

Shehens` Houn` Dogs

Elia Wilkinson Peattie

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EDWARD Berenson, the Washington correspondent for the New York News, descended from the sleeping-car at Hardin, Kentucky, and inquired for the stage to Ballington's Gap. But there was, it appeared, no stage. Neither was a conveyance to be hired. The community looked at Berenson and went by on the other side. He had, indeed, as he recollected, with a too confiding candor, registered himself from Washington, and there were reasons in plenty why strangers should not be taken over to Ballington's Gap promiscuously, so to speak, by the neighbors at Hardin. Berenson had come down from Washington with a purpose, however, and he was not to be frustrated. He wished to inquire politely why, for four generations, the Shehens and the Babbs had been killing each other. He meant to put the question calmly and in the interest of scientific journalism, but he was quite determined to have it answered. To this end he bought a lank mare for seventy-five dollars "an th' fixin's thrown in, sah" and set out upon a red road, bound for the Arcadian distance.

The mountains did not look like the retreat of revengeful clans. They wore, on the contrary, a benevolent aspect. All that was visible was beautiful; and what lay beyond appeared enchanted. The hill-sides flowered with laurel and azalea; the winds met on the heights like elate spirits, united after a too long separation; the sky was so near and so kind that it seemed after all as if the translation of the weary body into something immortal and impregnable to pain were not so mad a dream. Pleasant streams whispered through the pine woods, and the thrush sang from solitary places.

Berenson had ridden far, and the soft twilight was coming upon him, when he met the first human being since leaving Hardin. It was a slight, sallow, graceful mountaineer with a long rifle flung in the easy hollow of his arm. He emerged suddenly upon Berenson so suddenly as to disturb the none too sensitive nerves of the mare, who shied incautiously over the edge of the roadway. The two saluted, and Berenson pulled in his nag.

"How far am I from Ballington's Gap, sir?"

"'Bout two mile, sah, if you don't go wrong at th' fawk. Bin to Hardin?"

"Yes I left the train there."

"Did the folks there send yo' on heah?"

"Well, they let me come," said Berenson with swift divination.

"That theah ole Pap Waddell's hoss yo' all ridin'?"

"Why, I believe it is or was. It's mine now."

"How much if it's fair askin'?"

"Seventy-five dollars and the saddle thrown in."

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A slow smile illuminated the sallow face the sort of a smile that dawns when one perceives a joke. The mountaineer drew a long dark plug of tobacco from his pocket.

"D'ye chaw?" he inquired with pensive sweetness.

"I smoke," said Berenson, and offered his pocket case of Havanas. The two lighted up, and the man walked beside the mare as they proceeded.

"We—all bin havin' a good deal of disturbance raound heah, lately," volunteered the mountaineer.

"Yes, so I hear."

"What with the Shehens defendin' theah h'athstones, an th' Babbyses raisin' hell, 'twas bad enough trouble an' to spa—h. An' now th' revinoosers "

"I didn't know they'd been giving you trouble lately."

Berenson did not feel that he ran any risk in identifying his companion with the "blockaders." Loyal mountain sentiment, as he knew, was with the keepers of the stills.

"Yaas, they've bin amongst us ag'in. As I was sayin', all this makes us more inquirin' than polite, sah, an' it's my place to find out the business of them that comes to the gap. As we ah gittin' mighty neah thah this minute, I've got to come to th' p'int." He smiled at Berenson ingratiatingly.

"Well," said Berenson, slipping from his horse and taking his place beside his inquisitor, "you shall have a full and complete answer. I'm a newspaper man, and I've come down here to inquire into the meaning of this feud this Shehen—Babb difficulty that has been going on down here for the past twenty—five years or is it longer?"

"I don't know jes' the numbah of yeahs, but it's in the fourth generation, sah. But I don't see why it should consahn outsidahs, sah."

Berenson looked at him with genuine interest. He had a dignity and a grace that were almost distinguished. He bore himself with nonchalance something as might any clansman, certain of the rights of his position, and firm in his ability to protect his own. He was young not more than twenty—two. His tan—colored jeans hung easily upon his lithe and muscular body. His eyes had a kindly expression at moments, but in repose were marked by a certain mournfulness.

