "If you screw up my portrait, I'll bury you in the woods."

A: [laughs]

E: My God!

A: No! It was.... No! Not at all.

H: But then it got queer and sexy, so I mean...

A: Then it got queer and sexy.

While Anna had been staying with Rosa at one point Rosa had given Anna a palette which Rosa had signed as a memento for her to take to America with her when she left.

H: Mmhm.

A: And one day when Anna had been there for about a month and a half, Rosa asked if she could borrow the palette, because she need another one for her painting and Anna wasn't using it. And Anna said that Rosa couldn't because Anna wanted to keep it uncovered in paint to remember Rosa by when she returned to Boston where she was living in America. And Rosa responded, "Oh, so you really love me." And Anna said, "Yes, believe me." And in Anna's diary she then writes, "Since then we've scarcely exchanged a word, but sometimes she stares at me with great intensity."

E: She sounds like a such an intense person.

A: I think she is. Yeah.

E: Yeah.

A: So I think we know where this is going, so I'm going to tell you 'cause I like this, the next chapter of the biography which Anna wrote of Rosa is titled *Rosa Bonheur Makes Me Promise To Live With Her Forever After*.

H: Well that's a concise chapter title. [laughs]

A: [laughs] Yeah.

E: It definitely escalates though.

A: It does escalate. The next day – I'll read the excerpt from the diary:

Late this afternoon, Rosa Bonheur came into the studio where I was working. She turned around and placed her hands on my shoulders. While I gazed at her in surprise, she asked in tones of tender supplication: "Anna, will you stay here and share my life?"

E: Aww.

A: So Anna's pretty overwhelmed by this, and she's kind of not sure how to react and so she tells Rosa, "No, I have to think about this. This is a big deal." So she goes away to her to think about it, and that night they have dinner together, and Anna says, like, it's pretty silent, it's pretty awkward.

H: Oh no!

A: [laughs] They don't really know where they stand. And after dinner Rosa sits her down as is like, "No, we need to talk about this." So they sit down and they talk and Rosa confesses to Anna that the reason she was such a difficult subject to paint and would never sit for Anna and would always critique was 'cause she wanted her to take a long time painting her 'cause she didn't want her to go home.

E: Ah.....

[laughter]

H: That's sweet in a creepy way.

A: Yeah, I don't know how I feel about that.

H: Or creepy in a sweet way.

A: Yeah....

E: I also just like, feel like if painting was my job and someone did that, no matter their intentions, I'd be like, very frustrated.

A: You'd be pretty mad?

E: Yeah.

A: Yeah. Yeah, no, that's also true. Yeah, so Anna was trying to paint to a deadline for a specific exhibition, and she was getting pretty frustrated and pretty worried that she actually wasn't going to make that deadline.

E: So so far Rosa's tactics are "Screw up her painting; ask her to marry me forever, I guess?"

A: [laughs] Yeah.

E: [laughs]

A: Look, Rosa's been in a relationship with the same person since she was 14.

E: Yeah.

A: She kind of... You know.

H: Don't forgot threatened to tie her up in the woods!

E: That's true.

A: There was that time.

E: Also “Bring me some grass!”

[laughter]

E: “Specific grass!”

A: “Hard to get grass.”

E: Yeah.

H: Or promised to tie her up in the woods?

E: Probably?

A: Yeah... Anna’s response to that exchange about tying her up in the woods was kind of like, “Oh! But then... but then I wouldn’t be able to finish your painting if I was tied up.” And Rosa was kind of like, “...You’re missing the point.”

H: [laughs]

A: Okay, I do want to – before we talk about lesbian bondage – I do want to clarify that we’re not clear at any point that this is a sex thing. There is no mention of Rosa or even Nathalie or Anna having sex or even sharing a room or sharing a bed. Rosa does say at one point, “I never had any lovers,” but, I mean that’s a bit difficult to talk about because she uses the male word for ‘lovers’ which, you know, that’s both “I never had any male lovers” and both “I never had any lovers” because in French the male is used for the general group of male and female. So that’s not entirely clear, but yeah. I would not jump to the conclusion that this was a sex thing.

H: Okay.

