

Nicolas Sarkozy and Carla Bruni

THE TRUE STORY



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Translated by Sophia Cappon

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**THE TRUE STORY OF
CARLA AND NICOLAS**

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Preface

“On the morning of 13 November Jacques Seguela rang me to confirm his dinner party that night. I asked ‘who else is coming?’ He rattled through the guest list and said that Nicolas Sarkozy would be there too,” Carla Bruni told us.

“Did you hesitate to accept the invitation?” we asked.

“I didn’t hesitate and I wasn’t surprised to be asked. But I was very curious. Then when I arrived, I realised it was a blind date. There were eight people in all. Three of them were couples and then there were us two, both single people.”

Heads of State do not very often go on blind dates: and it is rarer still for such an encounter to lead, in the space of a few short weeks, to marriage. But the newly elected – and freshly divorced – President of the French Republic, His Excellency Nicolas Sarkozy, first saw his bride to be at about 9pm on November 13th 2007.

This book tells the story of how Nicolas Sarkozy and Carla Bruni met, fell in love and married; of the political controversy that followed their whirlwind romance and of how France’s first couple have both impressed and, at times, annoyed, the world. It is something of a surprise that this book was published in France at all. Nicolas Sarkozy has been known to use his influence to suppress coverage of his love life. In 2005, the editor of *Paris Match* was sacked after his magazine published a front-page picture of Cecilia Sarkozy (who was then the President’s wife) with her lover, Richard Attias.

A ‘kiss and tell all’ book about Sarkozy’s love life was also pulped after he complained to the publishers, even though his wife had given interviews to the author, Valerie Domain. Domain, however, was not to be silenced. She changed the locations and characters’ names, added a few bodice-ripping flourishes and re-issued her book as a novel, *Between Heart and Reason*. It was a classic *Roman A Clef* – everyone in France could recognise the thinly veiled main characters. It seems likely that Sarkozy was no fan.

But perhaps, this time he did not object to his story being made public: he certainly did not use Presidential powers to gag Carla Bruni, who we interviewed at great length. In the course of writing this book, we talked to all the main players in this story, uncovering an extraordinary and often comic tale of love, jealousy and politics. And it is a tale that does not stand in isolation.

Less than a year after Carla and Nicolas were married, another glamorous couple, Barack and Michelle Obama, took power in Washington – having narrowly defeated the Presidential ambitions of yet another one-time First Lady, then-Senator, now United States Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton. If once great women stood behind great leaders, they now, across the world, take centre stage, starring in at least as many headlines as their husbands. And, in the cases of Hillary Clinton, Carla Bruni and Michelle Obama, they seem to have mastered the trick that eludes their husbands in office – of staying rather popular.

Chapter One

Friday November 23rd, 2007

11 a.m, the Elysées Palace, official residence of the French President.

Nicolas Sarkozy meets Javier Solana, who was previously Spain's Foreign Minister and is the serving European Union Commissioner for Foreign Affairs. Solana is travelling to China ahead of the French President; the two men want to co-ordinate their positions on a number of issues so that Europe presents a united front in dealing with Beijing.

When Sarkozy and Solana issue a communiqué, the diplomatic language is very restrained, with little by way of stick and lots of carrots on offer. "We want to deal frankly with the Chinese on a range of difficult areas including human rights", the communiqué says. But the document's overall tone suggests that human rights will not be allowed to obstruct trade.

And Sarkozy has more on his mind than affairs of state, this morning.

After Solana leaves, Sarkozy has a meeting with Denis Olivennes, chief executive of FNAC, a leading French bookshop chain. Olivennes has just chaired a committee on combating intellectual piracy and protecting French copyright interests in an increasingly challenging multi-media environment. The French have a real problem, here. Only 129 million people speak their language worldwide, against 560 million English-speakers and over a billion people whose first language is Mandarin. Very few French writers are well-known globally nowadays. Perhaps Simone de Beauvoir, and Sartre, of the recently deceased, while, amongst the living, only Michel Houellebecq has a significant profile in the English-speaking world. Classical French playwrights like Racine or Marivaux are rarely performed in English, while Shakespeare and Shaw – indeed, even some 20th Century American playwrights - are constantly staged in French. Proud as the French are of their independent film

industry, it has a smaller global market share than India's, and its audience is aging, as French youth turn to Hollywood blockbusters.

