

A Prince of Egypt

(Continued from page 51)

Fully dressed, she lay on her cot. Tendrils of wavy golden hair escaped from under her cap; her cheeks were deadly pale; her lips were parted and smiling. She had crossed her slim hands over her undeveloped breast, and no movement as of breathing broke the eerie, lifeless serenity of her rest.

The nearer I approached, the more disturbed I grew. There was something unnatural about her. I am not afraid of death, and I did not think she was dead, but there was a nameless something there, which turned me icy cold and sent my heart into my throat. Fighting against this terror with all my strength, I went quite close to the bed and looked down.

THE BODY WAS EMPTY! Like an opaque shell. Not transparent or looking as if devoid of life, but rather as though the Thing which is vital had been drawn away.

Even while I stared, unable to take my eyes from her, there sounded again that humming; I was enveloped in a cloud of perfume; the room glowed with a warm rose light, and I saw IT return to that still body, and fill it.

Dryad Dixon stirred and awoke. Fully conscious on the instant, she got to her feet and started to the door.

"Wait!" I called sharply. "As your superior, I insist that you do not go again into the desert alone. It is not safe. You might easily lose yourself among those endless hills of sand."

And then vaguely wondering what prompted me to connect her recent appearance with the desert, I clutched at the stifling air and fell forward on her bed.

NEARLY two months have passed since that night. I am back in England, slowly recovering from fever. It was worth having—to come out of my delirium one morning and see the trees bursting into what Oscar Wilde called a "shrill green." It was like getting a glimpse of heaven after the eternal pink of Cairo.

I was delirious a long time, which accounts for my delay in writing what now lies before me on these pages. And it looks so strange in England!

Yet there are stranger things to tell. . . . This diary belonging to Dryad Dixon, for example. . . . I found it less than a week ago, when for the first time I sorted over the contents of my luggage. How it came to be a part of my kit is still a mystery, for although I do not know who packed for me, I know it was not Dryad Dixon. I was sent to England two days after my last experience with her—and twelve hours previous to my going, she disappeared!

A letter from Colonel Mowberly brought me the news—a letter breathing such a storm of emotion as to make it impossible for me to reproduce it, even in part. Poor, broken-hearted Dan! His love for that girl was like the love of a man for a spirit. He could give me no particulars. She simply left the hospital one afternoon, and never returned.

Although there was torture for him in the thought that she had gone away with someone else, he clung to that belief rather than think she had been lost in the desert. He seemed unable to consider the horror of such a death, and pinned his hopes upon me as a means by which she could be traced. He could bear anything but the uncertainty of not knowing what had become of her. The letter was kept from me until a few days ago.

