

THREE-PAGE SYNOPSIS

From Chocolate to Philosopher

Literary Memoir — approximately 93,000 words.

Roger Kuperways has lived several lives: Paris apprentice, New York fashion designer, and university professor for twenty-seven years. Each reinvention began when the life he built collapsed.

Roger Kuperways is born in Paris in 1944, as World War II ends. His childhood unfolds in a city still carrying visible scars of occupation—bullet-pocked walls and damaged façades standing beside elegant shop windows filled with silk and tailored coats. Even as a boy, he absorbs the tension between survival and style.

At fourteen, he becomes an apprentice in couture ateliers, including two years in the legendary workrooms of Coco Chanel. There he learns that mastery is built on repetition, precision, and respect for material. The discipline of cutting fabric and shaping garments becomes an early education in identity: once cloth is cut, it cannot return to its original form.

At seventeen, Roger leaves Paris and immigrates alone to the United States with twelve dollars in his pocket and two handmade suits that a wealthy uncle no longer wanted. With limited English and few resources, he works long hours in Chinatown garment factories—often called sweatshops—earning \$1.45 an hour as he studies the mechanics of American business.

On November 21, 1963, Roger opens his first American business. The next afternoon, the world stops: President John F. Kennedy is assassinated. He has been an American entrepreneur for exactly one day. The symbolism is accidental but formative—history moves forward regardless of personal plans.

Over the next decade, Roger builds a fashion label in New York's Garment District. His designs gain traction through persistence, trunk shows, and relentless networking. Major department stores—including Bergdorf Goodman and Saks Fifth Avenue—carry his collections, and his designs appear in their Fifth Avenue windows. His garments are also sold nationwide in stores such as Neiman Marcus, I. Magnin, and Marshall Field's. Among the women he dresses is Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis, who arrives one Saturday morning accompanied by Secret Service agents. In a private fitting that forms the emotional center of the memoir, she says something he carries ever since—words reconstructed from memory, but whose meaning has never been in doubt: « *Vous ne m'avez pas seulement habillée. Vous m'avez rappelé qui je suis.* » (You didn't just dress me. You reminded me who I am.) Seeing his garments displayed in Fifth Avenue windows affirms both artistic vision and commercial success. The future appears secure.

But global economics shifts. The rise of overseas manufacturing begins dismantling the American garment industry. Margins collapse. Factories close. After years of expansion, Roger is forced to shut down his operations. The loss is not only financial—it is existential. The identity built on craftsmanship and entrepreneurial momentum disintegrates. For the first time, he confronts failure without a clear next chapter.

Rather than retreat, Roger reinvents himself. Drawing on decades of business experience, he transitions into academia, teaching entrepreneurship and philosophy at New York University for twenty-seven years. He brings to the classroom what no textbook can offer: a life lived inside the risks he teaches. He challenges students to confront uncertainty honestly and to define success beyond status. Teaching becomes another form of tailoring—shaping potential rather than fabric.

Parallel to his professional reinvention, Roger deepens personal pursuits—Argentine tango, competitive bridge, photography collecting, and mentoring entrepreneurs worldwide. These

disciplines refine his philosophy: presence matters more than performance; precision matters more than appearance; resilience is a practiced art.

In his seventies, Roger undergoes open-heart surgery; in his eighties, he survives a near-fatal bout of pneumonia. Physical vulnerability strips away illusion. For decades, movement defined progress—new cities, new titles, new ventures. Confronting mortality reframes ambition. He recognizes that expansion without attention is empty. The lesson that began in the atelier returns: once cut, life does not reverse.

The memoir closes not with triumph but with clarity. Roger understands that identity is not fixed by career or acclaim. It is continuously stitched and restitched through loss, reinvention, discipline, and choice. From pastry benches in Paris to Fifth Avenue windows, from factory floors to university lecture halls, from ambition to awareness, his life becomes a study in conscious becoming. Now Professor Emeritus, he guides a new generation through the art of beginning again.

From Chocolate to Philosopher traces a journey across continents and careers, revealing that collapse is not an ending, but an invitation to begin again—with greater intention.