"Well," said Berenson, "the newspapers have fallen into the way of thinking that everything is their business. They are probably wrong, but as long as I work for them and I don't know enough to make my living any other way I shall act according to their policy. Now, up North, we have become greatly interested in your feud. We have quarrels of our own up there, but they are not inherited quarrels. We don't carry on a fight from the grave to the cradle, and the cradle to the grave. We don't keep on fighting after we've forgotten what the row is about, and we want to know why you do. It strikes us that you have the habits of the old Highlanders, and that these vendettas of yours resemble the old wars of the clans "

"Waal," interrupted the other, with a philosophical intonation. "We all are Scotch or Irish, mostly."

"That's so!" cried Berenson. "Of course you are! Anyway, I've come down here to get an impartial account of the whole matter, and I want to meet any man as many men as I can who will give me the rights of it."

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The mountaineer motioned Berenson to stop. He turned to the side of the road, unslung a horn cup from his shoulder, and, stooping, brought it up filled with glistening spring water. He held it out to Berenson with a charming gesture of hospitality. Berenson bowed and accepted it.

"It's good watah," said the other. "I'm fond of watah myself." He spoke as if his taste were rather exotic.

"Waal, I'm powahful glad, Mr. "

"Berenson Edward Berenson."

" Berenson, that yo' bin so squah in tellin' me of yo' business. We don't have many visitahs from ovah yon. 'Bout th' only ones that come heah ah th' revinooers, an' I needn't say, sah, to a man like yo', that they ah not pahicularly welcome. 'Bout fo' yeahs ago a fellow from Mr. Wattedson's papah did come t' these pahths when they was some shootin', an' he took sides with th' Babbs." (A pause.) "He nevah went back." They stopped on a level bit of road to breathe themselves, and Berenson received and returned the whimsical smile of his companion. "But what I like about you," went on the mountaineer, "is that yo' said yo' was goin' to be impahshal. I'm an impahshal man myself, and I think we should all be impahshal. Th' trouble with outsiders is that they ah not impahshal."

"Well, it's a fine thing to be," assented Berenson. "You make judges out of stuff like that. Any judges in your family?"

"One, sah."

"Still living?"

"No, sah. Passed away las' yeah."

"What was his name?"

"Loren Shehen, sah."

Berenson's heart performed an acrobatic feat.

"Are you a Shehen, sir?"

"I have that honah, sah. I'm th' last."

"You don't, I'm sure, mean that you are the last survivor?"

"No, sah, I do not. I mean I'm the youngest bohn. Theah's a numbah of us yet on Tulula mountain, sah. Theah's my fathah, an' my two eldah brothahs, an' my Uncle Dudley and one son of his, an' my second cousin Edgah an' theah ah othahs, kinfolk, but not close related. The Judge was with us last yeah, but he was killed, by a hull pahcel of Babbs a hull yelpin' pack of 'em."

"You've lived here all your life, Mr. Shehen?"

The mountaineer's eyes twinkled.

"Waal, not yit, Mr. Berenson, but I expect to, sah."

Berenson smiled.

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"I should think, however, that in spite of the impartial disposition which you say is native to you, Mr. Shehen, that you would have difficulty in dealing with the matter of the feud without some heat."

"No heat at all, sah! You don't git heated when yo' speak of rattlesnakes, do yeh? They ah jest snakes! You kill 'em when yo' kin. Well, Babbs ah th' same. They ah the meanest set of snakes that crawl on theah bellies. That's an impahshal opinion, sah. Yo' kin ask th' next man we meet."

Berenson gave up all effort to keep a sober face. He grinned, then guffawed. He made the rocks ring with his laughter. The mountaineer regarded him indulgently.

"It's a true wohd," he said quietly.

"I haven't had your full name yet," said Berenson, when he got breath again.

"Bill Shehen, sah young Bill."

"Well, I'm glad I met you, Mr. Shehen! I want to hear your side of the story from beginning to end. Now where can I put up? I want to stay here for some time. It's not alone on account of my paper. I need the rest. I'm tired. I want to talk with all the Shehens I can, and all the Babbs I can."

