

cistern. I drank, and they bathed my face and neck, and my hands, which were black in the bad light; and whiter than before, in that bad light, was the hair of Mary Romany at the temples. And I asked if they saw a man's shirt about anywhere. It was found, trampled. They seemed horrified when I arose, but begged me to come with them into Lost Valley.

It was true that Mary's father was coming. They had seen his camp-fire on the opposite ridge, fourteen miles away, last night. He would start early and be here within two hours. At least, they hoped her father was with the party. They had been unable to sleep; had left Yarbin watching and gone down into the Canyon with the first light. She had been drawn down there, Mary Romany said. From the passage they heard voices in the Vatican.

I stood upon the platform behind the altar-stone and they brought me water. I told them I would go to the valley to prepare for her father's coming; that all would be well there; that only a few had gone wrong with the whiskey; that I was tired, but quite well.

"You will not let us stay with you?" Lilian Yarbin asked, but the other had asked it first with her eyes.

"No, I want you to meet him in the other valley—and to say that all is well."

As the water bubbled in the key-bores, I heard the far sound of firing. The women heard it, and asked.

"It is Huntoon practicing at the Pass. He knew nothing of this—"

I held the panel open. I remember the arms of Mary Romany as I bade her go, and again bade her go . . . and the big trachyte panel slipping back.

And now I was alone, and sank forward on the altar-stone, and I wanted the woman's arms. The firing lifted me again. I had lied about that. I moved across the Vatican as one in a dream.

Suddenly there was a furious reverse in my mind from hatred to happiness. It was like a plunge in a pool of sheer joy. I held the Vatican; a fight was on at the Pass. If Orion had surprised the diminished command there, and taken the position—the beasts who had tortured me were penned in the valley. I had but to swoon—to let go and sink to the stone.

For ten seconds, at least, I was a slave to this poison. My hand flew along the inner locks of the great iron door—all shot and effectively barring out the miners and the soldiers. It was not I—for I was not all there—just another reflex of the night of agony. And now I heard running feet and the spent and husky voice of Maconachie:

"For God's sake, Mr. Ryerson—open the door—"

Tears came to my eyes, as I remembered the night; and the queer honest length of the "o" in God from his lips, made a babe of me. I was already reversing the locks.

"What is it, Mac?" I called.

"There's a fight at the Pass—and it sounds nearer. . . I've gathered the women, and the men are standing for your orders—the drunken lot. For God's sake, open—and take over command. It's all up, if you don't."

I pushed back the great iron door and squinted at the red of morning. Maconachie fell back from the sight of me.

"Yes, they thrawned me a bit, Mac. Yes, I know you didn't have anything to do with it. Dole's whiskey—"

"They overpowered Huntoon's guard at the Inn," he said hoarsely. "I couldn't stop them. I told them I was done with them."

The women of the placer passed into the Vatican—and many of them shrank from me. The poor creatures had felt the brunt of the night's lawlessness. Down by the river the miners were running to and fro, many already started towards us. And now I saw a mule galloping furiously on the trail down from the Pass. It was the old gray vixen that had creased me. . . Maconachie signaled the rider, who was reining toward Headquarters. He turned his mount like a flash. Fifty feet away, the fiery beast stepped in a rut—sprawled and slid with thud and groan. The courier launched forward until the bridle-rein, which he had not dropped, brought him whirling to the turf. It was a most sensational delivery. . . Maconachie and I picked up the messenger, whose face was twisted with