A: Eventually after they had this awkward dinner and this awkward talk, Anna made up her mind that she was going to stay with Rosa forever, and they exchanged vows of love and Anna writes in her diary, “I really cannot believe this unexpected bliss. I am now Rosa Bonheur’s friend and adopted daughter.”

E: Okay.

H: Ah.

A: So yeah.

E: This again!

A: This again.

H: Is there any indication of like, a misalignment of objectives, or....?

A: I think, this is a very general statement, that you know, I don’t have much evidence to back up, but I feel like I have seen more in earlier writing than we do in the modern day, people using things like ‘daughter’ and ‘son’—

H: Okay.

A: —when talking about lovers. Especially in the context of queer lovers, when they kind of have to say, “How can we make this a familial relationship?”

H: Especially with an age difference like that.

A: Yeah, especially with something like that.

E: Is it any kind of formal adoption process? Like with Nobuko?

A: She does make Anna the recipient of most of the – most of her belongings in her will, and of the estate, but she generally compares Anna when she speaks to Anna, she compares Anna to Nathalie, and like, in that relationship, so she's conceptualising it the same way she conceptualised her relationship to Nathalie, which we know she's explicitly said, "Were I a man we would have been married."

H: Okay.

E: Yeah.

A: So Rosa was very excited that Anna had said yes to that, and she was very keen to tell all their friends, but Anna was quite worried about what her family would think, specifically what her mother would think, and so she wanted to write to her mother first and kind of let her know the situation and work that out before they publicly said "We're going to live together forever."

So Anna wrote to her mother. It's not clear what response Anna was expected, but she says, "My mother's letter" – when her reply came back – "made it clear that we still had some very real opposition to overcome."

Anna's mother's concerns were that Rosa wasn't truly serious about taking Anna into her household, you know, being in a permanent union with her; and she was also worried about Anna giving up her promising art career in America to be basically a lady's companion in France. Her mother was very ambitious for Anna and all of Anna's sisters. The reason they'd moved to France was for Anna and her sisters to study and the mother was very interested in them having careers and being very successful and independent women.

H: And certainly if you see one of your daughters striking up with someone of wealth and prominence then you have it in the back of your mind that that person can afford to discard them if they ever fall out of favour.

A: That's true, yeah. And I guess that is in the thing with her worrying that Rosa wasn't serious about it; that Rosa might get sick of her.

E: Also this has just happened very quickly.

A: They've known each other for quite some time.

E: Yeah, but they went from "I'm going to visit you for like a month" to "I'm living her permanently."

A: That is true, yeah, yeah. It is interesting though, I did wonder – would Anna's mother have had the same concerns if Anna was marrying a man?

H: Mm.

A: Because they're not gender-based concerns.

E: Maybe the thing would have been there if she was like "I'm getting married" is that it's not as easy to discard someone once you've married them.

A: That's true. That's true.

E: Whereas there can't be that kind of legal—

H: —contract, almost.

E: Yeah, contract, you know—

A: Yeah.

E: —guarantee that she'll be looked after to some extent.

A: But in terms of giving up her career, she would have had to give up her career if she married.

E: Yeah, that's always there too.

H: Hm.

A: Yeah. Rosa had expected a reaction like this, to some extent, and she said, "Many people take a dim view of women who live together. I've been battling that prejudice my life long." So to combat the concerns about her being able to just drop Anna if she got sick of her, she ensured that Anna remained financially independent, and she said she really wanted people to look on Anna as her equal.

H: Hm!

A: So she set up Anna to be a recipient of her will; Anna also maintained her own income from her art, and she paid board in the house.

E: So is she still doing art and selling art, or is she surviving off of existing...?

A: No no no, she's still doing art.

E: Okay.

A: She is still doing art, yeah. So another concern that Rosa and Anna had – or mainly that Rosa had I guess – was what they would do if Anna met and fell in love with a man.

H: Mm.

A: Anna had actually had man back in Boston who had proposed to her before she came over to France. She hadn't said yes, but she hadn't said no, and she's kind of said, "Look, I don't know. I'm going to go to France. We'll talk when I come back." And she didn't come back. [laughs] So that was the end of that. But Rosa was concerned about this, and she said, "Anna, if you ever fall in love with a man, and want to marry, you're always free to leave. I only want you to be happy."

