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COCO CHANEL

An Illustrated Biography

Zena Alkayat &
Nina Cosford

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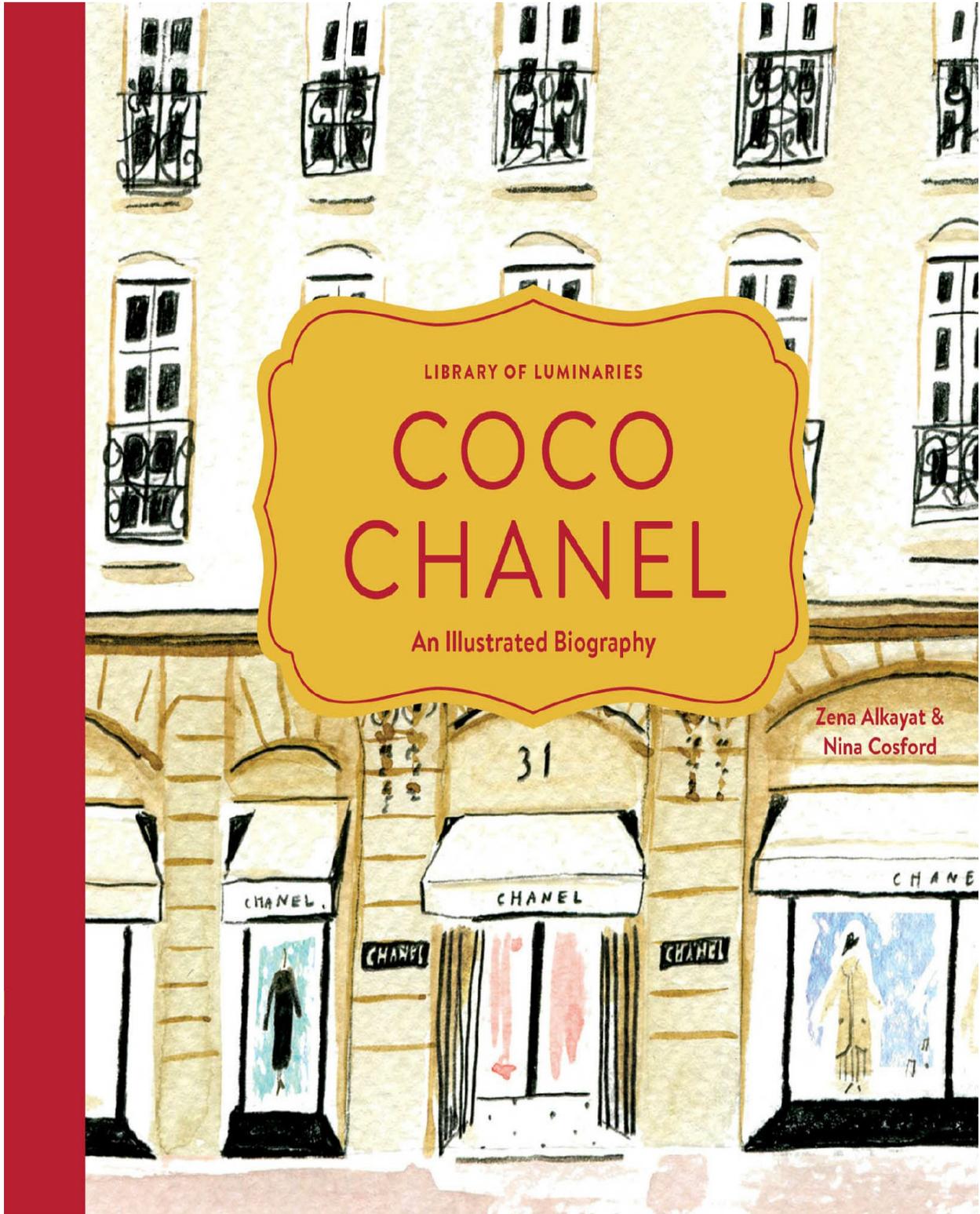
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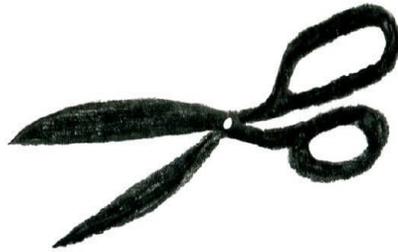
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by Zena Alkayat and Nina Cosford



CHRONICLE BOOKS
SAN FRANCISCO

First published in the United States in 2016 by Chronicle Books LLC.
First published in the United Kingdom in 2015 by Frances Lincoln Ltd.
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ISBN: 978-1-4521-5062-8 (epub2)
ISBN: 978-1-4521-6208-9 (epub3)
ISBN: 978-1-4521-6209-6 (mobi)

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication
Data available.

ISBN: 978-1-4521-5024-6 (hc)

Chronicle Books LLC
680 Second Street
San Francisco, CA 94107

www.chroniclebooks.com

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"i am not a heroine. But i have chosen
the person i wanted to be."

Coco Chanel, 1946

GABRIELLE CHANEL WAS BORN ON
AUGUST 19, 1883, IN A CHARITY
HOSPITAL FOR THE POOR IN SAUMUR,
WEST FRANCE. HER FATHER, ALBERT,
WAS A ROVING MARKET TRADER;
HER MOTHER, JEANNE, WAS FROM
A WORKING-CLASS FAMILY.