Olivennes introduces his report to a galaxy of French cultural stars, luminaries that few people in England or America will have heard of. He is not just Sarkozy's political ally. If this ceremony had taken place a few years before, Carla Bruni would probably have accompanied Denis. They had an affair after he split from his wife. One of his friends told us:

"Denis found her too intense and was worried that she'd clip his wings. Though they did think of living together."

Today, instead of being at Denis' side, Carla Bruni is at home, her smart apartment in Paris' elegant 16th arrondissement. She still has a soft spot for Denis Olivennes;

"He's a real man of the left. I know that some readers of *Le Nouvel Observateur*, (a leading French weekly journal) are upset that he has written this report for the President. I've seen the violent reactions in the e-mails readers send in. They're quite amazing," she says.

Intellectual piracy is an issue of real concern to Carla, as she has been a victim of it herself. She is a successful singer-songwriter, and her music, like that of most recording artists in the digital age, has been freely traded through online file-sharing networks: without her receiving a penny in royalties.

"Sure it's good when music travels, it's good for the life of a work to get it out there. But what's not so good is when that gets out of control, when people seem to think they can use material without paying. It does nothing for the glory of France when we let ourselves be exploited. You have to draw the line when it gets out of hand. And then punish those who do it."

In the Elysées Palace, the speeches rumble on. Nicolas Sarkozy goes through the motions and shakes the appropriate hands but he is wrestling with a more personal issue. Soon he will have to reveal he is 'seeing' Carla Bruni. When it comes to who the President is sleeping with, the personal is always the political. He discusses the problem of how to 'launch' his new relationship with Jacques

Seguela, an old friend and media expert. Seguela counsels patience, which is irritating, but the President knows his friend is right.

It isn't problematic, in terms of French cultural norms, that Sarkozy is 'seeing' someone who is not his wife. Indeed, even married French politicians are more or less expected to do so. Some experts claim that the French view extra-marital affairs as a "presidential right". A recent book about sex and French politics, *Sexus Politicus*, argues that a politician who is known to have committed adultery does better at the polls, because his straying from the marital bed proves an excess of virility. The French want to be seduced, and they like a leader who's had practise.

"Far from being a flaw, to cast yourself in the role of seducer is without doubt an important quality in our political life," says one of the authors of *Sexus Politicus*, Christophe Deloire.

A recent poll found that 83% of French voters would still vote for a candidate if he cheated on his wife. Anglo-Saxon voters may not be so tolerant – but then, their politicians seem to have fewer affairs. Only two of the last nine Presidents of the United States are known to have 'strayed' while in or near the Oval Office. Nixon, Ford, Carter, Reagan, Bush the First and Bush the Second were faithful to their wives. John F Kennedy and Bill Clinton were of course a different matter...and there are a variety of rumours concerning Lyndon Johnson. It's early days yet, but President Obama comes across as very much the faithful type.

Since 1945, British Prime Ministers have been even less sexually adventurous than the American political elite. The only recent British Prime Minister known to have committed adultery is John Major, who had an affair with his fellow M.P, Edwina Currie. She wrote a waspish memoir in which she complained that Major dumped her as soon as he received a high-profile job as Chancellor of the Exchequer. But Major was kicked out of office long before the story broke, and had nothing left to lose, in terms of voter's esteem, when it finally hit the headlines.