E: It sounds like it's going pretty well.

A: Yeah.

E: Like she's seemed to make her secure but also not obligated.

A: Yeah! Yeah, no I think like, it's pretty well thought out, in terms of kind of finances and everything like that.

E: Mmhm.

A: So Anna reassured Rosa that she was never going to marry while they were together. Rosa did describe Anna and her relationship as being "a divine marriage of two souls".

H: Okay. Do we have any indication of what Anna recorded on the same topic?

A: All these quotes from Rosa come via Anna.

H: Okay.

A: So the major source on Rosa's life is a biography that was written by Anna, and Rosa was very determined to have this biography and she asked Anna if she would write it and they sat down and really talked through it, so although it was written by Anna and it was published and mostly written after Rosa's death, I think we can take it as being very solid definite fact about Rosa's life.

H: I suppose the influence of the author and the subject there might compromise that to some degree.

A: Yeah, no that's true.

H: But the best sources of information possible.

A: Yeah, the best source of information possible being, you know, someone who had talked very closely with Rosa. She does a sort of section which is mostly Anna's diaries about the time when they lived together, and she does a section which is kind of Rosa's life before that time, leading up to that time, and she does that in first person from Rosa's point of view, so it's written as an autobiography, but it's written by Anna from her notes talking to Rosa, which is why I said before it was a ghostwritten autobiography. So a lot of the quotes I've actually said are from Rosa throughout this episode come from that biography.

H: Okay.

A: So Anna's written them down, and I'm assuming their reasonably direct quotes.

E: Mm.

H: Hm.

A: Rosa had actually had her biography – much shorter biographies – written before in her lifetime, but it had always been by men. Some had interviewed her and everything, but they're always been men and she had felt that they'd always not given enough importance to Nathalie and Nathalie's mother and her relationship with them. She could never forget she was talking to a man, so she could never be completely kind of, clear and honest about her life and her feelings.

H: Hm.

E: Mmhm.

A: So she thought that Anna as another woman, and as an American, who would therefore be probably more progressive, in Rosa's eyes, than a European would make a good biographer for her.

H: Mm!

A: So Rosa and Anna moved in together – I mean, I guess they were already living together. Anna described their life together as being calm, and I think she uses the word monotonous, but not in a negative way, but just in, you know.

H: Okay.

A: They lived in this nice little cottage in the middle of nowhere and they painted and they went out for walks in the forest and... Rosa also had a new studio built for Anna at the house. On the foundation stone they engraved both their initials. Above the window the architect put of sculpture of two roses tied together with a ribbon which was supposed to symbolise Rosa and Anna's relationship. They also had a engraving of wild horses above their fireplace because Anna had first met Rosa she'd been acting as an interpreter for a man from America who had sent Rosa a wild horse for her to paint.

H: Ah!

E: God, sending a wild horse must be a time.

A: Yeah, the reason that he actually came over from America and met Rosa was 'cause he never got like, a response from Rosa saying, "Yeah! I got your horse!" and he was like....

H: [laughs]

A: "Aaahhhhh!"

[laughter]

E: What happens when a horse gets lost in the mail?

A: The horse did turn up. Rosa... There was just miscommunication and Rosa didn't realise it was from him.

H: [laughs]

E: Okay, so she's just like, "I guess there's a horse now!"

A: Rosa had said, "I really want to paint some American wild horses."

H: Mm.

A: She really liked American wild horses, and several people had just sent her horses, and so she received these three wild horses and she though, "Oh yeah, well they're all from the one person. It's not like two people sent me horses," so she thanked this one person.

H: [laughs]

A: But two were this one guy and one was from this other guy—

E: Okay.

A: —who was like, "She never thanked *me!*"

H: And they pulled wild horse postage conundrum!

A: There's another point actually where she received a letter from the train station saying "Oh, there's two baby cats in a basket here for you to pick up from the train station," and she was like, "Cool, yep, I'll come and get the cats, I guess. I wasn't expecting cats," and she went and looked at the basket and was like "Those sure are lions."

[laughter]

A: So people kind of just sent her animals to paint.

H: Yeah.

