

Last Whispers In a Busboy's Ear

Los Angeles

The sudden burst of gunfire at the Ambassador Hotel early Wednesday morning made a big difference in the lives of a great many persons — one a 17-year-old busboy named Juan Romero.

Juan had worked overtime on election night to get a close look at his hero, Senator Robert F. Kennedy, and the Senator shook hands with him on his way through the kitchen. Then, in a single moment, Juan's whole world changed . . .

"There was this guy," Juan said. "He had a gun. I saw him and I heard the gun go off and I saw the Senator fall.

"I got down on my knees and picked up his head and I told myself, 'I'm home in bed. I'm dreaming. I want to be dreaming.'

"But I wasn't, and Mr. Kennedy was there, bleeding, and he was trying to say something to me."

Placing an ear next to the wounded man's lips, Juan said he heard him whisper, "Is it all right? Is everyone ok?"

"I told him yes," Juan said. "I said everything would be ok."

Fumbling in his shirt pocket, Juan found the crucifix that his father, Flavio Romero, had given him when the youth was confirmed in the Roman Catholic church. He pulled it out and pressed it into the Senator's hand, closing the fingers over it.

"'Hold onto this,' I told him. 'Hold on, and it'll be all right.'"

"He was trying to say something else," he said. "He was trying to talk. His lips were moving, sort of, but you couldn't hear anything. I was crying. I haven't cried since I was a baby. But I was crying . . ."

Then an ambulance crew came to take the Senator away.

Juan moved back reluctantly, making sure the crucifix was still in the Senator's hand, and then started to turn away with the others who had been in the room. But a police officer stopped him.

"They took me to the station on Rampart St.," he said, "And I told what I saw over and over again, un-



KENNEDY AND ROMERO
'Everything is different now'

til about 7 a.m. Then they let me go, so I could get to school."

Juan's home in East Los Angeles was too far from Rampart Police station for him to change clothes before school.

"My father saw," Juan said. "He told me go to school and don't think about what happened. But I thought about it anyway.

"My first class is ROTC and I always kind of liked it before, but today I told them I wasn't coming to that class anymore."

Juan shook his head.

"I don't like guns anymore," he said. "Everything is different now, but I hope they let him keep my crucifix there in the hospital. I hope they didn't take it away from him."

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