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Kareena

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GRAZIA COVER STORY

She's All that

Star-child, top-billed actress, half of a power couple, and a journalist's dream – **Kareena Kapoor** slips into her many avatars with consummate ease. *Filmfare* deputy editor Anuradha Choudhary deconstructs our stunning cover girl

Photographs R BURMAN Senior Fashion Editor EKTA RAJANI Creative Director ANJAN DAS

A close-up portrait of a woman with dark hair and green eyes, looking over a white tulle veil. She is wearing a vibrant green, one-shoulder dress with a draped neckline. Her right hand, adorned with a green crystal ring, is visible near the veil. A thin gold chain necklace is also visible.

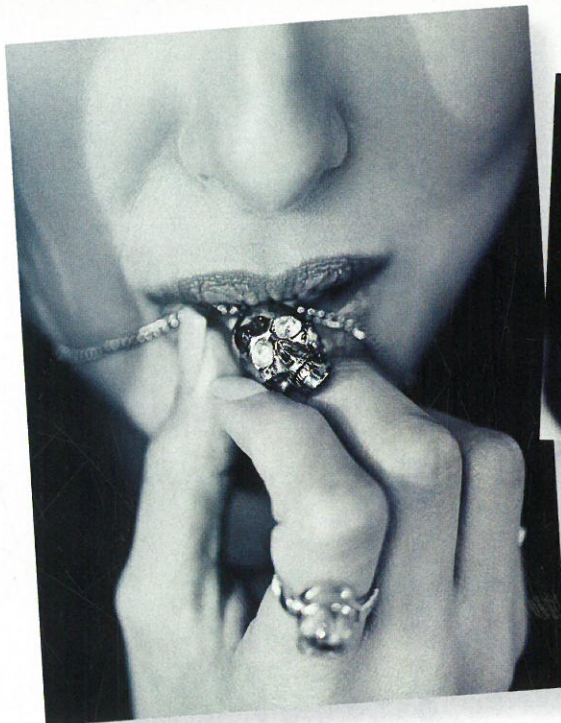
One-shouldered dress,
Emporio Armani,
price on request; skull
necklace, Rajesh Pratap
Singh, Rs 4,850; crystal
ring, Louis Vuitton,
price on request

This page: Mesh detailed
jersey dress, Bottega
Veneta. Rs 2,10,337
approx; butterfly ring,
Accessorize. Rs 345;
crystal ring, Louis
Vuitton, price on
request; embellished
bird earrings, Aldo
Accessories. Rs 1,000;
floral cushion, Good
Earth. Rs 1,350

Facing page: Skull
necklace, Rajesh Pratap
Singh. Rs 4,850; crystal
ring, Louis Vuitton,
price on request



"I'm going to be a huge movie star, you wait and watch. I'll make chhutti of everyone"



She came, we saw, we were conquered. That, in a nutshell, explains Kareena Kapoor's rise to the top of Bollywood's ecosystem. Ten years ago when she emerged, the nation took to her like white takes to hue. And those hues have only brightened with every passing year.

My first memory of her is of a thirteen-year-old stuffing her face with french fries in her older sister Karisma Kapoor's make-up room. Karisma was already making waves at the box-office. As a fledgling reporter, I was fascinated by the younger sister. Her eyes were clear pools of Rémy Martin, her lips so full they could drip any minute. The baby fat only added to her allure. "I'm going to be a huge movie star, you wait and watch," she'd announced as her chubby fingers coiled around those oily fries. "I'll make *chhutti* of everyone." Her innate confidence had struck me as extraordinary. And I had no doubts in my mind that she would make it one day. In my subsequent meetings with her, it was all she spoke about. Later, she would tell me that she'd plotted and planned to be an actress ever since she was three.

However, it was at her first ever photo shoot with ace shutterbug Shantanu Sheorey where I saw her true potential. She was still a woman in the making, all femur and forearms. Even then she'd known how to stand still and let the camera drool over her. While her mother, yesteryear actress Babita, and sister Karisma, fretted over her hair, her make-up, her clothes, she remained unruffled by the big occasion. If I had any doubts about her tall claims of making it big in showbiz, they were dispelled at that moment. She simply didn't have the anonymity gene.

Her debut *Refugee* may not have done as well as expected at the box-office but it did enough to ensconce her in the showbiz terra firma. Movies like *Mujhe Kucch Kehna Hai* and *Asoka* set her up prominently. And her turn as Poo in *Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham* had her soaring high. A feisty Kareena had heeled her way past her contemporaries. As an interviewee, she

turned out to be a journalist's delight. If she was gorgeous and refined, she also had a salty tongue. She enjoyed giving fiery interviews, annihilating her competition in print, taking on the likes of Amisha Patel, Bipasha Basu and Preity Zinta.