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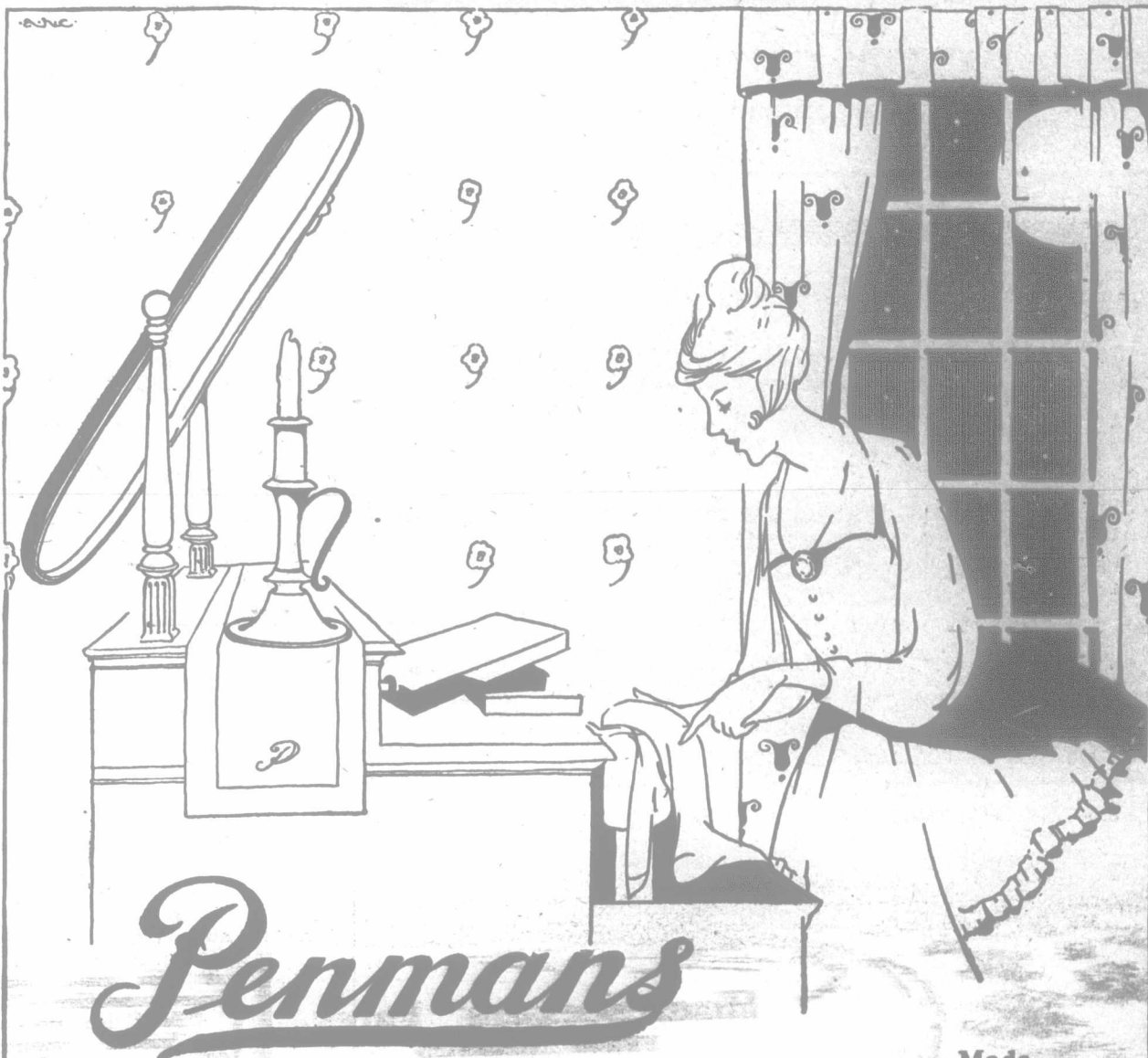
the torture of a mid-riff vacuum. His lips moved, but it was several seconds before he had air enough to sound the words:

"Orion has taken the Pass. . . . The men are holding a bit—but must give way. Huntoon has joined them to slow up the retreat, so you fellows will have a chance."

I ordered the courier into the Vatican, and sent Maconachie to bring up the miners in what order he could, and took the post at the great door, watching the ascending trail to the Pass. I was still dazed.

The old gray mule arose, snorted, shook herself, and turned about toward the Pass at a fast walk.

And now the miners were crowding in; and I watched those who hastened with averted eyes into the gloom of the Vatican. They hurried out of the light—as children from a dark room. Shame and fear and nausea twitched upon lip and nostril and eyelid; others fresh-awakened from stupor were even more swollen and deathly. I have seen it since—where one is rudely aroused from the death of drink—the look of Lazarus newly-called. . . . And Dole looked at me genially; and Dole's hair was subdued with much river-water, and his face clean and his eyes bright. He seldom drank his stuff. I had a



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