"Now that's whah yo' make yo' mistake, sah. Yo' cain't talk with both Shehens an' Babbs. If yo' go on to th' Gap with me, and bunk at my place to-night an' yo' ah welcome, sah yo've got to 'bide with us. Yo' will be counted a Shehen sympathizah. I don't suppose any one from th' outside kin ondehstand, sah. I don't expect 'em to do so. I thought about it a plenty. It's jest this: bein' bohn a Shehen, yo' nuss hate fo' th' Babbs with yo' mothah's milk; bein' bohn a Babb, yo' git silly mad evah time yo' see a Shehen. Bein' of one kind, yo' cain't pass the othah kind on th' road; yo' cain't heah of anything they do without a cold feelin' in yo' stomach. When yo' git to fightin' 'em, yo' feel like shoutin' like the niggahs at praise meetin'. I thought it ovah, sah, an' I've about come to the conclusion that it's a disease. Folks call it a feud. Well, I call it a disease the Shehen-Babb disease."

Berenson put a hand on the man's shoulder.

"Well, then, William Shehen, if you've found that out, why don't you cure yourself? If it's a disease, it's a fatal one! It brings your men to untimely death, and your women to sorrow. Don't set your sons when you get them in the way of inheriting the same fearful malady. Get out and get away from it all. Do something besides destroy and make bad whisky. For you do make whisky, I suppose."

"Yaas," said the other gently, "but it ain't so damned bad." His voice had sougning intonations, like the wind in the pines.

"I'll wager you've got a bottle of it in your pocket now," said Berenson.

"Waal!" the wind was never softer on a summer night.

"Well, I've a bottle of the ordinary whisky of commerce. I'll bet mine is the smoother, the nuttier, and altogether the pleasanter."

Three buzzards sitting on the dead branch of a Norway pine received a shock from which they did not recover for several days. They had seen walking along the road two quiet men, one sad mare, and a long thin dog with a lame foot. They suddenly beheld a swift change a tableau vivant. One man stood at the point of the other man's rifle. The mare had jerked away and was backing, with frightened eyes, toward the verge of the steep mountain side. The dog had crouched down as if to get out of the way of trouble.

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"I believe yo' all ah a damned revinoouer aftah all!" said Shehen. He did not raise his voice, but he spoke between closed teeth. His blue gray eyes had become like points of steel. Berenson, equally tall, in his dark, city clothes, his inappropriate derby above his long, office-bleached face, looked Shehen squarely in the eye.

"I'm not," he said. "I'm just what I told you I was. I haven't a firearm on me. If you shoot, you kill an unarmed man. Besides, you will have made a mis- take. The only trouble is, that while I like your jokes, you don't like mine. Up North, when we don't like a man's jokes, we tell him he's an ass; we don't kill him."

The buzzards saw the tableau remain, for an appreciable moment, undisturbed. Then the mountaineer lowered his rifle and flung it back upon his arm. He looked shamefaced. Something like tears came into his embarrassed eyes. Berenson regarded him coldly. The other, meeting the expression, flushed scarlet. Then he shook his fist before Berenson's eyes.

"That's it," he cried. "That's what I say! The life heah makes fools of us! We ah afeahd of shadows! We have nothin' to show fo' ouah lives! We live to kill that's it we live to kill. What has my family done fo' the community? What is the community? It's a beautiful country, but what do we do with it? We live like wolves, sah like wolves. Ain't that how we seem to yo' all?"

He was suddenly no more than a boy. His height seemed, indeed, to have belied him. He looked his passionate inquiry at Berenson, who warmed again into liking.

"Why don't you get out of it all?" demanded Berenson. "Cut it! Quit it! Vamoose! Come where they're doing something where they're talking about something worth while. Why, you're an intelligent fellow. You've courage. You've had some education, too, haven't you?"

"Dad sent me to Hahdin to the Industrial school; an' I've some books. I take pleasuah in readin', sah."

"I knew it! Well, get out of this place and make a man of yourself."

Shehen said nothing. To the acute disappointment of the buzzards, the horse was recaptured, the dog recovered, and the two men went on side by side.

The buzzards spread their wings, stretched their necks with a disgusted gesture, and flew away. Silence fell upon the travelers. They were coming to a hamlet. Back from the road, bowered in roses, was a tumble-down house. It was built of logs, and divided in the center by an open chamber. Three wolf-like dogs ran out to greet Shehen. The mountaineer stopped to welcome them, rubbing his hands over their backs, scratching them behind the ears, and finally lifting one of them up in his arms.

