# Archive:
# Grace Kelly

Actress, princess, icon, enigma: Hitchcock's most famous blonde boomeranged between social conformity and hardheaded rebellion over the course of her too-short life. Writer *Katie Calautti* delves into the archives to try and better understand Hollywood's "snow-covered volcano."

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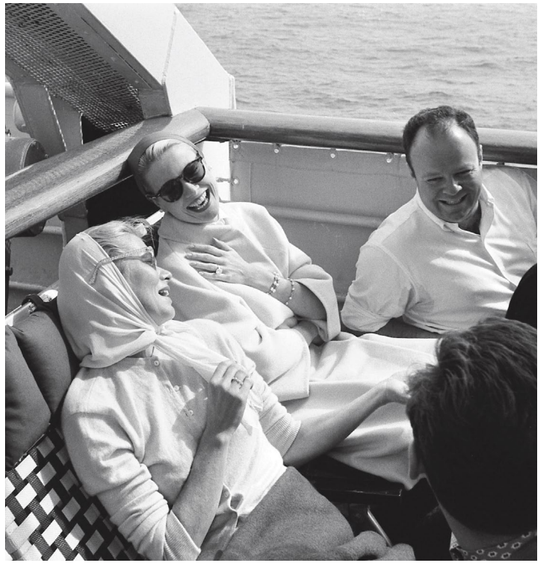

When 18-year-old Grace Kelly convinced her parents to let her move from Philadelphia to New York City to pursue her dream of acting, it was not with their glowing endorsement. "It's not as if she's going to *Hollywood*, after all," said her mother. "It'll never amount to anything," her father agreed dismissively. This was not the first time, nor would it be the last time, that the Kellys underestimated their daughter. Their disapproval was the mortar with which the bricks of her life were laid, and with which Kelly would go on to fashion a literal palace.

In the six years between 1950 and 1956, Kelly starred in 11 movies and became one of Hollywood's most enduring icons. So much has been said of the Oscar-winning actress, Alfred Hitchcock muse, and eventual Princess of Monaco in the 67 years since she burst onto the scene that to construct a sound characterization of her is, as reporter Pete Martin once wrote, "Like trying to wrap up 115 pounds of smoke." Kelly's life, like her persona, was a showcase of duality—an endless tug-of-war between social conformity and rebellion. The "snow-covered volcano," as Hitchcock famously described her, simmered for 52 short years.

Kelly was raised wanting for nothing—at least, not in the material sense. Her father, John B. "Jack" Kelly Sr., had found fame in the early 1920s as an Olympic athlete (he was the first rower to win three gold medals), then earned millions of dollars through his family's bricklaying business. Her mother, Margaret, a former model and competitive swimmer, was the first woman to teach physical education at the University of Pennsylvania.

The shy and sickly third of four children, Kelly was the sweet-natured, imaginative yin to her athletic, outgoing brother and sisters' yang. "My family told me they thought I was practically born with a cold," Kelly once said. Her mother ruled the roost with an iron fist, and her father judged his children's success based on their athletic prowess. "We were always competing," recalled Kelly. "Competing for everything, competing for love."

Her upbringing taught her to build a protective barrier between her outer and inner worlds—the early creation of that Grace Kelly mystique so many still marvel over. As her *To Catch a Thief* co-star Cary Grant said, when Kelly confronted adversity, "She'd just enclose herself in what my wife at the time used to call her 'plastic egg'—that she could see out of, but you couldn't get in."

Kelly moved to New York in 1947 to pursue acting, where mention of her Pulitzer Prize–winning uncle George Kelly earned her an audition at the American Academy of Dramatic Arts. "I think most of what went on after that was thanks to herself, that she had a great look and she definitely personified that cool blonde,"



Even early in her career, Kelly was strong-willed. She refused Hitchcock's request to wear "falsies" on the set of *Rear Window*.

Left Photograph: Walter Carone/Paris Match/Getty Images, Right Photograph: Keystone-France/Gamma-Keystone/Getty Images

says Jonathan Kuntz, film historian and UCLA lecturer. After a successful stint as a model, her ticket to Hollywood came in early 1950 when she screen-tested for a movie called *Taxi*. She didn't get the part, but the reel eventually made its way to her future directors John Ford and Alfred Hitchcock.

