



Coco Chanel: A Biography (Bloomsbury Lives of Women)

Axel Madsen

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Coco Chanel's genius for fashion may have been distilled in simplicity, but her life was an extravaganza. A brilliant array of luminaries fell under her spell - Picasso, Churchill, Cocteau; lovers included the Grand Duke Dmitri; the English roue, Boy Capel; a French poet; and, a German spy and the Duke of Westminster, who offered to leave his wife for her permanently, if she would only bear him an heir. Paradoxically, though she might have been regarded in some lights as a pioneering feminist - sacrificing marriage to a revolutionary career in couture - Chanel was utterly baffled by the idea of women's politics. Educated women? 'A woman's education consists of two lessons: never leave the house without stockings, never go out without a hat'. Chanel's rise from penniless orphan to millionaire designer - 'inventing' sportswear, the little black dress and number 5 - makes compelling reading, not least because she was inclined to design her own life as deftly as she did her fashions. Axel Madsen negotiates Chanel's smoke screens with skill, bringing this tantalizing woman to life in all her alluring complexity.



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