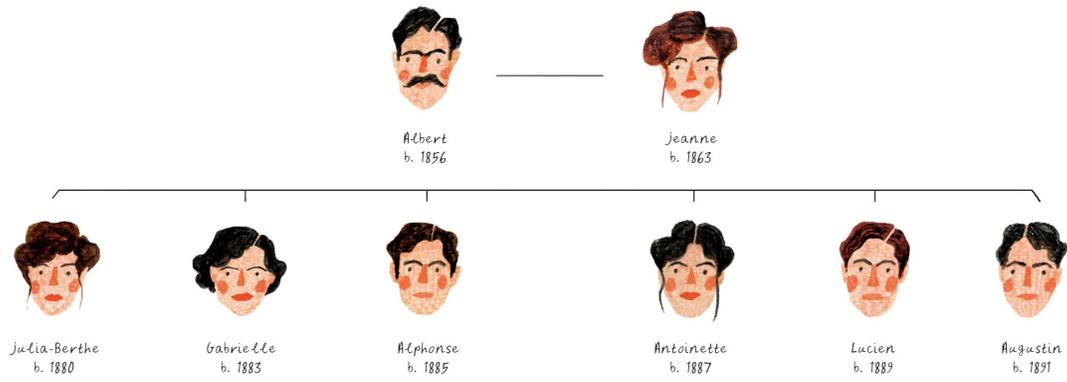


ABANDONED BY THE FAST-LIVING
ALBERT WHILE PREGNANT WITH
GABRIELLE'S OLDER SISTER, JEANNE
SPENT HER LIFE CHASING AFTER HIM
AS HE HOPPED BETWEEN MARKET
TOWNS ACROSS FRANCE.

SOCIALLY EMBARRASSED, JEANNE'S
FAMILY COMPELLED ALBERT
TO MARRY HER IN 1884. HE
RELUCTANTLY AGREED, BUT THE
BOND OF MARRIAGE DID LITTLE
TO KEEP HIM BY HER SIDE.



The Chanel Family Tree





GABRIELLE AND HER SIBLINGS WERE
ACCUSTOMED TO HARD WORK, BAD
LIVING CONDITIONS, AND A BROKEN
FAMILY LIFE, BUT THINGS BECAME
WORSE WHEN THEIR MOTHER DIED OF
BRONCHITIS AT THIRTY-ONE.
GABRIELLE WAS ELEVEN.

DESERTED BY THEIR FLY-BY-NIGHT
FATHER AND UNWELCOMED BY THEIR
MOTHER'S FAMILY, THE CHILDREN
WERE LEFT ORPHANED.

GABRIELLE'S YOUNG BROTHERS WERE
GIVEN TO A PEASANT FAMILY TO
PROVIDE FARM LABOR IN RETURN
FOR BASIC KEEP.

GABRIELLE AND HER TWO SISTERS
WERE SENT TO A CONVENT ORPHANAGE
IN THE RURAL VILLAGE OF AUBAZINE.
SHE NEVER SAW HER FATHER AGAIN.





Aubazine

GABRIELLE FOLLOWED STRICT
RELIGIOUS DUTY, TOOK BASIC
STUDIES, AND LEARNED NEEDLEWORK.

LATER AS AN ADULT SHE WOULD
BEND THE TRUTH AND DESCRIBE
A MISERABLE TIME SPENT IN
THE CARE OF "WICKED AUNTS"
IN WHICH "LOVE WAS A LUXURY
AND CHILDHOOD A SIN."



GABRIELLE WOULD LOSE HERSELF
IN ROMANTIC STORIES TORN FROM
THE PAGES OF NEWSPAPERS.



ON TURNING EIGHTEEN, GABRIELLE WAS
FINALLY FREE TO LEAVE AUBAZINE,
TRANSFERRING TO ANOTHER CONVENT
IN THE GARRISON TOWN OF MOULINS
IN CENTRAL FRANCE.

HER AUNT ADRIENNE CHANEL WAS
A FELLOW CHARITY PUPIL THERE.
WITH JUST TWO YEARS BETWEEN
THEM, SHE AND GABRIELLE BECAME
AS TIGHT AS SISTERS.



AFTER A YEAR AT THE CONVENT,
GABRIELLE AND ADRIENNE TOOK JOBS
AND LODGINGS IN A DRAPERY.

THEY SUPPLEMENTED THEIR MEAGER
WAGE WITH WEEKEND JOBS AT A
TAILOR'S SHOP FREQUENTED BY
LOCAL ARMY OFFICERS.



AS A SEAMSTRESS, GABRIELLE CAME
INTO CONTACT WITH MOULINS
MILITARY MEN WHO WERE LARGELY
DRAWN FROM FRANCE'S LANDED
GENTRY AND PARISIAN ARISTOCRACY.

DELIGHTING THE OFFICERS WITH
THEIR VIVACIOUS PERSONALITIES,
GABRIELLE AND ADRIENNE WERE OFTEN
ESCORTED TO CAFÉ-CONCERTS.

THESE SHOWS WERE PART OF
A GROWING TREND FOR BAWDY
ENTERTAINMENT, WHICH FIRST
APPEARED IN BELLE ÉPOQUE PARIS.





GABRIELLE WAS DRAWN TO THE
STAGE AND BECAME A POSEUSE—A GIRL
WHO WOULD FILL THE GAPS BETWEEN
BILLED ACTS.

SHE WOULD SING REVUE STANDARDS
"KO KO RI KO" AND "QUI QU'A VU
COCO?" ACCORDING TO LEGEND, THE
NAME "COCO" STUCK.



Qui qu'a vu

Coco

vous n'auriez pas
vu Coco?

Coco dans
l'Trocadéro



COCO BECAME INVOLVED WITH ONE
OF THE CAVALRY MEN. ÉTIENNE
BALSAN WAS A WEALTHY BACHELOR
WITH A TALENT FOR BREEDING AND
TRAINING HORSES.

HIS DISTINGUISHED FAMILY DESPAIRED
OF HIS LIBERTINE LIFESTYLE AND OPEN
DISREGARD FOR SOCIAL CONVENTION.



IN SEARCH OF FAME AND FORTUNE,
COCO LEFT MOULINS FOR NEARBY
SPA TOWN VICHY. DESPITE SINGING
LESSONS, INVESTING IN FANCY
FROCKS, AND TRYING TO IMPRESS
NUMEROUS STAGE MANAGERS, HER
DETERMINATION CAME TO NOTHING.