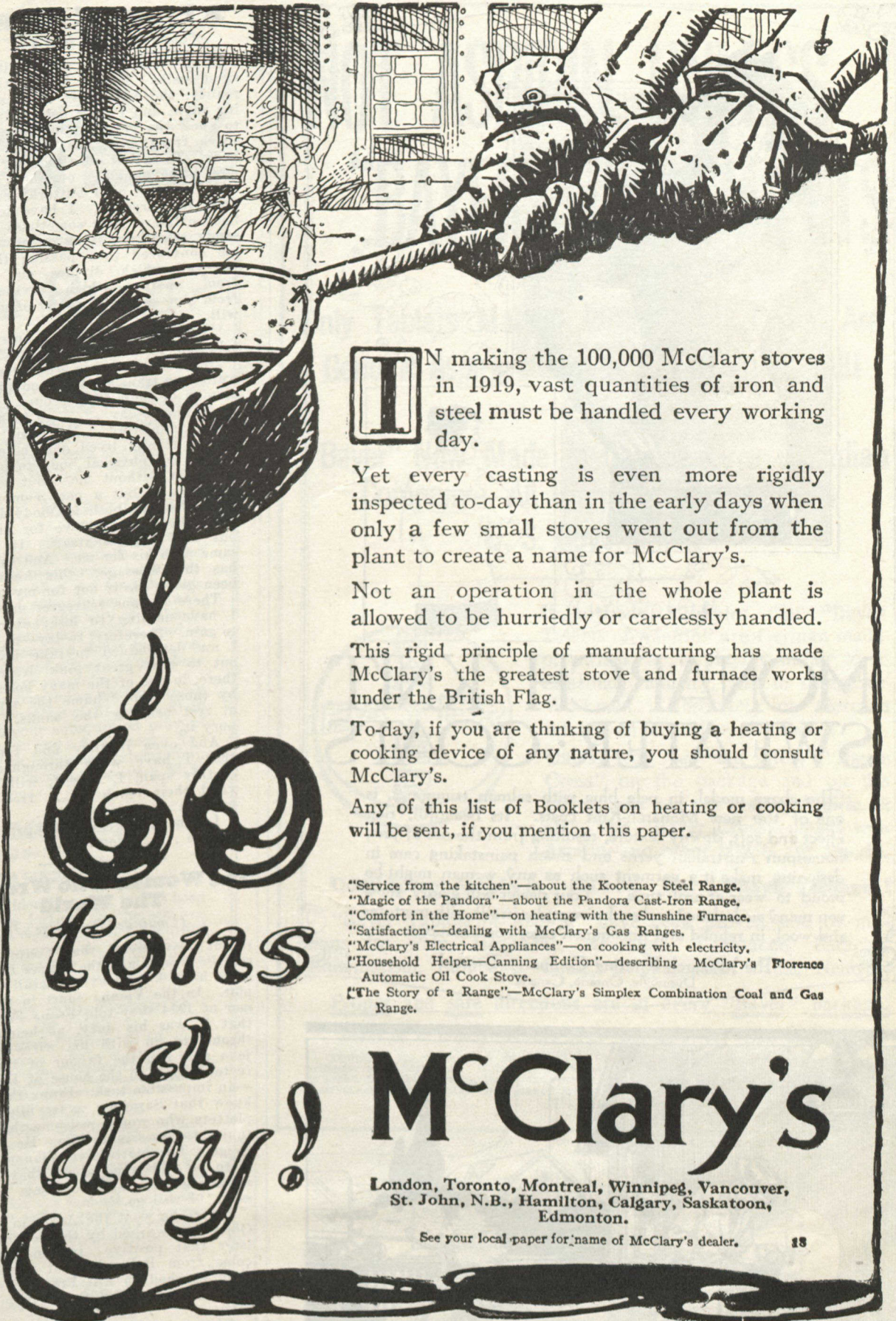
Why did I then feel impelled to look through my luggage? I do not know. Assuredly there was nothing of mine which could throw any possible light on the disappearance of Dryad Dixon! And yet, with faltering feet and trembling hands, I was drawn directly to my kit . . . and there was this book of hers!

To touch the pages she had written brought back all the strange sensations of those other days; to read them gave me the terrifying certainty of her presence near me. I was again conscious of that faint, elusive perfume—The Perfume of Egypt—diffused about the room. There was, too, a gentle humming, that weird, harmonious melody of sound so difficult to trace, and now and again I knew that the light changed into a silver-rose glow. In England, too . . . in England!

There is just one more entry—the last in Dryad Dixon's journal—that I should like to give, in answer to Colonel Mowberly's letter. I have no comment to make. I copy it. That is enough:—

Like Job, I sigh and say, "My soul is weary of my life," and at last I understand the message of that

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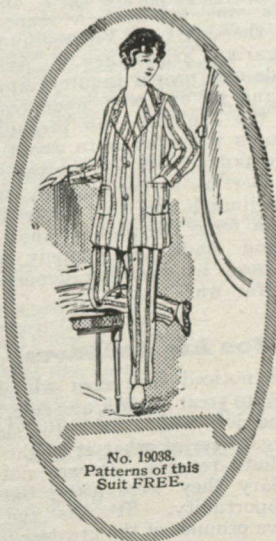
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