

Welcome to the Infinite Women podcast, I'm your host Allison Tyra and today we're talking about power couple Sofia Kovalevskaya and Anne Charlotte Edgren-Leffler.

In the late 1860s, Russian mathematician Sofya Kovalevskaya needed permission from her father or husband to study abroad, so at age 18 she entered into a fake marriage with another student so they could move to Germany and continue their education. In 1874, she became the first woman to earn a modern doctorate in mathematics and published papers on topics that are far beyond my understanding. After the death of her husband in 1875, Sofya moved to Sweden to take a position at Stockholm University, where she later became the first woman appointed to a full professorship at a European university since the physicist Laura Bassi and mathematician and philosopher Maria Gaetana Agnesi had done so in Italy in the 1700s. In Stockholm, Sofya met Swedish author and women's dress reform activist Anne Charlotte Edgren-Leffler. The two began a close relationship that would continue until Sofya's untimely death at age 41 in 1891. Among her novels, plays and other writing, Anne's final work was a biography of Sofya published in 1892 before Anne passed away that same year. Modern interpretations have suggested their relationship ventured beyond friendship into the romantic, not least because Sofya referred to it as a "romantic friendship". It should be noted that although both entered into marriages of convenience, Sofya is documented as having romantic relationships with men and Anne was married twice, making it more likely that the women were bisexual rather than lesbians.

Join us next time on the Infinite Women podcast, and remember - well-behaved women rarely make history.