COCO WAS ALONE AND WITHOUT AN INCOME. IN 1905, SHE TRAVELED NORTH TO OISE TO BECOME ÉTIENNE'S LIVE-IN MISTRESS AT HIS NEW HOME, CHÂTEAU DE ROYALLIEU.

"I was nothing but a lost child."



ROYALLIEU WAS A PLAYGROUND.
FRIENDS AND THEIR MISTRESSES
WOULD COME FOR THE PARTIES,
HUNTING, AND HORSE RACES.

ÉTIENNE TAUGHT COCO TO BE A
SKILLED HORSEWOMAN, AND WITH
BOHEMIAN FLOURISH, SHE HAD A PAIR
OF JODHPURS MADE FOR HERSELF.

IT WAS THE AGE OF THE COURTESAN
AND COCO SHARED THE CHÂTEAU
(AND ÉTIENNE) WITH ONE OF THE
ERA'S MOST EMINENT GRANDE
COCOTTES, ÉMILIENNE D'ALENÇON.



Emilienne

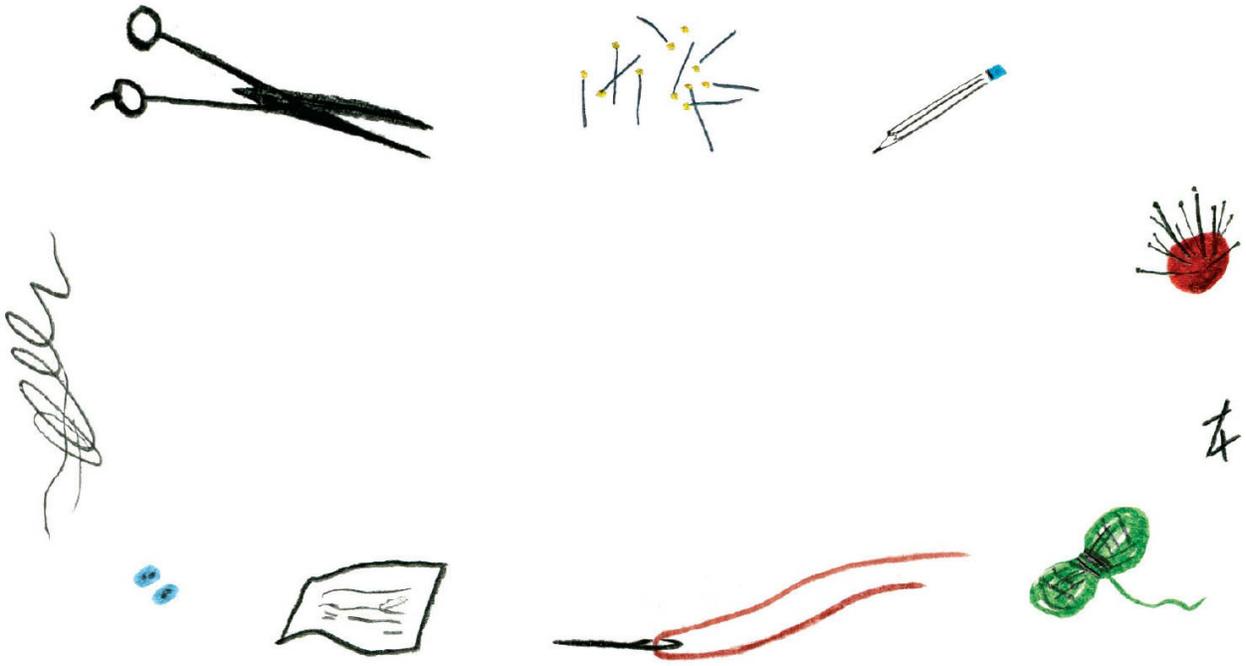
UNLIKE THE LAVISHLY BEJEWELLED
COURTESANS AND FEMININE
MISTRESSES, BOYISH COCO HAD
NEITHER CURVES NOR A FONDNESS
FOR OSTENTATIOUS SILKS AND FURS.

SHE WOULD TRIM HER OWN STRAW
BOATERS AND WEAR MODEST,
TAILORED OUTFITS.

DESPITE ÉTIENNE'S FRIENDSHIP AND
PROTECTION, COCO GREW RESTLESS.

*"i would say to myself over
and over, money is the key
to freedom."*





AFTER THREE YEARS TOGETHER,
ÉTIENNE GIFTED COCO USE OF
HIS PARIS APARTMENT AT
160 BOULEVARD MALESHERBES.



USING IT AS AN ATELIER, COCO
MADE HER UNCOMMONLY SIMPLE
HATS AND SUCCESSFULLY SOLD THEM
TO THE COCOTTES AND ACTRESSES
SHE HAD MET AT ROYALLIEU.

