

9/11/80

'What Happened To Dorothy?'

by Robert Lucas

KILGALLEN

by Lee Israel

Dell Publishing Co., N.Y.

August, 1980, 478 pp. \$2.95

Do celebrities have clay feet? Not always, but the recently published paperback edition of the life of media celebrity Dorothy Kilgallen is a "scorcher."

Lee Israel, the author, has pulled no punches and he has been thorough while documenting the minutiae throughout the book. He has "bent over backwards" to be fair, but the very nature of the subject and the controversy surrounding Kilgallen have made this difficult.

Kilgallen was preeminent in her field. From a somewhat obscure start as one of the few women crime reporters in a field blanketed by men, she fought her way to the top. An extremely feminine woman, she used feminine wiles with the dispatch of a commando in order to secure her news beats; she frequently outdistanced the competition and as frequently bruised the male ego.

She is cited for never having been vindictive in the manner of a Winchell or people of his ilk, but when she felt betrayed and could prove it, she promptly severed relationships with the offender and "sent them to Siberia." From her beginning as an obscure reporter she became one of the most feared newspaper and radio commentators of her time and, ultimately, a gossip columnist. Her column, "Voice of Broadway," was one of the most widely read "productions" in America and she could literally make or break celebrities merely by the mention or omission of their names.

Kilgallen lived (existed is perhaps a better word) in a world of make-believe, surrounding herself with psychopants and the then new "cafe society" types. When she wasn't aboard the all-night, merry-go-round of "doing" the bars, supper and night clubs, she covered some of the most famous murder trials in the Forties, Fifties and Sixties.

She became interested in the newspaper business as a child when her father, Jim Kilgallen, brought home stories about people and places all over the world. He was her idol and in turn he idolized her. It was through her father that Kilgallen obtained her first newspaper job and from that point it was all uphill until her untimely death, still shrouded in mystery, years later.

The Kilgallen story underlines the fleeting aspects of fame and the futility of amazing things. She was one of the headliners on the television program "What's My Line?" and her radio program, "Breakfast with Dorothy and Dick," supplied her with national publicity. She used both programs to further her newspaper career and to obtain news exclusives.

She died "mysteriously" just as she was about to break what has been described as the greatest story of her life. After President Kennedy's assassination she obtained

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an exclusive interview with Jack Ruby. Her voluminous file on that interview mysteriously disappeared after her death and the question is still asked: Was her death an accident? Suicide? Murder?

The book is illustrated with pictures taken from family and newspaper files. It is a frightening portrait of a woman who sought fame to the exclusion of love and affection. It is a portrait of insecurity.