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by
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Carolyn just had it. That thing so few have; either you have it or you don't, it's a gift you are just born with. I was working in New York City at the time, mainly on the Calvin Klein advertising campaigns. The brand was exploding on the fashion scene then—the clothing, the perfume, the underwear. There was a piece for everyone to own. Carolyn was working at Calvin Klein as well, and she was part of our fashion crowd and scene. She exuded everything that the brand stood for: minimalism, pared-down luxe, and streamlined looks that seemed easily put together. It was a time when women were the actual muses for design houses—they hung out with the designers, worked with them, wore their clothes, breathed life into their designs.

From a fashion angle, she was a master of separates, a champion of American and European design—but worn with an ease of a true American icon. She made everything look easy and attainable. The fact that she was a working woman added to that tangibility. She was one of us, working by day in fashion and then partying by night. Her Birkin held her makeup bag, her diary, her phone, and a change of clothes. There was a sense of realness to her and to her life.

Carolyn was one of the last of her time, a woman who let us experience her light, who used fashion to speak a thousand words, to be silent when many spoke. *CBK: Carolyn Bessette Kennedy; A Life in Fashion* is a chance for us—her fashion family—to honor her legacy and what she left behind: her class, her dignity, and, of course, her timeless style.

Foreword



by Gabriela Hearst

Founder and creative director of Gabriela Hearst and creative director of Chloé

Growing up on a farm in Uruguay, I learned a sense of quality and long-term design. Every garment we wore was made to the highest quality because they needed to last. It was thousands of miles away from Carolyn's world, but she was someone who understood that timelessness very well in a natural, intrinsic way. It is like when you cut a flower in the wild and you place it in another scenario, and you see the magnificence of it. Nothing about her style was forced, that is what made her so charismatic. Hers was not an opulent style, but it was luxurious. It was more about the shape and the silhouette. From her many minimalist evening looks, when she wore Calvin Klein, to the Yohji Yamamoto dress coat she used to wear buttoned to the top, to her corduroy pants and her casual looks in general, it's endless. There are no distractions. It's not a style that calls attention. It is a style that tries to deflect attention, and by deflecting that attention, she's making people pay more attention. She didn't have a strategy; she wore what she felt, and her intuition would drive her. Her style was timeless. Her looks and the way she dressed is a very relevant aesthetic today that goes beyond trends. She understood the value of quality and of moderation. She was not someone to be taken in by excess. The fact that she had just a few pieces shows how modern she was. This to me is the very essence of Carolyn and her timelessness.

Introduction

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Long blond hair, red lips, beige wool skirt, black V-neck sweater, patent black bag, and fitted sock boots. This was Carolyn Bessette Kennedy in October 1996 on the front cover of a gossip magazine. *Who is she?* was my first thought. Standing beside her in the photo was her new husband, John F. Kennedy Jr., but I only saw Carolyn—an immaculately styled, modern, confident woman.

At the time, I was at Manchester University, studying Classics, to dutifully follow the safe path toward a career in law. Fate hadn't intervened yet, diverting my GPS to a more fulfilling route: fashion. Three years after first seeing her picture, I hear of her passing, leading me to wonder once again, "Who was she?"

New York, 2002. The fashion editorials of Steven Meisel and Mario Sorrenti that I had innocently pasted on my teen walls are now my reality as I work alongside these creative masters. Unwittingly, I traverse similar streets and people in Carolyn's world, and as a fashion editor, I often refer to her style because it was quintessential New York, a city where buying one designer piece reigned supreme over five cheap knockoffs. I remember being admonished by a stylist for

wearing a cheap watch on set. As much as it cut like a knife, I later understood the power of my métier. Owning one meaningful luxury piece is all you need; if you can't afford it, then don't wear a substitute. If anyone knew this rule it was Carolyn.

In the high fashion ranks, Carolyn's style defined a certain classic minimalism. Though already part of the nineties fashion landscape, it was Carolyn who singularly translated conceptual runway fashion with her American fashion language of simplicity and accessibility. She applied her polished discerning eye to every piece she wore, and it was *this* that I clocked in the first image I saw of her. Today, her fashion memory is kept alive by innumerable social media accounts, the silver screen, and fashion designers who still pin her looks on their design mood boards. Her relevancy speaks to a whole spectrum of people, capturing the attention of her peers through to Gen Z.

CBK: Carolyn Bessette Kennedy; A Life in Fashion is the first book of its kind to look at just that—her fashion life. Throughout these pages, friends, colleagues, designers, art directors, and photographers gather to celebrate her. A close confidante speculates that Carolyn would be amused that there is a fashion book on her, but here we are. There has been an extraordinary outpouring from her circle; they have embraced an opportunity to speak of not only her life and love of fashion but also her love of people. Her inherent self-awareness ensured that she retained the minimalist vision she had as a teenager to when she married John Jr. She didn't seek fame but was carved in a certain light, a light she sometimes enjoyed but mostly eschewed, rarely speaking to the press. Instead, she used fashion as a vehicle for communication—at times to thwart the insatiable camera lens but mostly thriving in her chosen ensemble.

In short, Carolyn was the last of an era. In today's world, where we are inundated with ideas, images, and a deluge of

“famous people” promoting their special brand, hiring endless help to facilitate who they are, it was such a pleasure to be in Carolyn’s world for a short time. A world that required few words, where her presence was a simple picture of a general ease and happiness in who she was and her clothes were a reflection of that sentiment.

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