A: It was the thing that happened.

E: So she just had adult lions on her property.

A: They were caged or behind a fence in some way but there's definitely photos—

E: [laughs] So?

A: —photos of her, just like, lying down on like a picnic rug with her lion with her.

E: Oh man.

A: She used to go up and hug them.

H: She was just *lion* there?

A: She was just lion there, yeah. Yeah she just had adult lions and they were kind of fine.

E: They were tame?

A: They were tame. Oh, there was one actually – I've got so many animal stories that I cut from this that are going in now – the first lion she painted didn't belong to her; it belonged to a circus owner, it was part of the circus. So she went to see the lion and he was like, "Do you want to paint my lion?" and she was like "Ahhh..." and she went to see the lion and she was quite frightened, and she was like, "Uhhhh..." And Nathalie was like "Oh! A lion!" And Nathalie like went up and played with the lion and everything.

[laughter]

A: And eventually Rosa was like "This is fine. This is all good." And it turned out the lion was quite tame and they were like "Yeah, it's actually, like pretty house-trained, and it's like pretty friendly. Like, sometimes it likes to like, hide under the bed and then jump out and scare people."

H: Ohhh!

[laughter]

E: Oh my God! Ohh.... Can you imagine how terrifying that would be? If you just like got into bed and then a lion jumped out!

A: And then the lion was there!

[laughter]

E: Oh Jesus Christ! I love this lion.

A: She went to England – when she went to England for Queen Victoria to see her painting – and she really.... She went up to Scotland and she really really like Scottish cattle and Scottish sheep, 'cause they looked quite kind of wild.

H: Yeah.

A: You know, like Scottish cows look different.

H: They're very shaggy.

A: Very shaggy. And so she was really determined to bring some back and she went to this animal market and she bought all these cows and these sheep and she took them back and she was going to get on the ferry and they were kind of like, "What? No!"

[laughter]

A: "Quarantine laws exist!" And she had to leave them all behind.

H: Ah, that's very sad.

A: So she couldn't bring her Scottish livestock back home.

E: I was starting to assume that quarantine just wasn't a think at this point, given that you're sending wild horses in the mail.

A: Yeah. [laugh] I don't know how that worked. She also had one of those like, big, bear-like fluffy dogs, that she got while she was in the Pyrenees.

E: Mm.

A: She wrote home and she was like "I kind of adopted this dog... Like, it's huge, like I know this is a mistake, but like, this dog."

E: Mm. Aw.

H: And then 20 years later she looked back from astride her lion and was like "That wasn't so bad."

[laughter]

A: Yeah. Yeah that was very early in the piece.

E: I hope she rode as many of these animals as physically possible.

A: [laughs] I hope so too.

E: She's on the deer as it leaps into the pond just like, flipping off the Prussian soldiers.

A: [laughs] Rosa was getting quite old at this point. She was already 76 when Anna moved in with her.

E: Oh! Oh.

A: Yeah, she's quite old. Like, she was in her 60s when Nathalie died. And she was sort of thinking about her will and plans for her funeral and everything. She wanted to die in Nathalie's in the bed where Nathalie had died.

H: That's creepy.

E: I was going say, that's kind of sweet. I don't know.

H: I don't know.

E: It's sweet in a gothic novel sort of way.

A: Yeah.

H: Yeah.

A: Yeah, so Nathalie had died there in Rosa's arms, and Rosa wanted to die there in Anna's arms.

E: Aww....

H: Aww...

A: And she said "So in death I'll be surrounded by the women I loved throughout my life."

E: Aww.

H: Okay yeah, that is pretty sweet.

E: I think they're just also less squeamish about like, death objects, at this time, than we are.

H: Hm.

E: You know?

A: Yeah, I think that's very true.

E: Yeah.

A: And there is actually a photograph that was taken of her lying in her bed after her death.

E: Yeah, see that's....

A: Like, to us that's just not on, but like—

E: Yeah.

A: —that was fine.

E: But at the time—

A: Yeah.

E: —it's okay.