DELFT BLUE BEADS



WHITE
GEORGETTE
CRÊPE

BRAIDED WOOL

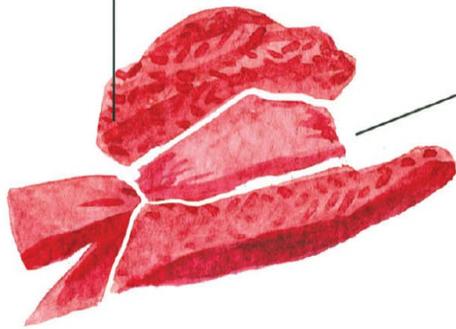


BLACK SATIN



BLUE AND
BLACK RIBBON

CERISE YARN BRAID



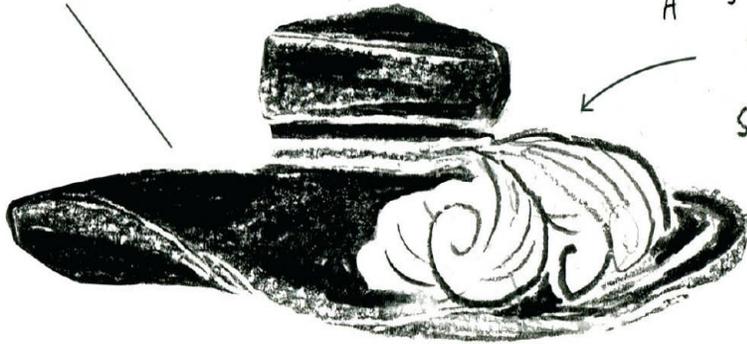
CERISE RIBBON

STRAW
HAT



PHEASANT
FEATHERS

BLACK VELVET

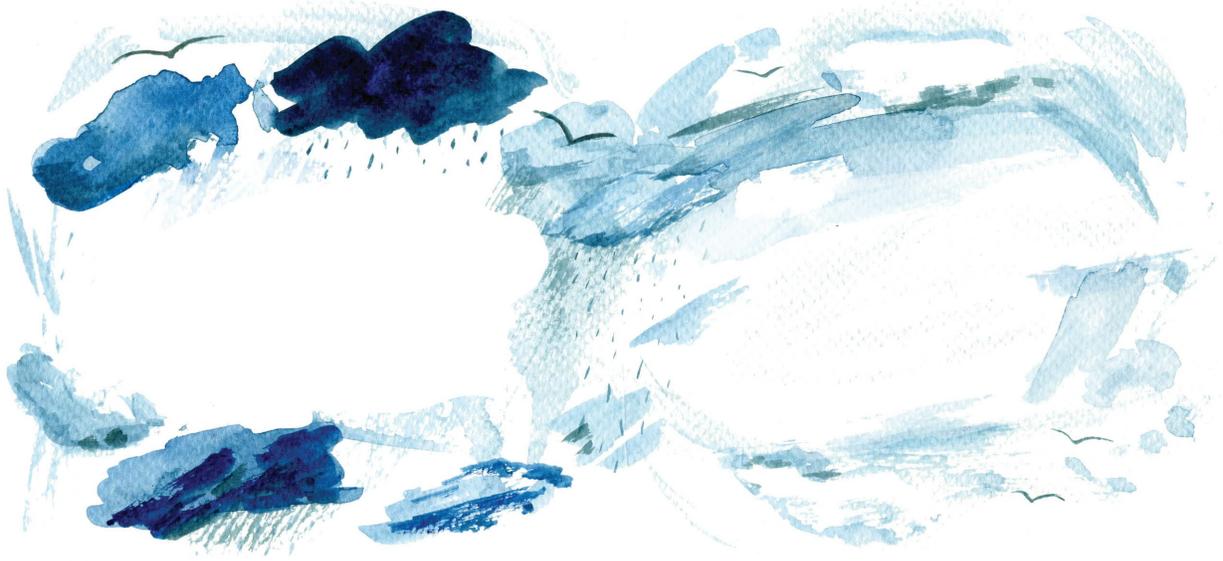


A SKEIN
OF
SILK

ARTHUR "BOY" CAPEL LIVED NEARBY.
THE YOUNG, RICH ENGLISH PLAYBOY
AND "LION OF LONDON SOCIETY" HAD
MET COCO THROUGH ÉTIENNE.

THE PAIR'S SUBSEQUENT AFFAIR
LEFT HER ENTANGLED (BOTH
EMOTIONALLY AND FINANCIALLY)
WITH TWO MEN. BOY PREVAILED,
AND IN 1909 COCO MOVED INTO
HIS PARIS APARTMENT.





AS COCO ESTABLISHED HERSELF,
HER TWO SISTERS TOILED. TO HELP
ANTOINETTE, COCO INVITED HER TO
WORK AT HER ATELIER. BUT SADLY
JULIA-BERTHE COMMITTED SUICIDE
IN 1910, LEAVING BEHIND HER
ORPHANED SON, ANDRÉ PALASSE.

GABRIELLE ASSUMED RESPONSIBILITY
FOR HER NEPHEW, LOOKING AFTER HIM
IN PARIS BEFORE ENROLLING HIM IN BOY'S
FORMER BOARDING SCHOOL IN ENGLAND.

SHE WOULD REMAIN CLOSE TO ANDRÉ,
SPENDING SUMMERS WITH HIS FAMILY
WHEN HE WAS GROWN UP.



FIN-DE-SIÈCLE PARIS HAD BECOME A
BEACON OF MODERNITY, WITH ITS GRAND
BOULEVARDS AND MIGHTY ARCHITECTURE.
FASHIONABLE SOCIETY WAS IMPRESSED
BY THE LATEST TRENDS.

FINANCED BY BOY, COCO OPENED
HER FIRST STORE AT 21 RUE CAMBON.
ACTRESSES BEGAN SPORTING HER
CUTTING-EDGE HATS IN MAGAZINES,
AND STYLISH SOCIETY WOMEN
QUICKLY FOLLOWED.



COCO'S RELATIONSHIP WITH BOY
(AND HER TRADESWOMAN POSITION)
ENSURED SHE WAS OUTWARDLY
SHUNNED BY THE ELITE PARISIAN
CIRCLES HE MOVED IN. BUT HER NOVEL
LIFESTYLE MADE HER STRIPPED-BACK
HATS ALL THE MORE TALKED-ABOUT.



COCO ALWAYS STOOD APART.

SHE WAS KNOWN FOR THRUSTING
HER HANDS UNCONVENTIONALLY
INTO HER POCKETS.



DESPITE BOY'S INFIDELITY, HE AND
COCO WERE IN LOVE. HE ADMIRERD
HER TALENT AND DETERMINATION
AND ENCOURAGED HER IN BUSINESS,
HELPING HER OPEN SHOPS IN THE
SEASIDE RESORTS OF DEAUVILLE (1913)
AND BIARRITZ (1915).

IN REACTION TO THE FLAMBOYANT,
CORSETED STYLES AND DECADENT
MATERIALS OF THE ERA, COCO
STARTED INTRODUCING EASY-TO-WEAR
SEPARATES WITH SPORTY, MASCULINE,
AND UTILITARIAN INFLUENCES.

"Over-embellishment had stifled
the body's architecture."