But while his people would not judge him harshly for having the desires of any healthy Frenchman, Sarkozy is in an unusual

position, and his circumstances are likely to raise eyebrows, even amongst the bohemians of the left bank. There are two problems. First, Carla Bruni, though born in Italy, is no-one's idea of a nun. A modern, attractive and passionate woman, she has had a fair few lovers – indeed, in one song, she even gives a number: 40, though as readers will see, this figure may rather be tongue-in-cheek. Secondly, Sarkozy's wife, Cecelia, recently left him for another man. This backdrop makes the story of his new relationship all the more poignant and intriguing: and there is little chance that the press will make a priority of Presidential privacy. A media circus is coming to town, as soon as word gets out.

After he accepts Olivennes' anti-piracy report, Sarkozy has nothing in his diary for the next few hours. Then, he will face another encounter with another ex of Carla's. At 6 p.m the French President will present a medal to Arno Klarsfeld, the son of Beate Klarsfeld, a formidable woman who managed to track down many former Nazis. Arno is also a former lover of the President's new girlfriend.

Sarkozy ladles on the flattery with a trowel. He tells Arno. "Like your mother you are an activist who does not just waffle. I am very proud to have you as a friend."

He does not add;

"And, of course, you were my predecessor in Carla's heart."

In the space of seven hours, Sarkozy has found himself in formal situations with two men who are former lovers of his girlfriend.

Yet ten days earlier, Nicolas Sarkozy and Carla Bruni hadn't even met.

Carla Bruni is clear about how she came to be a guest at the dinner where there were three couples and the President.

"I remember November 13th not only for emotional reasons. Jacques Seguela had invited me to dinner. He hadn't told me who else would be there. I said I'd go."

The dinner was not Seguela's idea. On November 13th, the French President had been divorced for four weeks. By then his ex-wife Cecelia had announced she would marry her lover, Richard Attias.

The President was available and, some would say, emotionally needy. It was also not as if his wife had left him for a Nobel Prize winner or a great artist; she had dumped him, twice now, for a man with a job in event management.

Few would have expected Sarkozy to fall in love with Carla Bruni, a left-leaning millionaire who wrote the lyrics:

*I am a child
For all my 40 lovers*

The list of these lovers is star-studded. Carla said in 2007;

“I think there are two narratives when it comes to seduction. On the one hand, there is the charm of what someone says, as a window into the man’s mind, his intelligence, his culture. And there is a sub-text, to do with pheromones.”

When Nicolas Sarkozy met Carla Bruni, it seems there was plenty of that ‘sub-textual’ chemistry – but the President knew that it would not be a simple matter to act upon it and launch a new relationship. He seems to have handled, with astonishing good grace, both his own previous romantic failures and the fact that his new lover could list thirty-nine romances before coming to her latest.

Chapter Two

On 25 November, Nicolas Sarkozy flies off to China. As he settles in the Presidential plane, he reviews a list of Burmese dissidents, given to him by a group of French intellectuals. They are seriously worried about Aung San Suu Kyi, the Nobel Peace Prize winner, who the military junta has kept under house arrest for over a decade. But Sarkozy has something far more personal in his hand luggage - a disc of songs that Carla recorded for him. He can listen to good music, including some of her material, while he is away.

Sarkozy returns from China on Nov 28th.

A few days later Denis Olivennes gets a call.

“Stay on the line for the President of the Republic,” says the operator.

Denis can hear plates clattering and the sound of running water as the President makes his way to the phone. Well...Mrs Thatcher apparently did some washing up while invading The Falklands and giving orders to her Secretary of Defence.

“Hello Denis, I am fine. I kiss you”. Sarkozy uses the familiar *tu*, not the more formal *vous*, in addressing his friend. Then, abruptly, the President hangs up.

Denis is taken aback. First, the call was almost surreal in its brief length and sudden ending. Secondly, Sarkozy is not given to kissing Denis, verbally or otherwise, nor, indeed, to addressing him with the familiar ‘Tu’: a mode of address not associated with the Presidency. Once, legend has it, a socialist activist addressed then-President Mitterand, a comrade and fellow traveller, joyfully saying, ‘at last, a President we can ‘tutoyer’ (address as ‘tu’).