That she was the most celebrated of the newcomers, that the entire industry was giving their left arm to work with her, gave wind to her wings. It wouldn't be wrong to say that she was courting controversies like an ardent lover. Yes, it's true she refused Dharma Production's *Kal Ho Naa Ho*. Karan Johar was miffed. Sanjay Leela Bhansali was irked by her remarks in print. So much so, that even father Randhir Kapoor, in an interview, warned her against talking too much. He told her not to talk as if she were Shah Rukh Khan. Those she angered, called her arrogant, others were disarmed by her innate honesty and her unwillingness to call a spade a shovel. To journalists she was an eternal source of entertainment and great copy.

No artiste, no matter how clever or cautious she might be, is immune to the losing streak. What goes up must come down and that goes for egos as well as careers. Kareena Kapoor was a star, there was no doubt about that. But, her movies weren't doing her any justice. *Mujhse Dosti Karoge!*, *Jeena Sirf Merre Liye*, *Talash*, and *Khushi* all did her in. One flop after another would have decimated a lesser person. But, not Bebo. I met her several times during that period. She was troubled by a career that was going nowhere, but not overtly so. Her steely resolve to make it big shone through. And her immense self-belief carried her all the way. "I can feel it in my bones that the good times are here," she told me once. "I just have to keep at it. I know I have it in me. Hits and flops are not in my hand. What is important is that I'm good even in my flop movies." Typical Bebo.

Like her character in *Jab we Met* says, 'Main apni sab se favourite *hoon*', she's been her most favourite person. So is it surprising when her BB status reads, 'I'm too hot to handle'? No, you'd expect that from her. It's this self-love that ultimately turned the tides for her. Movies like *Yuva*, *Chameli*, *Fida*, *Dev* »



Chiffon Grecian dress, Gaurav & Ritika. Rs 22,500 approx; leather waistcoat, Just Cavalli. Rs 25,000; butterfly necklace (part of set), Swarovski. Rs 25,000; colour block heels, Fendi. Rs 33,423; armchair, A & MORE; price on request; floral cushion, Good Earth. Rs 1,350

and *Omkara* bear testimony to her powerhouse talent. While *Jab We Met*, *Golmaal Returns*, *3 Idiots* and *Golmaal 3* are proof enough of her huge star status. Her Bollywood connections may have opened the door for her but they also invited a greater level of scrutiny. Ultimately, it's her talent that has kept her in the game.

Yes, Bebo is disarmingly immodest about her achievements. "I'm the best," she'll tell you with a rapier sharp glance. "My co-stars call me selfish. They say you're only interested in yourself and what you're doing in front of the camera. I reply saying, I can't help it. It's what got me where I am." It's the confidence of an actor who's in it for the long haul.

And yet she's aware of the fickleness of the industry. She knows she's living in wonderland and it could melt any minute. That's why she wants to make the most of it. No wonder movies are her lifeline. "I'm happiest when I'm on a set," she's told me. "The make-up, the clothes, the naach-gaana. I love everything about the movies."

She's always said and done what she believes in, rather than what she should do. She's done things she wouldn't do again, and some she might. Years in the industry have tempered her fiery nature. Yes, there's still a directness about her that can be laser-sharp but now she won't unnecessarily air her opinions in print. This sense of decorum is an unfortunate by-product of her fame. It's the way the industry lives, and she's okay with it. But, even the most difficult phases in her life failed to subjugate her natural ebullience. She remains unsullied by criticism even today. That's where she scores over others.

What truly sets her apart is the fact that she's all heart. She'll do anything for a friend. Some of the movies on her resume are there only because they happened to be made by her friends. That's the way to her heart. Logic, intellect and reasoning don't work for her. If she likes you, she'll stand by you. She runs with a close-knit gang of make-up artistes, hair-dressers, fashion designers, personal assistants, people who've been with her for ages.

Spend 10 minutes with her and you know she's a far cry from other celebrities who strain to present themselves as no different from you or me. She doesn't pretend she cleans her own room or makes soup. She's a star and she's very comfortable with the idea. She's always operated as if the world's her oyster and she's going to eat it.

She seems to live on a different octave from the rest of the world. And when she doesn't like something, her voice can get stern. When she's being fierce like this, there's something daunting about her. But give her a moment and she'll soften, letting loose a vast appreciative grin. I'd once written an analytical piece on her where she got the impression that I'd been nasty to her. She called me up and let loose a volley of abuses. I calmly asked her if she'd read the article. She admitted she hadn't. I asked her to read it and if there was anything wrong with it I would reply to all her allegations. Within half an hour she was back on the phone apologising profusely for listening to others. She »