HER COLLECTIONS WERE PERFECTLY
TIMED FOR A COUNTRY PLUNGED INTO
WORLD WAR ONE IN 1914. THEY WERE
PRACTICAL, FLATTERING, AND FITTINGLY
AUSTERE (THOUGH IN REALITY THEY
WERE BOTH EXPENSIVE AND EXCLUSIVE).



*"To look once at a Chanel jersey costume
is to desire it ardently."*

"Vogue," 1916

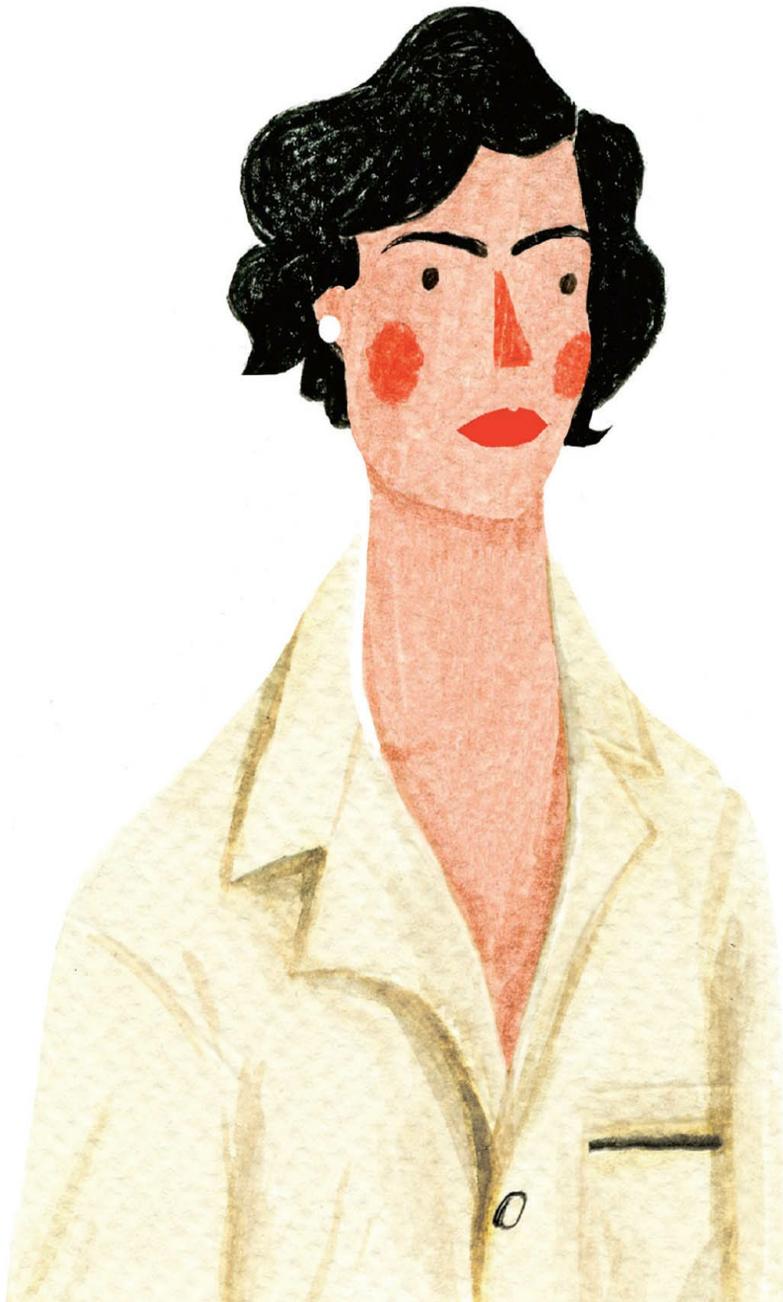




HER MINIMALIST COLLECTIONS
WERE MADE OF CHEAP JERSEY.
THIS INNOVATIVE, ANTI-LUXE
APPROACH GAVE HAUTE COUTURE
A WELCOME JOLT.

BUSINESS BOOMED AND COCO
FOUND THE FINANCIAL INDEPENDENCE
SHE HAD LONGED FOR.

IN 1917, COCO DARINGLY
CROPPED HER LONG HAIR.





BOY SIGNED UP FOR ACTIVE SERVICE
THOUGH HE OFTEN VISITED COCO
WHILE ON LEAVE. HE ALSO FOUND
TIME FOR AN AFFAIR WITH ENGLISH
ARISTOCRAT DIANA WYNDHAM.

BY THE END OF THE WAR IN
NOVEMBER 1918, BOY'S ROMANTIC
WRANGLE BETWEEN THE TWO VERY
DIFFERENT WOMEN WAS OVER.
HE'D CHOSEN TO MARRY DIANA.



THAT YEAR ALSO SAW THIRTY-
FIVE-YEAR-OLD COCO EXPAND
HER PARIS BOUTIQUE TO A LARGE
SALON AT 31 RUE CAMBON. BUT
BOY'S ABANDONMENT LEFT HER
BROKENHEARTED.

COCO ESCAPED PARIS TO A RENTED
VILLA IN THE CITY'S SUBURBS. DESPITE
HIS NEW MARRIAGE, BOY STRUGGLED
TO GIVE HER UP. BY SPRING 1919
HE WAS BACK IN COCO'S ARMS.



THEIR RENEWED ROMANCE WAS CUT
SHORT ON DECEMBER 22, 1919, WHEN
BOY'S CAR OVERTURNED BEFORE
EXPLODING INTO FLAMES.
HE WAS THIRTY-EIGHT.



ON THE DAY OF THE FUNERAL, COCO
INSTEAD VISITED THE SITE OF THE
ACCIDENT. SHE WALKED AROUND THE
BURNED CAR WRECKAGE AND SAT
WEEPING ON THE SIDE OF THE ROAD.

"In losing Capel, I lost everything."