‘Si *vous* voulez’, (if you want), replied the President, and turned his back.

Denis tries to understand what it all means. He describes the call to friends in an attempt to make sense of Sarkozy’s behaviour. Like him, they are baffled.

But then, on November 28th, almost no one in France knew that Sarkozy had fallen in love. Some of those interviewed in this book said that the best way to look at the events of November 2007 to March 2008 is as a 'beautiful novel.' But what kind of novel, exactly?

In many ways, the new President is an outsider to French society. His father was Hungarian and left during the 1956 Revolution, which ended with the Russian invasion of Hungary. Nicolas' mother is French; his father was something of a philanderer and left when Nicolas was only three years old. Sarkozy grew up in Paris, studied law and political science and began to practice as a lawyer at the age of twenty-six. His parents were Gaullists (supporters of the political parties loyal to the late founder of the Fifth Republic, General and then President Charles De Gaulle, *very* roughly the French equivalent of British Conservatives); Sarkozy became one in their wake. In 1977, he was elected as a municipal councillor in the wealthy Paris suburb of Neuilly-sur-Seine.

In August 1984 Sarkozy married a devout Catholic, Marie Dominique Culioli. His political career had taken off by that point, and Sarkozy had become Mayor of Neuilly-sur-Seine. In France, serving as a Mayor has often been a stepping-stone to national politics, including the Presidency. Both Francois Mitterrand and Jacques Chirac learnt the tricks and pitfalls of executive office by serving as Mayors (of Bordeaux and Paris, respectively), for many years. One of Sarkozy's Mayoral duties was to officiate at civil marriages. In 1984, he presided at the wedding of twenty-four-year-old Cecilia Ciganer-Albeniz to Jacques Martin, a successful French TV presenter, who was twenty-six years her senior. Nicolas, it seems, fell in love with her at first sight.

Cecelia cared for her husband, but the marriage soon ran into difficulties. Martin was much older than his wife, and he had what seemed to be traditional, even archaic, expectations of her. He wanted a wife who would look after the children, cook and cosset him when he came home. Cecilia could not be satisfied with such a life. She had worked for Schiaparelli as a model and was a talented pianist. She soon became frustrated with life as a suburban housewife. It did

not help that Martin, exhausted by the pressures of the TV trade, often fell asleep in the evenings, shortly after coming home.

Sarkozy was smitten and he did not scruple at pursuing a married woman. He started to phone Cecilia and send her flowers, and she did not object to his attentions. The fact that she and Sarkozy both had young children gave them excellent cover. With a little subtle engineering by Cecilia and Nicolas, the two couples became great friends; they often ate, and even holidayed, together. But Cecilia and Sarkozy would manage to sneak away and snatch time alone.

But they had not reckoned on Sarkozy's wife. She became suspicious and while the two couples were on a skiing holiday, wrapped up warm and followed her husband's footprints in the snow. They led to Cecilia's chalet. Mrs Sarkozy was devastated, but she was a devout Catholic, and believed that marriage was for life. She and Sarkozy separated, but did not divorce for another seven years. Cecilia's husband had no such religious attachment to his unfaithful wife. He filed for divorce soon after learning of the affair.

Sarkozy and Cecilia married in 1997, and, at first, seemed very happy. She became a public relations consultant and used her skills to help his political career. In 2002, he was appointed Minister of the Interior, the French equivalent of Home Secretary. He also remained Mayor of Neuilly-sur-Seine. In France holding two such jobs is quite normal.

Within a few years, though, Nicolas and Cecilia's marriage was in trouble. She was tired of the pressures of political life. The last straw came when she learned that her husband, who had fallen in love with her at first sight, had since been unfaithful. There were a number of infidelities detailed in a French book called *Sarkozy and his Women*. One such woman was a journalist, Anne Fulda, on France's leading daily, *Le Figaro*.

