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The Last Playboy : the High Life of Porfirio Rubirosa

Shawn Levy

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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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