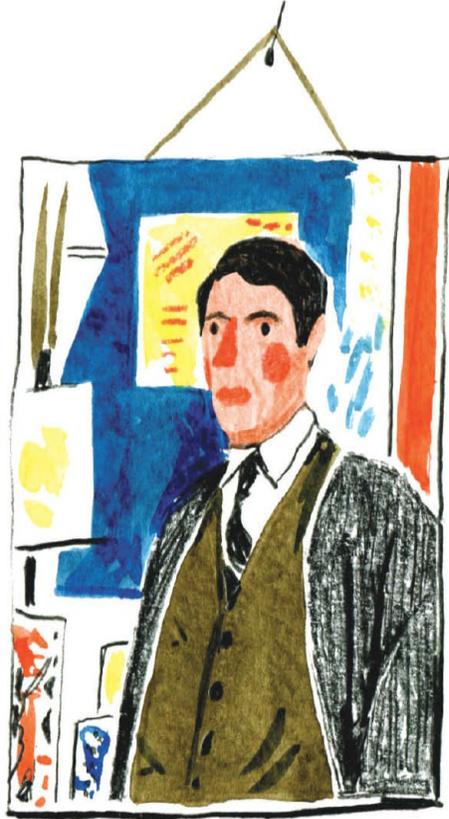




COCO WAS EMOTIONALLY SHATTERED.
HER CLOSE FRIEND MISIA WAS SOON TO
MARRY SPANISH PAINTER JOSEP MARIA
SERT. COCO JOINED THE NEWLYWEDS
ON A RESTORATIVE TRIP TO ITALY.

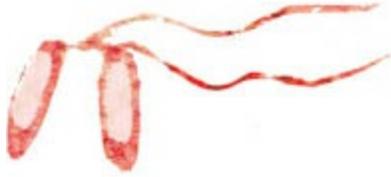
SHE VISITED MUSEUMS AND
CHURCHES, JUNKSHOPS AND SALONS.
SHE FELL IN LOVE WITH THE ART
AND ARCHITECTURE.

MISIA MOVED IN BOHEMIAN CIRCLES
AND SOON COCO BECAME FRIENDS
WITH THE ERA'S MOST AVANT-GARDE
ARTISTS, INCLUDING PABLO PICASSO.



PICASSO

COCO WENT ON TO FUND SERGEI
DIAGHILEV'S REVIVAL OF "THE RITE
OF SPRING" BY THE RADICAL BALLETS
RUSSES IN 1920.



SHE ALSO DESIGNED COSTUMES FOR
JEAN COCTEAU'S PLAY "ANTIGONE"
(1922) AND THE BALLET "LE TRAIN
BLEU" (1924).





Le Train Bleu

COCO LOVED CLEANLINESS,
CAMELLIAS, AND LIONS (HER
ASTROLOGICAL SIGN WAS LEO).



SHE BELIEVED THE NUMBER FIVE
BROUGHT HER GOOD LUCK.



HAVING JOINED FORCES WITH
EXPERIMENTAL PERFUMER ERNEST
BEAUX, COCO LAUNCHED HER
FIRST FRAGRANCE IN 1921. THE
PIONEERINGLY COMPLEX SCENT
(IN A UNIQUELY MASCULINE BOTTLE)
WENT ON TO MAKE HER MILLIONS.



BETWEEN 1921 AND 1924, COCO
HAD SEVERAL AFFAIRS, SOMETIMES
OVERLAPPING. FIRST, THERE
WAS MARRIED COMPOSER IGOR
STRAVINSKY, FOLLOWED BY EXILED
RUSSIAN DUKE DMITRI PAVLOVICH.

SHE HAD A BRIEF LIAISON
WITH PICASSO AND A DEEP AND
TURBULENT AFFAIR WITH HIS FRIEND
THE POET PIERRE REVERDY.

*"My love life got very disorganized,
because the person i loved had died."*



THE JAZZ AGE WAS BEGINNING
TO SWING, AND CAFÉ SOCIETY
FAVORED RAUCOUS BAR LE BOEUF.
IT WAS COCO'S REGULAR HAUNT,
FILLED WITH THE FASHIONABLE
AND FABULOUS.



LE

BOEUF

sur le Toit

WHILE OUTLANDISH DESIGNERS
PAUL POIRET AND ELSA SCHIAPARELLI
HAD A BIG IMPACT ON THE ERA'S
FASHION, COCO LEFT A LASTING
LEGACY. HER EASY ELEGANCE ALLOWED
A WOMAN'S PERSONALITY TO TAKE
CENTER STAGE: A PHILOSOPHY
EMPHATICALLY DEMONSTRATED BY HER
MOMENTOUS LITTLE BLACK DRESS.



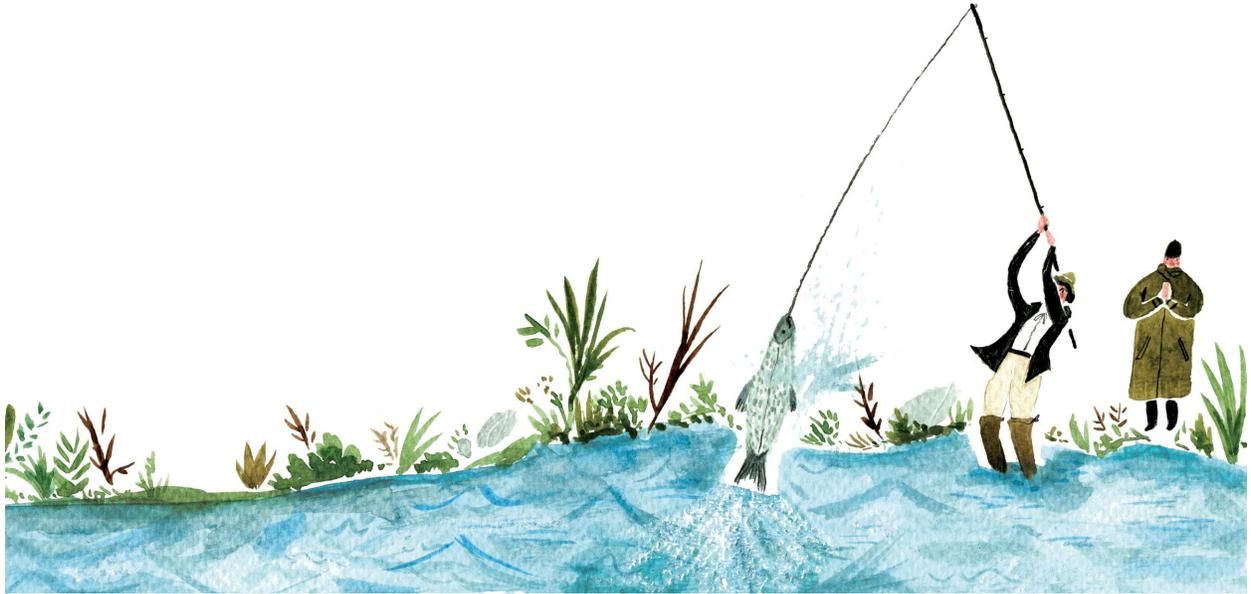
*"Eccentricity was dying out;
I hope, what's more, that I
helped kill it off."*

