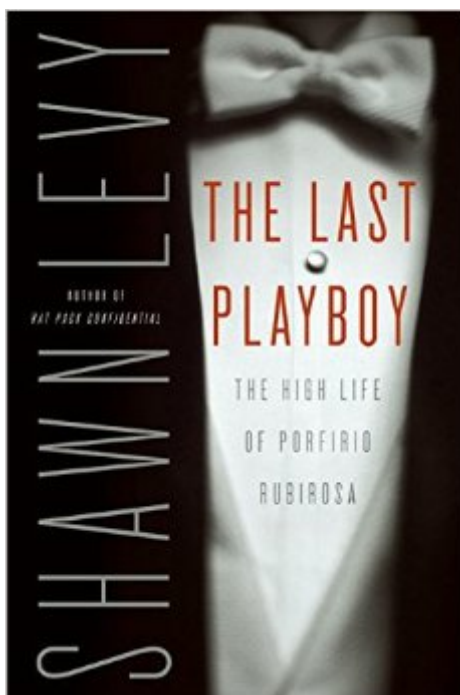


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The Last Playboy : The High Life Of Porfirio Rubirosa



Synopsis

At one gilded moment, his fame was so great that he was recognized all over the world simply by his nickname: Rubi. Pop songs were written about him. Women whom he had never met offered to leave their husbands for him. The gigantic peppermills brandished in Parisian restaurants became known, for reasons people at the time could only hint at, as "Rubirosas." Porfirio Rubirosa was the last great playboy: the roué par excellence, a symbol of powerful masculinity, ubiquity, and easy-come-easy-go money. "Work?" he shot back at an interviewer, scandalized at being asked what he did with his days. "It's impossible for me to work. I just don't have the time." His natural habitat was the polo field, the nightclub, the Formula One racecourse, the bedroom. He had an eye for beautiful women, particularly when they came with great wealth: He managed to marry in turn two of the richest women on the planet. Rumor had him bedding hundreds of famous and infamous women, including Christina Onassis, Eva Perón, and Zsa Zsa Gabor, who gleefully posed for paparazzi after he had blacked her eye in a fit of jealousy on the eve of his marriage to another woman. But he was a man's man, too, a notable polo player and race-car driver with a gift for friendship, chumming around with the likes of Joe Kennedy, Frank Sinatra, Oleg Cassini, Aly Khan, and King Farouk. When above-board, heiress-type income was scarce, he diverted himself with jewel-thievery, shadowy diplomatic errands, and any other illicit scam that came his way. Whatever legitimate power he wielded came to him from the hands of Rafael Trujillo, one of the most bloodthirstily power-mad dictators the New World has ever seen. A nation quivered at Trujillo's name for decades, yet Rubi flouted his strictures without concern, as if Trujillo's iron grip could never crush him. And he was right. When Rubi died at the age of fifty-six, wrapping his sports car around a tree in the Bois de Boulogne, an era went with him -- of white dinner jackets at El Morocco; of celebrity for its own sake when this was still a novelty; of glamour before it was available to the masses. In *The Last Playboy*, Shawn Levy brings Rubi's giddy, hedonistic story to Technicolor life.

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Customer Reviews

If you have never heard of Porfirio Rubirosa, that's no surprise. He died in 1965, and wasn't good at much of anything beyond having a good time, but at that he was extraordinarily good. His was a life of inconsequence, and perhaps inconsequential also is the biography *The Last Playboy: The High Life of Porfirio Rubirosa* (4th Estate) by Shawn Levy. Inconsequential, but also glittering and amusing. The character Rubirosa made for himself was, Levy says, "nightclubber, cuckold, kept man, gigolo, scene maker, skirt chaser, dandy." He was hardly a careful examiner of his own life, but when he explained why he did poorly as a student, he was exactly right: "The only things that interested me were sports, girls, adventures, celebrities - in short, life." His limited interpretation of what life was all about was similar to his limited principles. "It has always been one of my chief principles: I will risk anything to avoid being bored." He succeeded wonderfully, and this account of his life, written in a perfect breezy and joking style, is an entertainment that few will find boring. "Rubi", as everyone knew him, was born in 1909 in the Dominican Republic, and served intermittently as a roving official for that country. He married five times before his death in 1965, to actresses and heiresses. How did Rubi manage to ingratiate himself to so many women, and get so much support from them? There are lots of answers. He was darkly handsome when such looks were thought fashionable and seductive (even leading to the famous backlash "Latins are Lousy Lovers" by Helen Lawrenson in *Esquire* in 1936). He kept himself in good shape; he was a keen polo player. He was intelligent, capable with five languages, fluent in three. He genuinely liked women.

Imagine? He fills your room with flowers. He changes his hotel room to be next to yours to "feel you through the walls." Maybe he sends a limo and escort to take you shopping for something special to wear for dinner. He's a great dancer. He's dashing on a horse or in a race car. The impeccable manners match his perfectly tailored clothes. Why would you think that he represents a Saddam Hussein style manager of a Caribbean nation and its torture chambers? Why would you think he's an accessory to murder? a murderer? a jewel thief? a profiteer from passports sold to Jews

desperate to escape Hitler? Now what is it he does with the fleet of fishing boats his 3rd wife gave him? He doesn't think about any of this, so why should you? Levy does a great job of tracking Rubi down. It was an intercontinental life in 5 languages, but that would be the easy part, since facts (the ones that Rubi doesn't want anyone to know) are like the proverbial jello nailed to a wall. In his last chapter Levy tries to opine on the meaning of it all and finds very little. What if Rubi had joined the Dominican resistance? (would never cross his mind.) The closest thing he finds to meaning is a Langston Hughes obituary noting Rubi's (possible) race, which no one had noticed before. Rubi was a man of his time, but not all time. Why? Where are the Rubis of the world today? Have divorce lawyers and pre-nups driven them out of business? Have the women lost their sense of romance? Rubi with Madonna? Paris Hilton? Oprah? Martha Stewart? They just don't seem so emotionally vulnerable. Maybe the playboys are still here, sub rosa (pun) in blue jeans, the veritable playboy next door.

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