After a rather underwhelming two-minute-long debut in 1951's *Fourteen Hours*, 1952's *High Noon* was a notable upgrade. It positioned 23-year-old Kelly opposite legendary actor Gary Cooper, who was almost 30 years her senior—an immense age difference that would become standard for her leading men. "Kelly was so rarely paired with men her own age," film historian and *You Must Remember This* podcast creator Karina Longworth notes. "To the point where, in hindsight, it feels like the entirety of her persona pre-royalty was wrapped up in being the young object of desire for an older man."

The enticement of acting alongside Clark Gable and Ava Gardner on location in Kenya for Ford's 1953 film *Mogambo* lured Kelly into what she considered the indentured servitude of Hollywood: a seven-year contract with Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Studios (MGM). She astonished her agents and MGM executives by requesting alterations to the paperwork, requiring every other year off so she could take on theater work, and maintaining her primary residence in New York. This would be the first of many contentious dealings with her studio.

The role in *Mogambo* earned Kelly a Golden Globe for best supporting actress, solidifying her rising star status; now sheofficially had the attention of Hitchcock. Kelly asserted her will on his sets from the very start, telling the exacting director that her *Dial M for Murder* character would never put on an elaborate robe to answer the phone in the middle of the night —she'd simply do so in her nightgown. Hitchcock relented, and after that, gave her a great deal of freedom to dictate her wardrobe in their next two film collaborations.

MGM studio head Dore Schary often fed her lightweight roles in fluffy films, but Kelly always dug her heels in, saying, "If anybody starts using me as scenery, I'll return to New York." (After all, unlike most struggling actors, Kelly didn't need their money: She had a trust fund granted by her father on her 21st birthday.) She was equally stubborn about giving interviews. "I was hired to be an actress, not a personality for the press," Kelly once said.

Her all-around obstinacy earned her a short suspension from MGM in early 1955—so the freshly Oscar-nominated actress made two unprecedented moves: Without consulting her PR agents, she informed the press of MGM's action and went on vacation in Jamaica with her sister Peggy. Kelly invited photographer Howell Conant along, and Kelly and Conant proceeded to take spontaneous, intimate images the likes of which had never been seen in glamour-obsessed Hollywood. The goal was to present Kelly as a human being—the opposite of the treatment she was getting in Los Angeles.

Considering her disdain for the press, it's ironic that a publicity stunt during Kelly's visit to the 1955 Cannes Film Festival changed the course of her life. The movie editor of *Paris Match* magazine roped Kelly into a 30-minute photo op at Prince Rainier's palace in Monaco, a small principality bordering France. The single 32-year-old monarch, like Kelly, was very much in the news at the time—if Rainier did not produce

*"I was hired to be an actress, not a personality for the press."*

Kelly's parents approved of her marriage to Rainier, because it assured their social standing in Philadelphia society.

Photograph: Philippe Le Tellier/Paris Match/Getty Images

an heir, Monaco would revert to French control.

Once Kelly returned to the States, Rainier wrote to thank her for her visit. The two began corresponding regularly, and found they had much in common—Rainier, too, had an unhappy, lonely childhood and at times felt burdened by his very public position. Six months later, Rainier visited the United States with his priest and doctor in tow, set on asking Kelly to marry him. When asked in an interview, "If you were to marry, what kind of girl do you have in mind?" His response was, "I don't know—the best." That is what Kelly's parents had always raised her to be—and despite all her career success, it was with this match that she, at last, earned their attention.

Three days after meeting the Kellys, Rainier proposed. After submitting to an exam from Rainier's doctor that confirmed Kelly could bear children, Rainier gave her a 10.47-carat diamond, which she wore as her character's engagement ring in what would be her last movie, *High Society*.

So why did Kelly leave her hard-won career—within which she'd carved out an unusual amount of autonomy—for an even more structured life in Monaco's palace? "I don't want my wife to work," Rainier told the press. And against the backdrop of 1950s society, being a wife and a mother was still the ultimate accomplishment. Kelly also saw her makeup call times being bumped an hour earlier—a sign that the 26-year-old was already aging out of Hollywood. And a friend recalled that she doubted her abilities as an actress and felt there was nowhere for her to go but down after her Oscar win for *The Country Girl*.

In April 1956, Kelly prepared for what the media had dubbed "the wedding of the century" when she sailed with friends and family on the USS Constitution to Monaco. She carried with her four massive trunks and 56 pieces of luggage, along with her wedding dress—a gift from MGM—stored in a steel box resembling a coffin as a ruse to throw off reporters.