IN 1924, COCO EMBARKED ON AN AFFAIR
WITH THE DUKE OF WESTMINSTER
(NICKNAMED BENDOR) — ONE OF THE
RICHEST MEN IN ENGLAND.

THEY SPENT THEIR TIME HUNTING ON
HIS SCOTTISH ESTATE, CRUISING ON
HIS YACHT, AND ENJOYING THE
GLAMOUR OF THE FRENCH RIVIERA.



A DEMON WITH A FISHING ROD,
COCO WOULD REEL IN SALMON
AND TROUT ALONGSIDE BENDOR
AND HIS CLOSE FRIEND
THE FUTURE PRIME MINISTER
WINSTON CHURCHILL.



COCO'S TIME WITH BENDOR
INSPIRED HER WORK. HER "ENGLISH
LOOK" DREW HEAVILY ON THE BEAUTY
AND PRACTICALITY OF HUNTING
JACKETS AND YACHTING ATTIRE,
FEATURING BESPOKE SCOTTISH TWEED,
NAVY SHADES, AND GOLD BUTTONS.
IN 1927, SHE OPENED A SHOP IN
MAYFAIR, LONDON.

The English Look



NOW IN HER LATE FORTIES, COCO
FAILED IN HER ATTEMPTS TO GET
PREGNANT AND BENDOR WOULDN'T
CURB HIS INFIDELITY. BY 1930, THEIR
AFFAIR HAD COME TO AN END.



AS THE GREAT ECONOMIC
DEPRESSION TOOK HOLD, COCO SET SAIL
FOR HOLLYWOOD WHERE FILM PRODUCER
SAMUEL GOLDWYN AGREED TO PAY HER
\$1 MILLION A YEAR TO DRESS HIS STARS.



camellias Coco's



shearing scissors



Boy's portrait



perfume



threads

Atelier

Lion sculpture



pins



bracelets

buttons



notes

cigarettes



MORE AFFAIRS FOLLOWED, INCLUDING
A DEEP ONE WITH ILLUSTRATOR PAUL
IRIBE, A BRIEF ROMANCE WITH SALVADOR
DALÍ, AND RUMORED LESBIAN LIAISONS.

COCO HAD AN ENVIABLE SOCIAL LIFE
AND ENJOYED HER PUBLIC ADMIRATION
(PARTICULARLY FROM THOSE WHO ONCE
THOUGHT HER LOWLY). BUT ALONE AT
NIGHT, SHE WOULD INJECT A MORPHINE
SEDATIVE TO HELP HER SLEEP.



ON SEPTEMBER 3, 1939, FRANCE
DECLARED WAR ON GERMANY. A FEW
WEEKS LATER, COCO CLOSED THE
HOUSE OF CHANEL (LEAVING ONLY
31 RUE CAMBON OPEN). NINE
MONTHS LATER, THE NAZIS
ADVANCED INTO PARIS.

THE OCCUPATION CHANGED
EVERYTHING AND THE GERMAN
COMMAND BECAME PART OF LIFE.
THOSE WHO DIDN'T GO INTO EXILE
OFTEN FOUND THEMSELVES OBLIGED
TO WORK FOR THE OPPRESSORS.



DURING THE WAR, COCO ENTERED INTO AN AFFAIR WITH HANS GUNTHER, BARON VON DINCKLAGE. SHE ALSO EMBARKED ON A FAILED ATTEMPT TO SET UP PEACE TALKS BETWEEN CHURCHILL AND THE GERMANS.

THE AMBIGUITY SURROUNDING HER ACTIONS LEFT HER REPUTATION IRREVERSIBLY TARNISHED.



Von Dineklage

WHEN THE WAR ENDED IN THE SUMMER OF 1945, COCO MANAGED TO AVOID THE FATE OF MANY "HORIZONTAL COLLABORATORS." THESE WOMEN WERE PARADED NAKED THROUGH THE STREETS AND HAD THEIR HAIR SHAVED OFF.

JUST MONTHS LATER, COCO RETREATED TO SWITZERLAND. SHE KEPT A LOW PROFILE FOR NEARLY TEN YEARS.

WHILE SHE WAS AWAY, FASHION IN PARIS WAS FAMOUSLY TRANSFORMED.