A: In her funeral plans she also wanted to mirror Nathalie's funeral. Rosa had received the Legion of Honour during her life and that meant she was entitled to have a military escort at her funeral and it was probably going to be a very big affair with eulogies and everything, but Nathalie had had none of that, so Rosa refused all of that, and she said, "I don't want any of that at my funeral, because Nathalie didn't get it. Why should I get it?"

She planned to be buried in Nathalie's family vault, alongside Nathalie and her mother. And she also asked Anna if when Anna died Anna would like to be buried there with them as well, and she wanted to epitaph over the grave – which it does – to read "Love is divine affection" and she said, "Nathalie won't be jealous, I know. Her love for me is big enough to understand that when souls share everything each one's happiness only increases the other's."

And another thing that was very important to Rosa as she made the plans for the end of her life, was that Anna would be the sole recipient of her will. As we talked about before, because they couldn't get married, this was kind of the best she could do for Anna.

E: Mmhm.

H: Hm.

A: She said, "If your family or mine ever separated us and cut short our happiness together I'd destroy everything here, I swear it."

E: Okay.

H: With the bombs still in the building?

[laughter]

A: Yeah.

[laughter]

A: After Rosa died – to just jump forward a bit—

H: Mmhm.

A: —Rosa’s family did try to claim Anna’s inheritance, and they accused Anna of hypnotising Rosa—

H: [snorts] Of course.

E: Okay.

A: —into giving everything to Anna.

Rosa made all these plans, and she died on the 25th of May in 1899, so they’d actually lived together at By for less than a year.

E: Aw....

A: But they were very happy for that less than a year, and she did die in Nathalie’s bed, in Anna’s arms.

E: Mm....

A: And her last words to Anna were, “I shall be your guardian angel.”

E: Aw....

H: Oh wow, that’s very cute.

A: Just a quick note about her burial. Rather than choosing whether to be buried in a dress or pants, Rosa decided to be buried in her nightgown, so she didn’t have to make that decision, and also wearing the laurel wreath that Anna had made for her.

E and H: Awww.....

H: That’s adorable.

A: Anna lived for another 48 years. She was a very successful artist; a very good portrait painter. In 1922, on what would have been Rosa’s 100th birthday, Anna donated the portrait she’d painted of Rosa to the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. She died in San Francisco in 1942, and she was buried with Rosa and Nathalie—

E: Mm...

A: —in Nathalie’s family grave.

E: Where exactly is that? What part of France, I assume?

A: I think it would be in Paris but I’d have to check.

E: Goddammit, I was in Paris *this year*.

A: And another thing you should have looked up while you were in France this year—

E: Noooo! [laughs]

A: —is that Rosa’s house where she lived with Nathalie and then with Anna, is now a museum—

E: Ohhh!

A: —to her life, and it’s set up as a house museum as it was when she left it.

H: That’s good.

E: That sucks. [laughs]

A: I’m sorry.

E: What happened to her animals after her death?

A: I don’t know. There was quite a big section in the biography that Anna wrote that kind of talked about how she dealt with Rosa’s estate after her death, which I kind of just didn’t look at in that much detail.

E: [laughs] Fair enough.

A: Like, I skimmed it, but it wasn’t interesting.

E: Yeah, yeah.

A: It was all about legal battles over whether she hypnotised Rosa or not. [laughs]

E: Hm.

A: So probably I could find out, except that I returned that book to the library the other day.

E: [laughs] We’ll never know!

A: So we’ll never know. I don’t know what happened to her animals. Yeah.

E: Okay. They just let them all free. [laughs]

A: Thank you very much for listening. We’re Queer as Fact. If you want to find us on social media we’re on Twitter, Facebook and Tumblr as Queer as Fact. We’re also on iTunes. If you listen to us on iTunes please rate and review us, ‘cause that really helps us, and if you want to email us directly, you can, at queerasfact@gmail.com. We always welcome suggestions on topics for episodes. This episode topic was suggested to us by an anonymous Tumblr user, so if you want to suggest an episode, please get in touch, and if you’re listening to us from Australia, please remember to fill out your postal survey for gay marriage and talk to your friends and family and encourage them all the vote yes as well.

We’ll be back on the 1st of November, when Hamish will be talking to us about Shelley’s Leg, one of Americans most formational gay bays. Thank you for listening, and we’ll see you then.

[music plays]