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The tragedy of Sita, heiress entangled in a murky business

[Independent, The \(London\)](#), [Aug 14, 2004](#) by [Sholto Byrnes](#)

Just before Lord "Gordy" White died in 1995, he handed his daughter, Sita, a note. "When you die, you die alone," it read. He was almost right.

Although when Sita died in May this year at the age of only 43 she was with Victoria, Gordy's third wife (who was two years Sita's junior), she was alone at her funeral. The ceremony was attended by 40 mourners, but none of her family, not her sister, her daughter, her half-brother, her mother or her stepmother, were present.

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Her sudden death - she collapsed from an embolism in the lungs just before a yoga class - was a sad end to a life that failed to meet the high expectations of her father, a man whose money and fame overshadowed her even beyond the grave. Short of money and a single mother, in the years preceding her death Sita had been leading a druggy and purposeless existence in Los Angeles, preoccupied with her quest to receive what she regarded as a fair share of her father's fortune.

When Sita, the child of White's first marriage to Elizabeth Vasquez, was growing up, her father was just a few years into his partnership with James Hanson, a business arrangement and friendship that built the Hanson Trust and led to both men

becoming millionaires and peers. White, who had served with the Special Operations Executive in the war, was a dashing figure and a ladies man who had escorted Jane Russell, Ava Gardner and Grace Kelly. (Of Kelly, he once said that she made "you feel that you were the only person in the world", adding, "as she's short-sighted, I don't suppose there could be anyone else".)

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White had less time for his children, however. (As well as Sita, there was Carolina, also from his first marriage, and Lucas, from his second marriage to Virginia North.) Although Sita was well provided for, with homes in Los Angeles and London, she failed to emulate her father's success, a job on the set of the James Bond film Licence To Kill and some time helping the development fund at London Zoo being her most noteworthy endeavours.

The difficult relationship she had with her father, by whom she felt rejected, was mirrored in her own love life, updates on which made regular appearances in the gossip columns. In 1986 she married Francesco Venturi, an Italian photographer. A delighted Gordy spent pounds 50,000 on the reception at the Duke of York's barracks in Chelsea and bought the couple a house in the Little Boltons, a select enclave nearby.

But before long she had begun a relationship with Imran Khan, whom she met in the Jermyn Street nightclub, Tramp. The Pakistani cricketer ended the affair after a few months, but after Sita moved permanently to Los Angeles in 1990 they spent one final night together. Sita later claimed she had asked Khan to father her child and that he had agreed.

Until the result of this assignation, Tyrian, was three, Sita kept the identity of her daughter's father secret. So did Khan, informing his biographer, Ivo Tennant, that he knew Lord White but making no mention of Sita. Neither was White exactly supportive of his daughter. He did invite her to live with him in his Bel Air home during her pregnancy, but, according to Sita, when Tyrian was born his only words were "that is not a white child" and he never made any effort to see her again.

When the news of Khan's paternity (which he has never publicly admitted) came out, he was by then married to Jemima Goldsmith, whose father Sir James was a friend of Gordy's. Campaigning for his own political party in Pakistan, Khan was attacked by opponents for violating the tenets of Islam. Sita promised "to do whatever it takes to prove him guilty" and later that year a California judge declared that Khan was the father after he failed to contest the paternity suit Sita filed.

She was to marry twice more, in 1996 to an actor and former "Marlboro Man", Alan Marshall, and again in 2002 to John Ursich, an Argentinian- born waiter. At the time of her death the couple were divorcing, with her levelling charges of abuse at her husband, and him accusing her of indulging in alcohol and cocaine.

By this point relations were better, having been strained for several years, with her younger half-brother, Lucas, who had inherited the largest part of Gordy's fortune (he is estimated to be worth around pounds 50m) and became Britain's youngest tax exile at the age of 20. Tall and good-looking, Lucas went into business with James Hanson's son, Robert, who was best man at Lucas's marriage to the American model Normandie Keith.

A few years ago Lucas battled with testicular cancer, but made a good recovery. Unlike the LA drifter society which Sita frequented, Lucas and Normandie move among the young, wealthy set, with Jemima Khan, the model Jodie Kidd and the Duke of York among their friends.

Although Lucas's spokesman says that over the years he had assisted Sita financially, she insisted that the \$13,000 (pounds 7,000) monthly allowance she received from a family trust was insufficient to maintain

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