

bassy Room shouting, "We killed him, we killed him." Coconspirators? Oh, God!

VANOCUR tried to get her story. "Miss Serrano . . . uh. Just take your time. I'll hold the mike in front of you. Tell me everything from the time you first saw the Senator come in the room, and what happened?"

SERRANO: Well, he, he—everybody was in the main room, you know, listening to him speak and it was too hot so I went outside and I was out on the terrace and I was out there for about five, ten minutes, you know. I started to get cold and then, you know, and everybody was cheering and everything, and then I was standing there just thinking, you know, thinking about how many people there were and how wonderful it was. Then this girl came running down the stairs in the back, came running down the stairs and said, "We've shot him, we've shot him." Who did you shoot? And she said, "We've shot Senator Kennedy." And aft.—she had—I can remember what she had on and everything, and after that a boy came down with her. He was about twenty-three years old and he was Mexican-American because I can remember that because I'm Mexican-American and I says, "What's happening?" and all of a sudden all these people start coming down that back end and I walked in and I was by the bar area and nobody seemed to know anything about it and I thought well, you know, maybe I misunderstood or something.

VANOCUR: Wait a minute. Did this young lady say "we"?

SERRANO: "We," she said.

VANOCUR: Meaning "We, the Mexican-Americans?"

SERRANO: No. She was not of Mexican-American descent. She was not. She was Caucasian. She had on a white dress with polka dots. She was light skinned, dark hair. She had black shoes on and she had a funny nose. It was, it was—I thought it was really funny. All my friends tell me I'm so observant.

VANOCUR: Did you work for Senator Kennedy?

SERRANO: I'm cochairman of Youth for Kennedy in the Pasadena-Alhambra area. I worked very hard for him, and everybody in the Pasadena area worked very very hard for him. 1965 I met him, Washington, D.C., in an elevator. He stepped on my foot and I shoved him and it's an unforgettable experience."

Vanocur shook his head in some bewilderment. He wondered about Miss Serrano's story. She seemed a little hysterical. But she wasn't that

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Mary Sirhan was obviously unable to say anything negative about her son. Hernandez asked if he was a normal boy like any boy or did he have a temper. "Never, never temper, no."

Sirhan never fought with his brothers? Mary admitted that he had had his differences with his two older brothers, Saidallah, who drank a little bit, and Sharif. Both of them wanted to impose the rules on the household and that led to arguments. Finally, she asked the two older boys to find somewhere else to live.

Hernandez reminded her of a fight Sirhan had had with Munir over some hot water on the stove. Mary explained that away. It was nothing. Nothing at all. "The last time you saw your boy, did you know if there was anything—on Tuesday, when he left, did you think there was anything wrong with him yourself?"

"No," said Mary. "He just got up and washed his face. I know he washed and just go and get the paper. He didn't say anything, nothing."

"He didn't say that he felt bad or that he—to you he didn't look any different than he did the rest of his life that you have seen him?"

"No," said Mary Sirhan. The poor woman didn't know what to conceal and what to come out with.

The interview ended on a sad note. The officers asked about her daughter, Aida, and Mary talked about her last painful days when she lay dying of leukemia. "I think that's all," said Strong. "We don't want to burden you anymore, but I think we pretty well covered—"

"I'm so sorry for what happened," said Mary Sirhan.

"We believe that you are," said Sergeant Hernandez.

"I'm really hurt and that's not the way that I wish to end. I was hoping that my son would be a great something that—good, not to be a killer." She sobbed. "Oh, I just can't take it."

"We realize this," said Strong, with sympathy. "We understand this."

"Why do you think he did what he did?" asked Hernandez.

"I'm asking why," said Mary Sirhan. "I just don't know. Please, if you know it, just let me know."

Hernandez sighed and looked at Strong. "Yes, ma'am. That's what we're trying to find out."

By June 20—more than two weeks after the assassination of Robert Kennedy, the FBI had finally found Sirhan's seemingly closest friend. He was Ivan Valladares Garcia, a native (and still a citizen) of Guatemala. He

was tall, well spoken, serious and extremely agitated about this interview on the campus of Pasadena City College.

"No," he told Special Agent Lloyd D. Johnson, "I will not give you my home address. You can reach me at work. My mother is nervous and I do not want her disturbed." Garcia told Johnson that he had met Sirhan at PCC, that they had never discussed politics, that Sirhan had never discussed Senator Kennedy or the Arab-Israeli conflict, except to note that his success as a jockey might be thwarted by the rich Jews who owned most of the racehorses in California. Sirhan did not have a strong interest in girls, did not have an interest in guns. Garcia volunteered the opinion that Sirhan was not part of any conspiracy. Why not? "Because," said Garcia, "the whole thing was so poorly planned." Any conspirators would have chosen a gun of larger caliber, would have found a better place to kill Kennedy, would have planned a better escape route. "Frankly," said Garcia, "I'm puzzled by all this. I never knew Sirhan to violate any laws of any kind."