In May 2005 Cecilia decided to leave Sarkozy. She said she had begun to feel "like a piece of furniture" and needed to break free. It didn't take her long to find a new man, the wealthy events organiser, Richard Attias. He had many virtues her husband lacked, she said. Attias listened to her – which she claimed Sarkozy never did – and

was charming.

Being left by your wife is hardly ever a political plus. If Sarkozy could not control his wife, how could he hope to govern the country? A columnist for the left-wing Paris newspaper *Libération* insisted that the split would harm Sarkozy's political position:

"A wife leaving the marriage has far more serious consequences, both physical and psychological, than some extra-marital affair."

Sarkozy published his own autobiography, almost as a counter-attack. He described how the faithless Cecelia had broken his heart; the public warmed to him as a helpless romantic. Some critics felt he bordered on self-pity, however, with words such as;

'I have never known such an ordeal. I never imagined I would be so profoundly distressed,' he wrote. 'The fact that his wife went off with another man left him: '...profoundly shaken. Even today I find it hard to talk about it. More than twenty years after we met, even to pronounce Cecilia's name still moves me.'

Cecelia went to New York to join the new man in her life. But Sarkozy did not give up. He bombarded her with messages of love; he said he was sorry, promised that he would change. He lobbied her friends and, it is alleged, even tried to put pressure on the boss of Richard Attias's company.

Sarkozy's energetic rescue of the marriage seemed to work and Cecelia came back to him in good time for the 2006-2007 Presidential election. Most of the media assumed that being First Lady was simply too great a temptation for her to resist. But though she came back, Cecelia did not dwindle, by degrees, into a wife. She did not transform herself into a totally dutiful political spouse, disappearing for two weeks during the campaign.

Despite these romantic dramas, Sarkozy was elected President by a comfortable, if not landslide, margin, following a lively series of debate with socialist candidate Ségolène Royal. He and Cecelia entered the Elysées France's top couple, but some observers still had doubts. Christine Clerc, author of a book on French presidential couples, claimed Cecelia was too selfish to make a good First Lady. She was too keen on living her own life because she was "an

independent spirit”. Unlike other First Ladies, she might not be willing to sacrifice everything for the job – his job. Cassandra Clerc predicted that Sarkozy might become the first French President to divorce in office.

Cassandra, like her Ancient Greek namesake, was spot on with this dark prediction. In September 2007, Cecelia announced that she was leaving Sarkozy for a second time and that she intended to marry Richard Attias. At much the same time, Ségolène Royal and her long-term partner Francois Holland, the leader of the Socialist Party, separated. Merely running for the office of President of the Republic ruins your relationship, it seems. In the case of Francois Holland, there may have been political, rather than romantic, pride, behind the split: he had expected to become the Socialist Party’s Presidential candidate, until a groundswell of enthusiasm propelled Ségolène (popularly known as ‘Sego’) to the nomination. Holland was pushed aside for the woman he’d long shared a bed with.

Vive La Difference! Vive La France!

On October 16th 2007, Cecelia and Sarkozy divorced. Much research has shown that untying the marital knot is one of the most difficult life events a person can experience; it is nearly as traumatic as the death of a loved one. Therapists argue that most divorced men and women should expect to go into a period of mourning for the lost relationship. The French call orgasm ‘the little death’; divorce is less enjoyable and more like the real thing. Sarkozy had been with Cecelia for most of the last twenty years, and is clearly a passionate man. He fought hard to save his marriage, and its end must have wounded him deeply. No doubt the irony did not escape him: he could seduce a majority of the French electorate, but he could not hold on to his wife.

It could have been worse. At least Cecelia did not move in with Ségolène Royal.

But the President has no time to sit and suffer: he has duties to attend to. Early in November 2007, Sarkozy flies to Washington to meet President George Bush. He tells Rachida Dati, his glamorous Minister of Justice, that he feels lonely. He misses his wife and finds