"HE WAS CAPTIVE NOW THIS WILD CREATURE

"They seem to be very quiet hounds," said Berenson. "How did you teach them to be so well behaved?"

Berenson's companion regarded him with amusement.

"Thah's reasons, sah, why the Shehens' houn-dogs hes to be quiet. We nevah did publish ouah place of residence! But thah's times when they cain't be kep' still, an' that's when one of the clan has bad luck comin' to him. They ah well trained, sah, but they do have theah times of howlin'!"

"And about that time," suggested Berenson, "you want to get your rabbit-foot out."

Bill Shehen nodded.

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"If you've got one handy," he agreed. "Fathah an' th' boys have been in a little trouble this week. They ah all away. Come in and spend th' night, sah. I want to talk to yo'."

It was said with the conviction that a refusal was impossible. And, indeed, Berenson considered it so. They put up the horse, and went into the great living room, which ran across one entire side of the house—three bedrooms occupying the other side. Shehen pointed to a crayon picture on the wall—the only picture in the room.

"That's my mothah," he said with a sweet and frank reverence. "She died last yeah." The portrait was a poor one, but it could not conceal the look of fatality in the dead woman's eyes. It was the same look that Berenson had noticed in the eyes of her son. A wave of compassion for both of them swept over him. He was left alone for a moment, and he stood before the crayon, seeing yet not seeing it.

They ate together, and then sat out beneath the hoary hemlocks, and watched the moon rise, scarlet, over the mountain's brow. Berenson felt at ease—at ease with the night, and the place, and the man. The whip-poor-will iterated his foolish call from below them, and almost above their heads the hoot owl cried.

"I can't say but that I'd be willing to get along without those two birds," said Berenson.

"They ah very insistin'," agreed Shehen. "Of co'se I know how to make that hoot owl shet up, but the whip-pooah-will is one too many for me."

"And how can you make the hoot owl hush? By killing it?"

Shehen grinned.

"Thah's ways of doin' things up here that you all woulden' take stock in," he ventured.

"Well, I don't know about that. What do you suggest?"

"Yo'all take off youah slippah, sah, an' change the right slippah to the lef' foot an' see what happens."

The industrious owl was in full cry as Berenson bent to obey this extraordinary request. But her mournful gurgle died in her throat.

"She'll shet up now," murmured Shehen, lazily lighting his pipe. And so she did. Not another sound issued from her depressing throat. Berenson made the echoes ring with laughter.

"You don't believe such stuff, man?"

"No-o," pensively murmured the mountaineer. "We don't none of us believe in it! It jes' happens that a-way, that's all. An' I may say, jes' fo' yo' info'mation, thet if yo' haven't on slippahs and it's inconvenient to change youah boots, heatin' a pokah red hot will do jes' as well."

"Thanks," said Berenson, and told of some family superstitions of his own.

But they talked of wiser things, too. Shehen liked books, as he said, and he showed Berenson a catalogue of the year's publications, with the volumes he had purchased or proposed to buy, marked off. He turned to serious matters; was fascinated with popular science, and expressed a wish to have a "star-glass" of his own. He knew the names of the constellations, it appeared, and he called his companion's attention to the color of the different stars.

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"I may be wrong," the Washington man said to the mountaineer that night, "but I think you are wasting yourself here. You ought to have more appreciation of yourself. The only way you can take your own measure is by standing up alongside other men. You're made for happiness and society and some nice girl's love, and good books and a home of your own. I can't think why you've not seen all this for yourself."

The mountaineer reached a hand down to stroke one of the dogs. "I reckon I've seen it," he said. "But my ole dad is one to have his way. They call him the Ten-Tined Buck of Tulula mountain. It never was much good runnin' counter to him."

"Will you come up to Washington with me if I get his consent? I'll stay here and get acquainted with him, and I'll locate you up there in some way. I tell you, when the chance really offers he'll want you to avail yourself of it. You'll see!"

The sound of the "branch" dripping over the rocks came to their ears. The hermit thrush cast the soft pearls of his melody upon the air. With infinite rustlings, the night settled about them, beneficent as a prayer.

"I mout try it up there," mused the mountaineer. "But I was always a home-keepin' fellow."