All in all, Garcia had reported a lot of the things that Sirhan didn't do. But nothing of what he did do.

Sergeant DeWayne Wolfer, a criminalist for the LAPD, approached the Ambassador pantry with a sound level monitor in one hand, a .22-caliber Iver-Johnson Cadet Model revolver in the other (identical to the weapon wrested from Sirhan's grasp on the night of June 4) and a box of Mini-Mag ammunition in his pocket. He made some test firings and discovered that the shots could not be heard on the south fire escape where Sandra Serrano was sitting when Kennedy was shot.

To the police, this proved Sandra Serrano was lying. She had never told anyone she had heard shots. That notion came from the police. Now, however faulty their logic, they would move in on Miss Serrano.

Sergeants Hank Hernandez and Tom Strong welcomed Sandra Serrano to the warmth and comfort of their lie detector room on the fourth floor of Parker Center, and Hernandez tightened the cardio band around her left arm. It was 10:15 P.M. "Now, Sandra," Hernandez plunged right in, "I'm going to ask you some questions just so we can get the true facts on the previous statements that you made before. You know that you shouldn't be afraid, and I hope you're not. The whole thing that we are trying to re-

solve here is what actually happened at the Ambassador Hotel, and I well understand, as you have explained to me, that this thing was magnified out of proportion with people that you said messed you around up there. So if you will tell me the truth about what happened, and I could ask you questions—"

"Uh-huh," said Miss Serrano, not wildly enthusiastic about all this.

Hernandez tried to clarify her story for her. She had had one drink, a screwdriver, in the Embassy Room. She went out to the fire escape about 11:30 P.M. and sat down. Sometime later, she saw a girl in a white dress—not polka-dot—and a few other persons come down the fire escape. The girl said "something about shooting Kennedy." Later, Miss Serrano talked to Thomas Vincent DiPietro who said he had seen the gunman with a girl wearing a polka-dot dress.

"So that's where that thing about the polka-dot dress, that's where it started?" asked Hernandez.

"I guess," said Miss Serrano.

Hernandez asked her when she first realized her story was getting out of hand. It was, she said, when she went to the Rampart Street police station. Hernandez wondered why she hadn't corrected the story then. She said she had told the police what she thought they wanted to hear. "I was sitting there hearing descriptions and descriptions of these people, of these people, of these people. Oh, God, no, maybe that's what I'm supposed to have seen. It messed me up, that's all; and I figured, well, they must know what they're doing."

"Well, at least you're being a decent, honest woman right now, aren't you, you know?"

"Yes, yes, yes." Then Sandra changed her mind. "I don't think I'm very decent."

"Well, you are being decent. You're telling the truth now."

"Yeah, in a way. But you know what I think? Some changes should be made. You know, when somebody sees something," stammered Miss Serrano, "keep them away from other people who have seen it. Because you don't know—you don't know what happens." That thought trailed away into a bit of incoherence. Then Sandra thought she might blame the press a little, too. "Well, you see another thing, too, you know, that is that, that other newspapers came out with that somebody else had seen it, and then I—I kept thinking to myself, maybe—you know, gee—"

"Regardless of what they saw, you know we just want to get the facts, and the facts that you saw were partly, apparently, were misquoted, or

misprinted, or mistelevised to the actual true facts?" Hernandez was too understanding.

"Well, they can't have been mistelevised because I said that. I actually said that. None of them—I don't know. Somewhere I heard it. I don't know why I said it, but it just fitted. Then it happened that it all fitted in, and I couldn't understand it, you know. Then, yeah, I really thought there was something behind it. I was scared. I tell you I've been scared all this time."

"Okay, well, don't be scared anymore, okay?"

Sandra Serrano smiled ruefully. "Okay. But don't tell my aunt, okay?"

"Well, I'm not going to tell anyone here," said Hernandez. "Of course, we're going to have to cancel all these reports, you know that."

"I know that."

But Hernandez went too far. All he had proved was that Sandra Serrano was confused. He never got her to deny she'd seen a girl running down the fire escape shouting, "We shot him!" Only that her description of the girl's dress was adjusted to agree with Thomas Vincent DiPietro's polka-dot girl.

Not content with talking to the FBI, Robert Duane, after reading a story in the *Valley Times* about the mysterious girl in the polka-dot dress, phoned the reporter whose by-line ran over the story.

"Fernando Faura?"

"Yes."

"You the guy who wrote the story about the girl in the polka-dot dress?"

"Yes."

"I'm interested in knowing what you know. I think I spent the day with her on June 4."

"Don't hang up," said Faura. "I want to talk to you."

The police had their red herrings. Now the press, represented by Fernando Faura and *Life* magazine, would go sniffing off on an unproductive lead as well.

On June 21, Mary Sirhan, accompanied by Adel, went to see Sirhan for the first time. A jail matron searched her thoroughly and escorted her, along with Adel and Russell Parsons, into a glassed-in room on the first