Dior's New Look



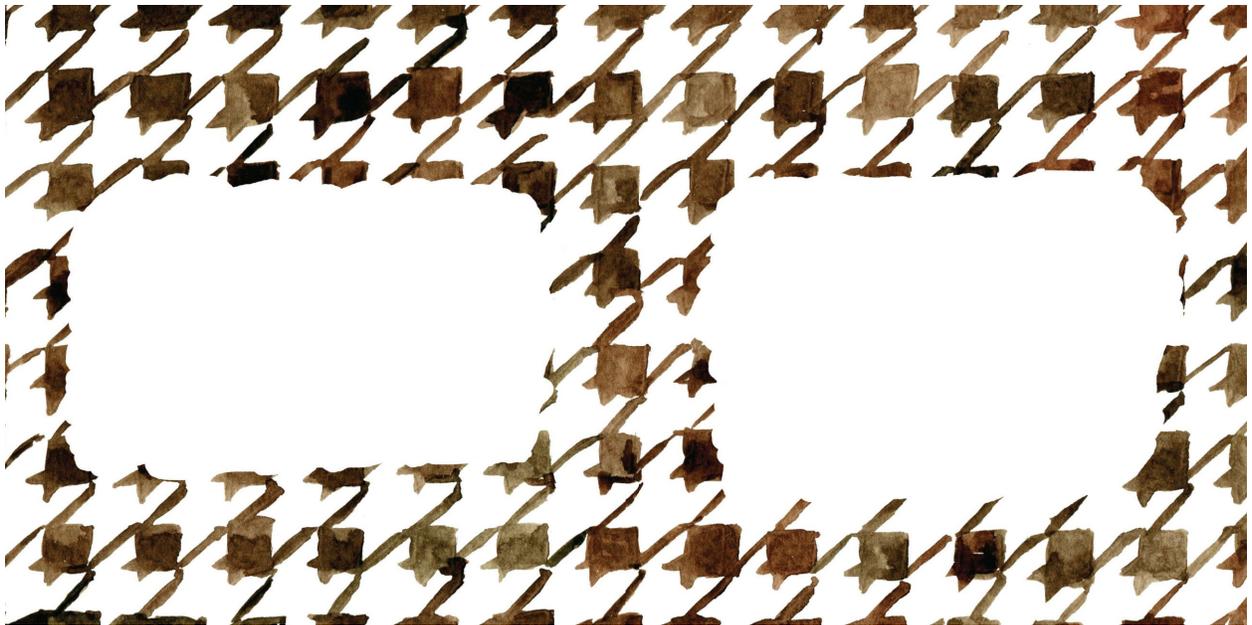
COCO FELT THAT ALL HER HARD WORK
HAD BEEN UNDONE BY CONTEMPORARY
DESIGNERS LIKE CHRISTIAN DIOR AND
PIERRE BALMAIN. THEY SEEMED TO LOOK
TO THE PAST FOR THEIR INSPIRATION,
AND THAT CAUSED COCO TO OPENLY
RAIL AGAINST THEM.

THE RESTRICTIVE, HOURGLASS
SHAPES AND RETURN TO THE ROMANTIC
IMAGE OF FEMININITY WAS CONTRARY
TO EVERYTHING COCO HAD FOUGHT FOR.
WOMEN WERE AGAIN TRUSSED UP
IN COSTUME.



ON FEBRUARY 5, 1954, COCO
REOPENED THE HOUSE OF CHANEL
AND PRESENTED HER COMEBACK
COLLECTION. SHE WAS SEVENTY.

THE RECEPTION WAS MIXED. SOME
DEEMED COCO'S MUTED COLORS
AND FUNCTIONAL SKIRT SUITS
OLD HAT. BUT AMERICAN "VOGUE,"
BRITISH BUYERS, AND WOMEN THE
WORLD OVER UNDERSTOOD THE
COLLECTION'S TIMELESS APPEAL
AND THE IMPORTANCE OF THESE
DESIGNS IN A REFINED WARDROBE.





OVER THE NEXT TWO DECADES, COCO CONTINUED TO INNOVATE, AND HER POPULARITY WITH STYLISH, PRACTICAL WOMEN NEVER WANED. HER DEFINING STAPLES AND SIGNATURE, MUCH-COPIED CREATIONS (FROM BAGS WITH SHOULDER STRAPS TO COSTUME JEWELRY) HELPED HER ESTABLISH A LASTING LEGACY OF ELEGANCE AND EASY GLAMOUR.

earrings



TWO-TONE SHOES



WIDE TROUSERS



2.55 handbag

STRAW



BOATER

pockets!



pajama top



costume jewelry



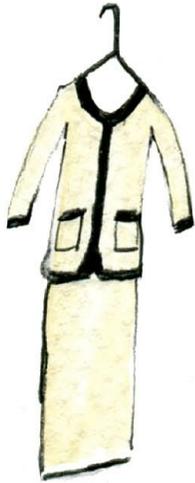
Camellia corsage



TWEED JACKET



BRETON TOP



skirt suit

Little Black Dress



pearl necklace

AS THE YEARS PASSED, COCO
BECAME FRAIL. IN HER EIGHTIES
SHE WAS PLAGUED BY ARTHRITIS
AND RHEUMATISM. BUT DESPITE
HAVING ALIENATED MOST OF HER
FRIENDS, SHE CONTINUED TO FIND
REFUGE, SOLACE, AND DISTRACTION
IN HER WORK.



ON JANUARY 10, 1971,
COCO COMPLAINED OF FEELING
SUFFOCATED AS SHE LAY ON HER BED.
HER MAID HELPED HER INJECT HER
LAST VIAL OF MORPHINE. SHE
WAS EIGHTY-SEVEN.



*"I lived a modern life; I shared
the habits, the tastes, and the needs
of those whom I dressed."*



Acknowledgments

Coco Chanel's history is difficult to pin down. Accounts of her life vary wildly, not least because she herself was apt to tell different versions of her own story. The author has taken care to be accurate and faithful to the truth throughout. There are, however, two scenes within the book that are known to be reported rather than confirmed. First is the idea that the nickname "Coco" was the result of Chanel singing revue standards. The second is the oft-reported account of her traveling to the site of Boy Capel's car accident on the day of his funeral.

For a wealth of biographical detail, the author would like to gratefully acknowledge the vivid and comprehensive *Chanel: An Intimate Life* by Lisa Chaney, as well as *Coco Chanel: The Legend and the Life* by Justine Picardie.

The illustrator would like to extend her love and thanks to Ali, Ma, Pops, Jojo, and Chester.

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