Berenson went to bed perplexed. The boy was as innocent and wistful as a girl, outlaw though he confessed himself. Having inadvertently finished too quickly and too disastrously his own individual interest in life, Berenson had fallen into a way of deriving vicarious zest by interfering in the lives of others. And, the case of young Bill Shehen seemed to offer a rare opportunity for his benevolent vice.

Three weeks later Berenson went back to Washington. The period of his investigation had not been without adventure even danger. He had made enemies and friends; he had felt partizanship. He had absorbed something of the point of view of these courteous, murderous, soft-voiced, battle-loving, mountain-whelped, clannish, affectionate, sentimental, law-defying men. He liked them liked their inconsistencies, their excesses, their barbarism, their hospitality, their piety, and their heathenism. And he carried to Washington with him, as friend and companion, one William Shehen, junior, son of Tulula's "Ten-Tined Buck."

If Shehen was shy, he was also sociable. He had a way with mountains understood them and answered them but he had a way with men, too. He was always graceful, and he looked well in the soft gray suit which he got at Berenson's advice, and in the drooping gray felt hat. He carried himself with nonchalance, took long, swinging strides, looked men almost too insistently in the eye, and was rather elaborate in his courtesy. He had, as a part of his indestructible possession, a knowledge of how educated men talked. He had read, and he had remembered. Away from his native environment, he employed something of this knowledge, which came within his literary, but not his actual, experience. The soft tricks of his earth-born, forest-nurtured speech clung to him, but in Washington these were not marked as amazing. His na•vete and his gentleness won him friends.

Berenson soon found an office position for him, and he filled it with faithfulness, though his patron never dropped in to see him that he was not distressed at the curious wistfulness in the boy's eyes. He who had known only his own will now submitted, from eight in the morning till half after five in the evening, to the will of others. His days were given up to minutiae, every last particle of which was laid out for him. He had hitherto acted solely on his own initiative, or had followed the rough autocracy of old Bill, his father, the leader of his herd the ten-tined buck of Tulula Mountain. He was captive now this wild creature, whose caprices had been his guide. Berenson pitied him, yet expected ultimate happiness for him. Civilization might be rather a stupid escape from barbarism, but after all, when a barbarian got to yearning for civilization, as Shehen had, it seemed best to give it to him.

Shehen went to the Presbyterian church, and he sang so well that the choirmaster requested him to join his baritones, which the young mountaineer did, with unfeigned pleasure. He sang with the open and flexible throat, knew his notes, and was as teachable as an intelligent child. He boarded with a widow who had two daughters,

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one other boarder and a flower garden. Bill used to work in the garden with the young daughter mornings before he went to the office. Her name was Summer MacDonald. She had had, far back, much the same ancestry as he. Something atavistic stirred in the two of them and gave them sympathies which could not be expressed. Besides, they were both young, they were training roses and weeding mignonette together, and at night they sometimes took a walk in the moonlight. They sang together, too, Summer selecting the songs, which were adagio and andantino, a trifle sad, and relating to love or religion. She had been going to the Congregational church, but she changed now, and went off every Sunday morning with Shehen, and after a while she got admitted to the choir, too, though her voice was not strong.

Bill liked it, however, the way it was. It flowed along like a pretty "branch" over the mica-starred soil of his mountains. Her face was pale and delicate, and she wore white frocks, and a wide white hat with drooping blue plumes on it. Even in the morning, about her work, she dressed in white, with fetching pink or blue gingham aprons, cut like a child's pinafore, covering them for neatness. With her light braids down her back, she looked like a child. She and Shehen were as happy as they could be. They used, sometimes, when they were walking together in the garden, to catch hold of hands and swing back and forth, out of sheer lightness of heart, and just as little children do. Bill never kissed her, but sometimes, when he was sleeping and the summer wind, perfumed from her garden, blew in upon him, he dreamt that she had kissed him. The caress was as light as thistle down; it had the breath of violets, and it made him blush with happiness.

