



Undressing Emmanuelle: A Life Stripped Bare

Sylvia Kristel

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The candid and heartbreakingly honest memoir of Sylvia Kristel, the cinema icon of the 1970s who played the lead role in the worldwide sensation erotic Emmanuelle films.

1974: After a year of wrangling with the censors, the erotic film, Emmanuelle, is a blockbuster sensation on release in France and a box office triumph around the world from Japan to the States. The image that adorned cinemas across the world was of an unknown 20 year old posing naked, innocent and vulnerable on a wicker chair. Overnight Sylvia Kristel was propelled into international superstardom (at the height of her fame she was invited to address the Brazilian parliament) and turned into an icon of sexual liberation.

Sylvia Kristel was born of a dysfunctional family and an impossibly strict religious education. But having won the Miss TV Europe competition in 1973 she was driven by her own ambition to be an actress on the world stage and auditioned for the part of the innocent seductress in Emmanuelle. Through the phenomenal success of the three Emmanuelle films she starred in, she became the darling of Hollywood, as she seduced and was seduced by the rich and the beautiful of the golden age of cinema. But she found herself typecast as Emmanuelle and often played roles that capitalized upon that image, most notably starring in an adaptation of 'Lady Chatterly's Lover', and a nudity-filled biopic of World War I spy, Mata Hari, in which she played the title role. Almost inevitably she became the victim of her own innocence as it was Emmanuelle people wanted, not Sylvia. The price that she paid for her meteoric rise was an equally rapid descent into an excess of alcohol and drugs as her tempestuous family life threatened to fall apart all together.

Naked, candid and heart-breakingly honest, 'Undressing Emmanuelle' tells the story of one of Europe's most celebrated cinema icons and the price she paid for her beauty and innocence.

Undressing Emmanuelle: A Life Stripped Bare Details

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Vera says

never read an autobiography before, so it was a different experience. A good one, though. I really liked the way Sylvia wrote it and I've grown fond of this woman throughout the story. A good book, indeed.

Mark Farley says

Spirited and exceptionally gifted, this quite remarkable and elegantly sparse memoir gives a wonderful snapshot and portrait of the 70's adult film star. It's rather beguiling in parts and says a lot of wonderful things about certain elements of sexual politics but more so than anything, it's quite tender and well written. Adorably so even.

Doug Clark says

In 1967, an writer calling herself Emmanuelle Arsan published in France an erotic novel about a young woman's sexual awakening that became a sensation and is now considered one of the erotic classics of the 20th Century. This book was Emmanuelle. In 1974, the book was adapted into a film starring a 20-year old Dutch actress and model, Sylvia Kristel , as Emmanuelle. The movie and Sylvia Kristel also became sensations. Ms. Kristel had a relatively successful film career for the next 10 years starring in two sequels and other similar films in what is now known as softcore.

Ms. Kristel published her autobiography, Undressing Emmanuelle, in 2007. The book is a recounting of her life growing up in a dysfunctional family that lived in a hotel during her early years until she was sent to a boarding school. Her parents divorced and her mother and siblings were forced to move out of the hotel. Sylvia, at a loss of what to do, found herself being pursued for her beauty and took advantage of that to become a model and actress. After winning the Miss TV Europe contest in England in 1973, she auditioned for the role of Emmanuelle which she won. It was to become her greatest success but also a millstone around her neck as she was typecast from then on.

Her life spiraled downward through affairs, short term relationships, alcohol (both her parents were alcoholics), and drugs (cocaine, mostly) finally bottoming out when she was told she would die if she didn't stop. Of her many relationships, the two most notable for us in America would be Warren Beatty and Ian McShane. None of her relationships lasted extremely long although several lasted a few years.

In her later years, she would appear on TV shows (mostly in Europe) and spent much of her time living in her native Netherlands painting. After surviving cancer, she continues to live a life removed from the spotlight in The Netherlands.

Her autobiography is a fascinating read. She does not shy away from her mistakes and foibles. Her writing style is very matter of fact, almost dispassionate. In many ways it seems as if she was an observer and recorder of her own life as opposed to an active participant. I felt a distance from her while reading it. The

book itself is a fairly quick read with fairly short chapters. Can I recommend it? Yes, if you are interested in whether she is really Emmanuelle (no) and how she lived through those years and survived. But I will caution that her matter of factness and dispassion make it hard for the reader to really care. She's had an eventual life and not all of it good, but her own lack of emotion in the telling makes it difficult for the reader to have an emotional investment. And maybe that what she wanted.

Titus Hjelm says

A quick read that gets a bit artsy at times, but is a candid and touching read.

Calle says

"I am a divorced child, of divided, uncertain background. Within this division I - supposed fruit of their love - no longer exist. It happened nearly forty years ago, yet to me nothing is sadder than my parents' divorce."

Sylvia Kristel became a star almost overnight as "Emmanuelle". It opened some new doors for her but she was forever associated with the character, forever typecast. Her life as a celebrity soon became a life of drug abuse, debt, a failed career and a failure as a mother.

Kristel writes beautifully and with great insight about her life from her childhood, her relationship to her parents and about the pain of her parents' divorce. It's a fascinating, beautifully written and sometimes moving memoir by this underappreciated actress

M. Sarki says

Interesting to note that Sylvia Kristel did most of her work and play in the throes of serious drug and alcohol abuse. The only way to overcome her own conservative and reserved nature was to deaden herself and dance away her pain. Sad that she did not attempt to know herself sober and to overcome whatever it was that kept herself hidden from even the people she felt most important in her life. The first half of the book is very good but then with the onset of alcohol and drug abuse the Hollywood syndrome takes over, and celebrity and the quest for shallow victories hastens her ultimate departure from her truest self. Not sure she ever recovered though she attempted in her own words to claim that she did. A lot of shallow name-dropping towards the end of the book but understandable for a washed-up B-grade movie star who had one of the most beautiful combinations of intelligence, good looks, and a very fine body.

Lee says

Memoirs of Emmanuelle actress. Not terribly interesting person, though from a fairly fucked up family. Main impression is that she is a bit of a lazy cow that thinks the world should sort of owe her a living.

Nina says

This memoir recounts the life of Sylvia Kristell, the famous actress who notoriously played Emmanuelle. To be perfectly honest, I have never seen or heard of this movie and the only reason I was prompted to read this book is that I received it in a book swap at a recent Innocent village fete. It is very easy to read but not because of the author's mastery of prose but more so her very simplified and I would say almost childish manner which she recounts her life. I can't believe a publisher thought that this book would work!
