

THE ASSASSINATION: 'Who Can Understand?'

He wandered from shabby obscurity into epic tragedy. He fired the shot that frustrated the world, then the mists of his mind swirled up and no one could be absolutely sure why Jack Ruby killed Lee Harvey Oswald. Now no one can ever be sure. For last week this unlikely avenger of a President—the last survivor among the three men whose life cycles had collided so lethally and so pointlessly three years ago in Dallas, Texas—vanished forever into his own murky corner of history.

In his last days, as in his last years, Ruby was surrounded by official and professional befuddlement. As late as Dec. 6, when he had less than a month to live, state authorities set a new site, Wichita Falls, Texas, and a tentative

time, "probably in February," for the opening of his retrial for the murder of Lee Oswald. Three days later, Ruby—whose doctors had been treating him for a "cold" for several weeks—was rushed to Parkland Memorial Hospital in Dallas with what was thought to be "pneumonia." Within hours the word was out: Jack Ruby had cancer. The following week came the news that he was a terminal case. The cancer of a man who had been the ward of the Dallas authorities for the past three years had spread through his lungs and the lining of his chest cavity.

Vision: By late December, Ruby was down to 144 pounds—30 below normal—and the bulging, weight-lifter's biceps of which he had always been so proud had turned to flab. He was weak, frequently glum and still hallucinating that the United States was being taken over by Nazis and that Jews were being slaughtered in the streets.

Yet he clung to life. "He just gave up

a few days ago," his brother Earl said last week. His sister Eva said he only began to fail when he saw a newspaper report that one of his trial lawyers, Joe Tonahill, had said that if Ruby was a terminal cancer patient, he should give his body to a hospital for research. "Why don't you donate your own body. They'd have more to work on," Eva furiously wired the heavy-set attorney.

On the morning of Jan. 3, Eva saw her brother for the last time. "I looked in about 9 a.m.," she told NEWSWEEK's Hugh Aynesworth. "I said to him, 'I'm here, Jack.' He was all covered with tubes going this way and that, and a nurse was giving him a bath, but he looked up and smiled and said quietly, 'Yes, I know . . . I know.'" A few minutes after she left, he lost consciousness. A blood clot had formed behind his right knee; a large piece broke loose and rushed up through the heart and into the right lung. The extensive cancer made further treatment impossible. At

10:30 a.m. Ruby was pronounced dead:

He left a legacy of debts and doubts. For his family, the burden of legal expenses has been crushing. For his countrymen, neither his statements, nor the Texas Court of Criminal Appeals reversal of his first "guilty" verdict, nor the increasingly convincing evidence of his insanity silenced all speculation about his motives or his connections. Yet the Chicago hustler and Dallas strip-joint proprietor never wavered from his original stance. Just last month—in a three-minute recording made surreptitiously in his guarded sickroom—he said once again that he had never been part of a conspiracy connected with the assassination, that his killing of Oswald had been an individual and unpremeditated act.

The body was flown to Chicago, for services at Original Weinstein & Sons funeral home. The flag-draped casket was opened so that newsmen could see that the body—in a blue-black suit, black skullcap and prayer shawl—was actually



Ruby hearing death sentence (above) in 1964; but fate worked a different ending



William Fulbright pleaded with JFK: "Dallas is a very dangerous place. I wouldn't go there. Don't you go."

■ Intimate glimpses of JFK and Mrs. Kennedy in their last days together. The President dressing on his final morning in the White House (and pocketing a black leather wallet decorated with a gold St. Christopher medal and containing \$26 in bills), saying good-by to John Jr., who begged: "I want to come." "You can't," said his father gently as their 'copter set down beside Air Force One. Jackie confessing to JFK that she disliked Connally and being admonished: "You mustn't say you dislike him, Jackie. You'll begin thinking it and it will prejudice how you act toward him."

Remnants: Whatever the personal material in the original manuscript that so disturbed Jackie Kennedy, little of it is in the first Look chapters. There is one passage in which Jackie, after the death of infant Patrick Bouvier, tells her husband: "There's just one thing I couldn't stand—if I ever lost you..." There are references to letters she wrote JFK from a Mediterranean holiday, but no quotations from the letters, which appeared in the manuscript (NEWSWEEK, Jan. 2).

Manchester's evident disdain for Lyndon Johnson emerges from the first installment. First, he rather sympathetically portrays the plight of a proud LBJ cast in the eclipse of the Vice Presidency, but as the story weaves on, LBJ and Lady Bird Johnson suffer by comparison with the Kennedys. The night before the assassination, Manchester suggests, JFK and LBJ quarreled over political matters. Mr. Johnson left looking "furious," a witness told Manchester, and Kennedy is quoted as telling Jackie that "Lyndon" was "in trouble." Still, while the Kennedys slept in Fort Worth that night, LBJ "jovially entertained members of his tong." Reporting the Secret Service code names for the principals (JFK was "Lancer," Jackie "Lace," Caroline "Lyric" and John Jr. "Lark"), Manchester observes that Lady Bird was "Victoria" and that she had "never had much luck with names."

Anti-Heroes: Others are negatively portrayed, too. John Connally emerges as a scheming *nouveau riche* embroiled in a petty political catfight with liberal Sen. Ralph W. Yarborough. Manchester tells how some Secret Service agents—on duty and off—spent the night before the motorcade drinking nonalcoholic "Salty Dicks" at a boite called "The Cellar" in Fort Worth. And Dallas itself is made almost culpable for the crime. The Warren commission's implicit view was that Oswald was driven by a private vision that knew no geography. But, without really explaining it, Manchester freely speculates that the mood of right-wing Dallas somehow encouraged left-winger Oswald to pull the trigger.

Indeed, Manchester's Look portrait of Oswald is essentially simplistic; the author even pinpoints the moment when the assassin presumably lost his tenuous grip on reality—at 9 p.m. on the eve of the motorcade, after Marina Oswald spurned his bid for a new life together.

As Look readied its first Manchester issue for distribution, the legal battle of wills between the Kennedys and author Manchester and his hardcover publishers, Harper & Row, dragged on. The Kennedys' action against Look had been settled out of court, paving the way for publication of the serialization. The judge set hearing dates for the separate actions against Manchester and Harper & Row, and both defendants filed answers to the Kennedy complaint. But hearing date or not, the odds were they would follow Look's lead and settle before the matter got to court.