The macabre metal-encased wedding dress was an unhappy foreshadowing. Royal life proved a bad trade for Kelly—she was terribly lonely and isolated from the start. "I became princess before I had much time to imagine what it would be," Kelly said. Studying to be royalty was unlike any of her acting jobs—she could skirt convention in Hollywood, but in Monaco old rules reigned. And the adjustment to palace life was hard: Rainier was often preoccupied with affairs of state, and until she learned French there was a language barrier between her and her staff. Even the births of her three children couldn't completely fill the void left by her career.

In 1960, Kelly's father was diagnosed with terminal cancer. After the princess left his Philadelphia bedside, her personal secretary, Phyllis Blum, recalled that Kelly broke down in tears—it was the first time she'd seen the princess cry. With the death of John B. Kelly, the man who had greeted his daughter's 1955 Oscar win by telling the press that, "Of the four children, she's the last one I'd expected to support me in my old age," the snow-topped volcano began its thaw. Photographer Eve Arnold visited Monaco to work on a CBS documentary in 1962, and recalled, "I got the distinct feeling that Kelly felt trapped." That same year, Kelly's shot at coming out of retirement arrived when Hitchcock offered her the title role in *Marnie*. She was overjoyed, and perhaps because he now had his heir, Rainier allowed her to accept. But as Donald Spoto writes in his biography of Kelly, she reneged when she learned she was pregnant. Two weeks later, she miscarried. It was never made public, so the official reason was given as an angry outcry from the Monegasque people, who supposedly didn't want to see their princess kissing another man. Kelly never returned to Hollywood.

Rainier and Kelly's relationship became more distant in the 1970s. Kelly often escaped with her daughters to Paris for months at a time, and in 1976 she joined the board of 20th Century Fox, telling a friend, "It gets me away from Monaco at least four times a year." She also began wandering the mountains of Monaco collecting flowers, which she eventually turned into art and exhibited. The new hobby puzzled those close to her. "Here was one of the most vital women in the world, and she's

*"I became princess before I had much time to imagine what it would be."*

"'I've been accused of being cold, snobbish, distant," Kelly once said. "Those who know me well know that I'm nothing of the sort."

*“She dreamed about the days when no one would care about her and she could be a bag lady...”*

making pressed flower collages?” said her friend Rupert Allan. She began drinking heavily by the late 1970s, and friends observed she was struggling with depression.

On September 13, 1982, Kelly and her youngest daughter, Stephanie, left the family’s country home for Monaco in their 1972 Rover 3500. She had an appointment with her couturier, and loaded some dresses that needed altering into the back seat. Because the car was crowded, she drove herself and left their usual chauffeur behind. Kelly never liked to drive, and the winding mountain roads on the way to Monaco were especially difficult to navigate. A truck driver witnessed her car swerving, then speeding up and flying over a cliff. The car bounced upside down, rolled several times and then came to a stop on its roof.

Stephanie suffered a hairline fracture to her neck; Kelly was unresponsive. The palace issued an early alert that the princess only had a broken leg, but it was later revealed that she had experienced a massive stroke while driving, and another brain injury in the crash. Kelly was taken off life support the following day. She was just 52 years old. All of Monaco—and Hollywood—grieved.

Kelly’s friend Robert Dornhelm recalled, “She always told me that she dreamed about the days when no one would care about her and she could be a bag lady wandering through the Metro in Paris.” It was never to be; even 36 years after she was laid to rest, an internet search of Kelly yields a photo of her lying in state in her coffin. The photographers that plagued her throughout her life refused to relent beyond it. (Though one notably did: The only time that Howell Conant did not pack his camera for a flight to Monaco was the trip to Kelly’s funeral.)

It seems everything happened early for Grace Kelly: Her pain, her fame, her marriage, her disenchantment, and her death. As Kelly herself once told Spoto, “The idea of my life as a fairy tale is itself a fairy tale.”

After a life lived on camera, Kelly’s funeral in 1982 was broadcast live around the world.

Photograph: Mondadori Portfolio/Getty Images



# 114 — 176

# Hair


**114** *Diana Ross*

**126** *Great Lengths*

**136** *The New Democrats*

**148** *Naïm Abboud*

**152** *Sherin Khankan*

**162** *Hair Essays*