DEADLINE LADY

By Georgia Craig

CHAPTER II

"Now, now," protested Haynes Jerome hurriedly, not quite meeting either Tracy's blazing green eyes or Ann's that were quite as angry. "I'm sure Ann will make you a very competent and valuable employee, Driscoll! The paper's lucky to get her."

Tracy made a rude sound that brought the color to Ann's cheeks and made her hands clench tightly. She had never ached to smack anybody so hard in her life. How dared he behave so to her? How dared he take it for granted just by looking at her that she couldn't write? Why should he take it for granted that she didn't need a job? She did, desperately, but no one must know that, no one except Haynes Jerome, who had been her father's closest friend and was almost like a member of her own family.

Haynes said hurriedly "Oh and about that girl-friend of yours, Driscoll—the one for whom you wanted a job. There's an opening in the classified ad department. I'm sure she'll be quite happy there. Have her report to Goodman in the morning. I'll see you later, Ann. We must have lunch together soon."

And with the air of one removing himself from danger, Haynes made his escape leaving the two enemies to stand glaring at each other.

"So you want to be a reporter do you, Clayton,?" Tracy asked and his tone was so warm and friendly that suspicion leaped in her mind.

"I do," she told him curtly. "And I intend to be— in spite of you!"

He nodded as though that was quite understandable.

"O. K.. then, you win," he said almost gently and scribbed something on the slip. "Hop over to the city morgue, and ask for Jim; see what you can get on that stiff they pulled out of the river this morning."

Ann caught her breath as though he had flung ice water in her face; her hand shook a little as, reluctantly, she took the slip of paper.

"The—the—city morgue?" she stammered and swallowed.

Tracy looked up at her, acid amusement and derision in his eyes.

"What's the matter, Clayton, can't you take it?" he wanted to know. "It's a routine story—any cub reporter could handle it. It ought not to be too tough for a Clayton!"

Her chin went up and her color came back, beneath the sting in his words, the look in his eyes.

"I'm sure it won't be," she told him coolly. "And neither will you! I came here wanting to be friendly and do my job to the best of my ability. Maybe I'm a rotten reporter—how can I tell until I try? But how dare you take it for granted I am, without so much as giving me a chance to prove I'm not you've made up your mind to be tough! Well, that's quite all right with me. I can do it the hard way too!"

And before he could answer, she turned on her heel and walked out of the office. He had been quite sure she would refuse the assignment. Instead she had accepted it with words that stung a little.

The city morgue was a place hitherto known to Ann very vaguely as an adjunct to the city hospital, where she had done nurse's aid duty. The big charity hospital accupied a very long block in one of the slummier sections of Midland City, and as Ann made her way through the grimy, smelly streets in the brisk spring sunshine that hade everything look even dingier, she felt a little sick.

She drew a deep breath and made herself walk up the steps, but at the top she collided with a man hurrying out of the building and for a moment they rocked, and the man's arms steadied her, and then the man looked down at her. A tall, blond pleasant-looking man in his very early thirties, an expensive camel's hair coat topping a well-tailored dark suit, setting off a really superlative silken scarf.

"Well, if it isn't little Annie, the joy of my heart!" the young man greeted her exuberantly. "What, in Heaven's name, are you doing here this morning, angel-face?"

"An assignment," Ann said and the little thrill of the words helped to steady her. "I'm working, as of this morning, oan th Ceourier, and my first assignment has to do with—a story about a dead man—found in the river this morning—"

"Who the devil ever sent you to the city morgue on any such story as that, Ann? That's routine stuff that always goes in over the telephone, unless there are unusual circumstances. If Jerome sent you out on any such story, I'll nail his hide to his office wall!" he said furiously.

Ann felt soothed and comforted by Lyn's anger, but she said quickly, "It was Tracy Driscoll, the new City Editor. And he thinks I'm a softie and can't take it. He's trying to make me quit, so he can give my job to his girl-friend—let's nail his hide to his office wall, Lyn!"

"You're going through with it?" asked Lyn.

"But of course," she answered him promptly. "How do I go about it?"

Lyn took her by the shoulders, turned her about, marched her down the steps and across the street to a little restaurant that did a thriving trade among the nurses and internes, and occasional worried families of City Hospital patients.

"You go about getting your story," Lyn told her inside the little restaurant, "by marching your pretty self right over there to that table and waiting while I go to see Jim! Sit tight, and I'll be right back with all the dope you need!"

"Oh, Lyn, you're sweet!" she told him, humbly grateful to be freed of a dreaded ordeal.

"It's taken you a long time to find that out," Lyn complained severely, softening the effect by grinning back across the street towards the hospital.

Ann had known Lyn Frazier all her life.

He and Ann had played around together for years, despite the fact that when Ann had been a bigeyed worshipping six, Lyn was already a rather arrogant young man of 16. But he had proposed to her regularly for the last two or three years, and Sarah, who was very fond of Lyn, could see no possible reason why she should not marry him.

Ann sat quietly by herself in the tiny restaurant, waiting for Lyn to get back with the details of the "stiff" that she was supposed to make into some sort of story for the Courier.

