



*Diving*  
FOR  
*Starfish*

The Jeweler, the Actress,  
the Heiress, and One of the World's  
Most Alluring Pieces of Jewelry

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but none of the jewelers I talked to would hazard a guess about which one it was.

I had heard the story of a starfish that I thought could have been Claudette Colbert's, emerging to a new life in Paris in the 1980s. The legendary late socialite São Schlumberger, married to the aristocratic French oil drilling tycoon Pierre Schlumberger, had once owned one. She fit the profile of the kind of woman who had a Boivin starfish. Wildly extravagant right up to her death in 2007, the Portuguese-born beauty lived a French fairy-tale life in a five-story eighteenth-century mansion, in Paris. It was filled with Rothkos, Lichtensteins, and all manner of fine art. Andy Warhol did a silkscreen portrait of São, heightening her legend. Salvador Dalí painted her, too. She gave parties for fifteen hundred guests, wore haute couture, and turned up once at Studio 54 in New York wearing major diamonds and rubies from Van Cleef & Arpels. She loved jewelry. Her husband gave her a fifty-one-carat Golconda diamond ring in a brown paper bag. Everything about her was excessive, including her public affair with the Egyptian prince Naguib Abdallah, whom her husband supported to keep her happy.

Ralph Esmerian had mentioned to me in a letter that New York jewelry designer Christopher Walling, whose innovative designs have been worn by a host of celebrities and society figures, including Queen Noor, Danielle Steel, and Liz Taylor, told him that São had a Boivin ruby and amethyst starfish.

A great raconteur, Walling recalled to me being with São when she asked her husband Pierre which of her many diamonds she should wear to a dinner with the Queen of England. Pierre responded, "All of them! If not now, when?" To criticism that it was vulgar to wear so much jewelry, São also memorably retorted, "It's only vulgar if you don't have it." Walling, a tall, dapper moustachioed man in cowboy boots and a camel's hair jacket, smiled, eyes twinkling like the gemstones he set in his jewelry designs, as he told me the story. He remembered that São was wearing her

ruby and amethyst starfish brooch when he accompanied her to one of fashion arbiter Eleanor Lambert's shows. Lambert was the creator of the International Best Dressed List. Walling explained that São did not wear her Boivin starfish to fancy dress balls, like those at Versailles, where she arrived in a maroon Rolls-Royce and was more likely to have on a ruby and diamond necklace that had belonged to Marie Antoinette. While the starfish was beautiful, it wasn't fine or fancy enough for formal royal occasions. He does not know what became of her starfish after her death, but it may well be tied up in the rancorous relationship that she had with her daughter, Victoire. I started conjuring the possibilities. Could São's have been the one that turned up for sale in 2012 at Emmanuelle Chassard's La Galerie Parisienne in Paris? Or could it have been Claudette Colbert's? Walling produced a photograph of a smiling São with her starfish pinned to the left shoulder of her fur coat as she and Walling headed out to a party for the gemstone artist Andreas von Zadora-Gerlof at Malcolm Forbes's in 1992. In the photograph, apparently taken with a flash, the color of the stones in the starfish is somewhat washed out and I would have mistaken them for sapphires or aquamarines, but Walling is clear. They were rubies and amethysts. With a magnifying glass I tried to see which rays were flipped. The fourth was obviously curled up, but I could not see the top of the ray on her shoulder. As I studied the image of the starfish that Chassard sent to me saying it had sold "recently," I saw that it had the first and fourth rays turned up at their ends. This is hardly conclusive, but it does suggest that the starfish she sold, for whatever reason, could have been São's. She died in 2007. Alain, Emmanuelle Chassard's father, offered another clue when he told me in Miami, the following year, that the starfish that went through the Chassard store was from a special old family, and a special piece. The Schlumbergers' would meet his description. Emmanuelle had figured prominently in a *New York Times* story in 2010 about Boivin. She talked about Boivin's



innovative designs and, case in point, a jewelry sale at Christie's in Geneva a month earlier that included a Boivin starfish, "a mythical piece of which no more than 4 or 5 were ever made," but when I went back to the auction sale record, that starfish was a larger and later version. A reproduction. It was impossible to know whether it or another had been the one sold from La Galerie Parisienne a year later. Or whether it could have been São's. Of course, I had asked, but Chassard wouldn't tell me.

During our interview a light went on in Christopher Walling's head and he brightened as he said, "I think I know who has Rogers's now. At least I can make an educated guess." Without giving away the name that had come to mind, he promised to check out his hunch and get back to me. A few days later, he told me that Ann Ziff had two starfish. He thought he remembered seeing her with one when they flew together in her G5 aircraft some years back. This news gave me a fresh shot of adrenaline. Ziff was a well-known jewelry fancier, she now designed jewelry herself, and she was a recognized patron of the arts. The only doubt I harbored was Nicholas Luchsinger's assertion when I interviewed him at Van Cleef in Paris that the client who had the Rogers starfish was "very, very private." Ziff was not that private, but I still hoped. My excitement was short-lived. I wrote to Deep Throat, who had told me that while he/she could not tell me outright who owned the Rogers starfish, he/she would confirm it for me only when I discovered it on my own. The answer came back promptly. "No!" I explained I had heard that Ziff had two. "Ask her to show it to you," was the only riposte.

Walling continued to think that one of Ziff's starfish might be Millicent Rogers's. I asked him why he thought someone would want two. The answer was obvious to him. He put his hand to his waist. Two would make a fabulous belt buckle, he explained. Oh. And here I had been straining in my fantasies to figure out



Sao Schlumberger with the Boivin Starfish and Christopher Walling, 1992