

A Cad and a Bounder

I shouldn't have been surprised when my researches into the Cowdray family, which rose to prominence accidentally showing up in Laredo, Texas just as news of the Spindletop oil well was breaking, would turn up that charming rogue Luis Basualdo. I first encountered him, his actual name was Hector Sosa, in the story of Ari (and Cristina) Onassis. He was part of the cadre of young swains who roosted under the eves of the Palace Hotel in St. Moritz, combed for food and lodging to provide entertainment for the fashionable women who stayed in the hotel. With his wit, charm, and unquestioned polo skills, he quickly fell in with Cristina, who eventually paid him \$30,000 a month, even after they stopped being lovers. (That \$30K was the same cost as sending her jet to NYC for 10 cases of Diet Coke, never more, "they don't taste the same after a month.") Basualdo was careful with money, as he needed to be, the Onassis office in Monte Carlo saying, "The only time he puts his hands in his pockets is to scratch his balls."

He was also on the Dunhill QE II backgammon cruise, being a very good player of that game, his aversion to work in any form providing the time required to become an expert gammonist. He was exactly our age, born in 1945, and died in 2021 at 75. He arrived in Miami in 1968 with 2 polo ponies, a good off-side forehand, lots of charm, and the requisite world-weary cynicism which eased his way in the ultra-elite circles in which he would circulate for the next 30 years before retiring to Argentina.

Beautiful women and shady finances were his stock in trade: Cristina accused him of getting away with \$1.2 million, deposited in an Alpine bank (Reto Silvany?) but later dropped the charges, and his father-in-law Lord Cowdray paid him £200,000 to divorce his daughter Lucy, with whom he had eloped when she was 17. He clearly lived up to his moniker The Bounder, and told his son-in-law not to pay much attention to his advice, as "I'm a bounder and a cad." Now he's showing Cheryl Ladd the races at Longchamps, then it's Joan Collins, herself a Brit, for Ascot Week.

When even more famous playboy Rubirosa ended his career by smashing his Ferrari 250GT Cabriolet into a tree in the Bois de Boulogne in July, 1965, he was returning home after a night celebrating a polo win with Taki and Basualdo at Jimmy's. At the time it was thought that he had found a good way for an inveterate playboy to step off the stage. Basualdo's only collision was with the bottle, which laid him low in his later years. It's pretty well acknowledged that the age of the playboy is over, as professionalism has crept into even that unusual job description. And yet, the category lives on in the imagination of some who still love the one widow who never bores and has never deserted them, the Veuve Clicquot, stored at least by the half-case on the bottom shelf of the fridge, ever ready to give would-be playboys wings of fantasy for taking flight, fulfilling Rubi's famous injunction "todos liquidos."

Just for the record, someone will lift high the Cowdray Gold Cup tomorrow afternoon. The sardonic spirit of Basualdo will hover over the field, approving good play and scanning the crowd for wealthy beauties of any age!