The thought struck her that Lyn Frazier had been mixed up in her life for quite a while now. It was easy to think about him. She was not in love with him, she knew, but sometimes while struggling with mounting bills and a dwindling annuity, she thought it would be a pretty good idea if she were.

Lyn came in, interrupting her thoughts. he watched, with a tiny twinkle of amusement in her eyes, as the nurses turned eagerly, almost fluttering at sight of him; Lyn so tall and blond and blue-eyed, with that lazy sort of grace and charm that some Southern men are born with and that is inceptly classified as "charm."

He paused a moment to answer a question asked by a pretty, white-clad nurse: he greeted a couple of the internes; and then he came on to the table where Ann sat, and she grinned at him impudently and said teasingly, "You and your public!"

Lyn answered her grin with one just as impudent, and drawled "What is this strange power I have over other women—but that leaves you, the only one that matters, completely cold?"

"It doesn't leave me cold — it scares me," she told him sweetly.

"Liar"! said Lyn and for a moment studied her curiously. Then he handled her a folded slip of paper and said briskly, "Put it away in your purse and don't even look at it until you get back to the office. I want you to enjoy your lunch—all right if we have it here? I'm due at the office in 40 minutes—and the food here isn't bad at all."

"I'd love it! The most delicious smells—and I'm starving," she told him and tucked the folded paper into her purse.

When Ann reached the office, she saw Tracy at the desk in the corner, talking to a flushed and indignant-looking reporter. She saw annoccupied typewriter, its cover still in place, thus indicating that no one had been using it today. She calmly took posssion of it, dropping her suit-jacket over the back of the chair, whirling copy-paper into the machine, ----- ?

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before she opened her purse and took out the folded bit of paper Lyn had given her.

She turned to the typewriter and wrote slowly for a moment, felling for words; and then more rapidly, more smoothly, absorbed in the words that flowed from her heart through her typewriter keys to the paper before her.

When she had finished it, she ripped it out of the machine, looked it over swiftly, and then walked to Tracy's desk and dropped it in otthe basket marked "copy." All without a word to Tracy, who was talking on the telephone, anyway, and apparently completely unaware of her presence.

She walked back to her desk and sat down, waiting for whatever comment he might make. And she hadn't long to wait. Perhaps ten minutes later she heard him call sharply, "Clayton."

She rose and walked to his desk and stood looking down at him.

He made some marks on her story, thrust it at a waiting copy boy, who moved swiftly off, as though fearful of an explosion that mustn't catch him too close at hand.

"Where'd you get that story?" Tracy demanded of Ann, without preamble.

She stared at him, puzzled.

"Why, at the city morgue, of course—where you sent me," she answered instantly.

he had never seen her before.

"Thn why didn't you call me back? Didn't Jim give you my meesage, asking you to call me?" he demanded.

A little color crept into Ann's face, but she only said, "I didn't know I was supposed to call you back. I—I didn't see Jim."

"And you didn't see the—er—stiff, either, did you?" asked Tracy dryly. "I asked Jim to have you call me, before he showed you the body."

Ann's eyes widened and she re-

To her amazement, Tracy grinned. And it was a grin that took years off his age, and made him look almost boyish and gay and starlingly attractive. For the first time she realized that while he was not at all good-looking, in Lyn's smooth, well-bred way, there was a distinct appeal in his lean, rather craggy dark face and her heart jerked a little sharp surprise in its accelerated tempo.

"I felt sure you'd be in no shape to use a telephone, after you'd seen the body," he told her, a taesing light in his green eyes. And then he sobered and said grimly, "It aws a rotten trick, sending a kid like you on such an assignment—"

"Don't" Ann said sharply

Puzzled, he asked, "Don't what?

"Don't—go soft on me," said Ann suspiciously.

His puzzlement gave way to resentment.

"Soft?" he repeated and there was Ann edge to his voice that was more familiar to her than the unaccustomed geniality he'd been displaying. "Well, even a roughneck like me can soften up a bit where a kid like you is concerned at the necessity for a defense, and resenting her all the more that he should be annoyed with himself. It was on her account and his annoyance was aimed at her as well as at himself.

"Well, don't!" she warned him icily. "You've tried; to get rid of me by being tough; now you're trying to get rid of me by going soft and friendly and sneaking up on my blind side. But it won't work, mister—it won't work! I'm here to stay, as long as I can make the grade; and when I can't then the contract says you can fire me, with a clear conscience."

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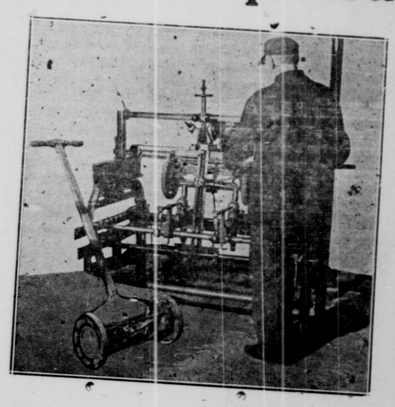
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