

‘Shoe time’

The curtain rises on the Marcos trial

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JUSTICE

The curtain rises on the Marcos trial

It has the makings of a Broadway hit: money, foreign intrigue and a star-studded cast of characters. The curtain rises this week on the trial of Imelda Marcos, the widowed former Philippine First Lady and owner of thousands of pairs of shoes—including ones with battery-powered disco lights attached to the heels. Marcos is charged with plundering millions of dollars from the Philippines and secretly investing it in New York City real estate. Defending her is Gerry Spence, a flamboyant rancher-attorney from Jackson Hole, Wyo., who parks his Stetson hat on the table and looks decidedly uncomfortable in a size-46 blue blazer and grey flannels. Codefendant and former billionaire arms-dealer Adnan Khashoggi is alleged to have helped Imelda and her husband, former president Ferdinand Marcos, to hide the ownership of the buildings. Khashoggi rides the dirty New York subway to the courthouse in an apparently deliberate attempt to soften his rich-and-famous image. As Khashoggi told Maclean's last week, "We are good material for you."

Even for a city accustomed to the continuing saga of real estate tycoon Donald Trump's tumultuous marriage, the Marcos trial promises to be a colorful spectacle. "Shoe time," screamed a headline in the tabloid Daily News during jury selection. The 60-year-old Marcos, who was indicted along with her husband before his death in September, 1989, is charged with looting more than \$500 million from the Philippine treasury between 1972 and 1986.

Then, they were forced into exile by the so-called People Power revolution, which made Corazon Aquino the new president.

Imelda Marcos, who went into exile with her husband in Hawaii, is accused of racketeering, embezzlement, bribery and elaborate kickbacks to obtain the money and then buy upscale properties. They include addresses on Wall Street and Madison Avenue, estates on Long Island and in Princeton, NJ., and paintings by such masters as Picasso and van Gogh. If found guilty, Marcos, who is free on \$5.9 million bail, faces a maximum sentence of 50 years in prison and \$1.2 million in fines. Khashoggi, 54,

subject to 10 years in jail and a \$600,000 fine, was freed on \$11.8 million bail—but has to wear an electronic police monitoring device on his left ankle.

Last week, in a dingy, fluorescent-lit courtroom, Judge John Keenan, federal attorney Charles LaBella and the two defence teams screened 150 candidates for 12 jurors and six alternates. Marcos, dressed in black mourning clothes and carrying a Gucci handbag, sketched the faces of the prospective jurors, jotted down trivia and fingered her rosary.

Called both the Dragon Lady and the Iron Butterfly by her enemies, Marcos held influential government posts in the Philippines, including governor of metro Manila. She is now staying in a rented luxury suite in Manhattan. Warned by her lawyers not to talk to reporters, she made only one comment last week about the jurors who were selected. Speaking in Tagalog, a language common in and around Manila, she said, “They feel for the poor more than the rich.”

Even before the trial opened, Spence, the tall, sandy-haired lawyer whose Wyoming ranch appears in Marlboro tobacco advertisements, had begun to cast Marcos as a victim. Openly courting public opinion through the media, which earned him a gentle rebuke from the judge, Spence said, “There is no more smaller, fragile human being in this world than a woman who has always been protected, who wakes up with her husband dead, living in a foreign land, charged with racketeering in New York City.” Spence argued that even a “welldressed and well-shopped wife” did not know what her husband was doing. “What about Nancy Reagan?” he asked. “Is she supposed to be responsible for the [Iran] contra affair? We’ve never sought to hold Pat Nixon responsible for Watergate.”

Khashoggi, meanwhile, did some pretrial politicking of his own. The Saudi financier portrayed himself as a genial entrepreneur who first worked with the Marcoses in the early 1970s but knew no details of their business. Sipping Earl Grey tea with a twist of lemon in the Peacock room of the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel, Khashoggi said: “It is like being a broker between two governments who gets his fees and on he goes. I don’t see the products.” Khashoggi was once one of the richest men in the world, but he now claims that his fortune has fallen to \$63 million from more than \$1 billion in 1984. Still, he lives in a \$30-million apartment on Fifth Avenue with a breathtaking view of Manhattan and a large swimming pool. His personal chiropractor, Steven Chance, works on him three times a day. Said Chance: “I get him so that energy runs through his body, over his organs, and his mind is cleared.” In the minds of New Yorkers, the trial of Marcos and Khashoggi promises to be the best show in town for months to come.

HILARY MACKENZIE in New York