

EA241DS

Ruby Rby

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AMS BUDGET

RUBY COLOR (450)

BY SID MOODY

AP NEWSFEATURES WRITER

DALLAS, MARCH 4 (AP)-IT WAS AS TENSE, FORMAL, EXPECTANT AS OPENING DAY OF SCHOOL IN THE COURTROOM TODAY. ONLY THESE WERE MEN, NOT CHILDREN, AND THEY WERE NOT ABOUT CHILDREN'S WORK.

FOR THE FIRST TIME SINCE JACK RUBY'S TRIAL BEGAN TWO AND A HALF WEEKS AGO THE HEART OF THE MATTER CAME DRAMATICALLY INTO FOCUS-- A MAN'S LIFE WAS AT STAKE. THE HORRIBLE DAYS SURROUNDING PRESIDENT KENNEDY'S ASSASSINATION WERE SUDDENLY, VIVIDLY RETURNED AS THE TESTIMONY IN THE TRIAL BEGAN.

RUBY, ALMOST FORGOTTEN DURING THE LONG DAYS OF WRANGLING OVER THE JURY SELECTION, WAS THE CENTER OF ALL EYES, A SMALL MAN, MUCH SMALLER THAN ONE WOULD ENVISION FROM THE ROLE HE PLAYED IN THOSE NOVEMBER DAYS--SWEPT FROM THE FRINGES OF SHOW BUSINESS ONTO CENTER STAGE OF WORLD HISTORY.

THE FIRST WITNESSES PICTURED THE RUBY THE WORLD HAS COME TO KNOW: AN OUTSIDER TRYING TO ELBOW HIS WAY IN. A MAN WHO OFFERED TO BRING SANDWICHES TO THE POLICE STATION THE NIGHT OF THE ASSASSINATION. A MAN WHO BUDDIED UP TO NEWSMEN AND POLICEMEN FEELING SOME COMPULSION TO BE IN ON THINGS.

EVEN TODAY, IN HIS TRIAL, HE HAD TO PEER OVER THE MASSIVE SHOULDER OF JOE TONAHILL, ONE OF HIS DEFENSE LAWYERS, TO GET A GOOD LOOK AT THE WITNESSES.

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TONAHILL AND MELVIN BELLI, RUBY'S CHIEF COUNSEL, CALLED HIM A "TOWN CHARACTER," "SOMEONE OUT OF DAMON RUNYON," "THE SORT OF GUY ON THE OUTSKIRTS OF A CROWD YOU'LL SAY TO GO OUT AND GET SOME BEER OR SANDWICHES."

AS RUBY SAT, HUNCHED FORWARD WITH HIS QUICK EYES AND POINTED FACE, HE SEEMED JUST THAT.

THERE WAS AN AIR OF EXPECTANCY AND TENSION IN COURT TODAY THAT HAD BEEN MISSING. THE LAWYERS WERE WEARING THEIR SUNDAY BEST-- DARK BUSINESS SUITS AND HANDKERCHIEFS TUCKED NEATLY IN THEIR POCKETS.

JUDGE JOE B. BROWN, BACK AFTER A DAY'S ILLNESS, MADE IT PLAIN THINGS WERE GOING TO BE DIFFERENT NOW THAT THE JURY WAS PRESENT. NEWSMEN COULD COME AND GO BUT NOT IN THE DASHES THEY'D MADE AFTER HOT BREAKS DURING THE JURY SELECTION. THE JURORS, SOME OF WHOM HAD BEEN LOCKED UP FOR AS LONG AS TWO WEEKS, WERE ALERT BUT IMPASSIVE. THE LADIES WERE TRIM, ONE WEARING A BRIGHT TURQUOISE SUIT, ANOTHER BRIGHT RED.

ONE OF RUBY'S TWO SISTERS, MRS. EVA GRANT, STALKED HUFFILY ABOUT THE COURTROOM BECAUSE THE FRONT BENCHES HAD BEEN RESERVED FOR REPORTERS.

GONE WERE THE OFTEN HEATED EXCHANGES AND RAPID-FIRE OBJECTIONS THAT MARKED EARLIER DAYS OF THE TRIAL. WILLIAM ALEXANDER, AN ASSISTANT DISTRICT ATTORNEY WHO'S KNOWN AS A FIERCE EXAMINER BUT WHO HAD RARELY BEEN AT THE STATE'S TABLE HERETOFORE, HANDLED MOST OF THE QUESTIONING.

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HIS FACE JUTTED FORWARD FROM HIS WIDE, HUNCHED SHOULDERS AS HE TRACED RUBY'S WANDERINGS FOLLOWING THE ASSASSINATION. BELLI, A LOCK OF HIS GREY MANE FALLING OVER HIS FOREHEAD, SMILED HIS PUCKISH SMILE AS HE TALKED WITH AN ARM AROUND THE SHOULDERS OF SHERIFF BILL DECKER BEFORE BROWN OPENED COURT.

THEN DIST. ATTY. HENRY WADE, A CORDIAL, UNHURRIED MAN WHO LOOKS THE PATIENT FAMILY MAN HE IS RATHER THAN A PROSECUTOR WHO'S WON 24 OUT OF 25 MURDER TRIALS, SHUFFLED UP TO THE DEFENSE TABLE. FACING RUBY ACROSS IT ONLY TWO FEET AWAY, HE READ THE MURDER INDICTMENT. ". . . JACK RUBY ALIAS JACK RUBENSTEIN DID THEN AND THERE UNLAWFULLY AND VOLUNTARILY AND WITH MALICE AFORETHOUGHT KILL LEE HARVEY OSWALD . . . HOW DO YOU PLEAD."

RUBY, HIS FINGERS CURLED TENSELY INTO HIS PALM, BOWED SLIGHTLY TOWARD BROWN AS HE ANSWERED, "NOT GUILTY, YOUR HONOR."

THE TRIAL HAD BEGUN.

JJ227PCS