

CHRISTINA ONASSIS

By Bill Dougherty

It's hard to believe that it's been thirty years since the passing of the much-troubled heiress Christina Onassis. She was the poor little rich girl who was thrust into the spotlight upon her father's death in 1975. Four times she married handsome fortune hunters. The last marriage to a French businessman produced her only child Athina, named after Christina's late mother. If history proves correct, the story of Christina Onassis and the people that surrounded her will remain one of the most famous Greek/American tragedies ever to be played out and with the entire world as its audience.

Christina and her brother Alexander grew up in a life of privilege. Her father was a self-made shipping billionaire by the time he was 25. The children's mother, Tina, was the daughter of Stavros Livanos; one of the most successful Greek shipping magnets at the time. The children were largely ignored by their jet-setting parents. Tina was exceptionally beautiful, charming and considered one of the world's top international hostesses. The couple's son, Alex, inherited his mother's striking looks, charm and his father's business sense. His little sister, Christina, only inherited her father's brains. From the time Christina was a teenager, she assembled an arsenal of plastic surgeons, dietitians and personal trainers. The end result was stunning! She went from ugly duckling to the belle of the ball.

By the early 1960s; Aristotle Onassis had begun an affair with world famous opera singer, the Greek-but-Brooklyn born, Maria Callas. When Tina Onassis found out, she immediately divorced the tycoon and later embarked on two more marriages; the last one being to another titanic Greek Shipping tycoon who also happened to be her late sister's husband, Stavros Niarchos. The divorce devastated Christina and her brother, yet they quickly warmed to Maria Callas. They often said that their father was never happier than with the diva. The foursome traveled the world on Ari's yacht, named after his youngest child. People would sell their first born



Christina Onassis



Aristotle Onassis



Tina Onassis Niarchos



Maria Callas



Lee Radziwill



Jacqueline Kennedy-Onassis



Alexander Onassis

to receive an invitation to sail aboard the *Christina* and in the fall of 1963 that much-coveted invitation was extended to the most famous woman on the planet.

In late summer of 1963; following the heart-breaking death of her son Patrick, who lived only days, Jacqueline Kennedy was reportedly suicidal. Her younger sister Lee Radziwill, an already well-established member of the international jet-set, suggested the First Lady join her sailing aboard the *Christina* to lift her spirits. While Lee believed Aristotle Onassis was interested in her, the Greek tycoon was mesmerized by Jackie. Following the tragic death of JFK only a few months later, it would be Ari who would arrive first at the White House to dry the tears of the grieving widow.

Several years later Jackie Kennedy and Aristotle Onassis married, much to the horror of the world and the Onassis children.



The Yacht, *Christina*

Maria Callas was devastated too, since she believed that she would be the second Mrs. Onassis. The Kennedy family, along with most of the world press, was less than amused by the nuptials as well. Unlike Maria Callas; the Onassis children mistrusted the former First Lady and looked upon her as a greedy, fortune-seeking black widow.

Almost immediately from the arrival of Jackie Kennedy into the House of Onassis, things started to go awry very quickly. The couple had little in common and argued constantly. By the early 1970s, they were leading separate lives. Ari remained in Greece and Jackie was living in New York. Ari rekindled his relationship with Maria Callas. But things continued to slip out of favor for the wealthiest man in the world. He lost his controlling interest in Olympic Airways and lost multimillion dollar shipping contracts to his ex-wife's husband, his arch nemesis Stavros Niarchos. Then Aristotle Onassis lost massive hotel deals along the French Riviera. In 1973, Alexander Onassis was killed in a plane crash. The pride and joy of his parents, his death devastated the divorced couple. Tina Onassis Niarchos committed suicide several months later and Aristotle Onassis perished in early 1975. Maria Callas died in 1977 from what many considered to be a broken heart. Christina Onassis had lost her entire family in less than a year and a half. She spent the rest of her short and unhappy life blaming Jackie Kennedy for bringing the Kennedy Curse upon her late father's great house.

Shortly after Alexander's untimely death, Ari sent his daughter to New York to learn the family businesses. She excelled tremendously and ran them successfully for several years. Eventually she grew tired of the daily responsibilities. By this time, Christina was in the press constantly. Her yo-yo dieting, prescription drug use, marriages and party girl reputation were starting to take their toll. She could be the most beautiful woman in the room commented a Buenos Aires socialite and months later be mistaken for a bag lady. Her fourth marriage would produce her daughter Athenia but like the rest, the marriage was fractured from the get go. She remained friends with Thierry Roussel after their highly publicized split and were often seen together with their daughter. After years of crash diets, suicide attempts and prescription drug addiction; Christina Onassis died of a heart attack in 1988 while visiting friends in Argentina. She was only 37.

Today her daughter Athena is one of the wealthiest and most beautiful women in the world. She is an accomplished and awarded equestrian. She divorced in 2016 and divides her time between South American and Europe. She has no ties to Greece and does not speak the language. She once said that if she could burn the Onassis name, she would. She is seldom seen in public and keeps a very low profile.

In the end, Christina Onassis was probably spot on about the Kennedy Curse. By the time Jackie Kennedy arrived in 1968, the so-called curse had taken countless lives and created much scandal. Even the adored and iconic First Lady would die at only 64. She would be followed in death by her son John, his wife Carolyn and his sister-in-law Lauren who all perished in a plane crash in 1999. We will perhaps never in our lifetime bear witness again to a collision course involving some of the most famous people in the world. The ultimate Greek Tragedy.