Berenson used to take Shehen around the Capitol, and to the Congressional Library and the Supreme Court Hall. He talked to him, casually, of government, of ideals of law, of the responsibility of a nation. He wished to make him comprehend what a nation meant, and to make clear that individualism need not include anarchy. He gave him a very good notion of how anarchy worked in cities, and he was not surprised to find Bill condemning it utterly. He loathed city crime, too, which seemed to offend him as being squalid and treacherous. Poverty touched him deeply. He could save nothing. He was always helping some one worse situated than himself. Berenson used to wonder if he was coming to have any notion of why the moon-shiners were offenders against the good order of the government; but though Bill's impulses were all on the side of generosity and compassion, he still seemed to lack some comprehension of the real meaning of law. Berenson could never cure him of the habit of going armed. He would, at any time, have been willing to dispense with his uncomfortable collar, or his tie, but his toilet was never complete without his modest Smith and Wesson. The fact that he was, in wearing it, breaking a legal regulation concerned him not at all. It was a point of honor for a Shehen to go armed. That finished it.

"You'll be getting a promotion some of these days, my boy," Berenson said to him. "And then I suppose you and Miss Summer will be setting up for yourselves and making your own flower garden."

Bill settled a spray of heliotrope in his buttonhole. Miss Summer had given it to him from her garden.

"I don't know," he said slowly. "If she knew about Ballington's Gap and the still on Tulula Mountain, and all the Babbs we all had killed, perhaps she wouldn't."

"Tell her the story and see what she says," urged Berenson.

"Yaas," smiled Bill, "eat the mushroom and see if you die!"

As time went on it seemed, however, as if the mountaineer would be likely to eat the mushroom. Berenson used to meet Bill and Miss Summer together, dreamful, on summer nights, and he noticed what seraphic intonation could be given the simple word "we."

"Have you told her yet?" he ventured to ask one day.

"I out with the whole yahn," Bill confessed.

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"And what was the effect of it?"

"Waal, it was as if she didn't quite follow me. I reckon she thought I was layin' it on. She said young men liked to play the Othello game that they wanted to be loved for the dangers they had passed."

"Miss Summer is a student of Shakespeare, then?"

"We've been readin' it togethah," murmured Bill happily.

Berenson could not help priding himself on his man. He felt that fine sense of partnership with the Creator which parents have when they regard a beautiful and virtuous child. Shehen the civilized, the pacific, the bookish, the lover, the citizen, the law-abider, was in part his product. Berenson talked of him at the newspaper office and at the club. People asked to meet him, and Berenson liked nothing better than a Sunday afternoon in Bill's company. Berenson's friends regarded his protege with mingled amusement and affection, and the mountaineer found himself with a circle of surprisingly distinguished acquaintances.

Shehen finally brought word that he had rented a little cottage a four-roomed affair with a garden plot. He had a charming view, and, with plenty of seeds and saplings from the Agricultural Department, he didn't see why he couldn't be perfectly happy. All he and Miss Summer wished, apparently, was to be together, to have a roof in case of storm or nightfall and both seemed more or less unlikely in their atmosphere of high noon and sun and to have a patch of earth to grow perfumed things in. Berenson was delighted. He had not enjoyed life so much for a long time. Having been under the necessity of setting aside the more idyllic department of life, he now regaled himself with his creature's happiness. He had begun to visit the furniture stores with the view to a comprehensive wedding present, and he had set the day when he was to go with the prospective bride to make the selections.

Berenson had his own ideas about how a bride's little drawing-room ought to be furnished. He had, indeed, treasured these ideas for many years. Now, for the first time, he had an opportunity for putting them into execution.

The evening before the day appointed for this agreeable task, Berenson and Bill had dinner together.

"I may be wrong," said the newspaper man, "and I hope I am, my boy, but it strikes me that you're not looking quite so enthusiastic as you should be. Haven't you been sleeping well? You look like a man who's been losing sleep."

"I sleep well enough, but "

"Yes. Well "

"But three nights runnin' I've had the oddes' dream!"

"Not a disagreeable dream, I hope! You've enough pleasant things to dream about, I should think."

"Well, yo' might call it a bad dream, an' yo' might not, Mr. Berenson. It's it's the houn's, yo' know. I heah 'em bahkin' all up the side of Tulula howlin' an' howlin' like somethin's goin' wrong. It gives me a dreadful honin' fo' home."

"Did you write to your father and brothers that you were to be married?"

"Oh, yes, sah, I wrote to all my kin. I asked 'em to come daown, but I know they won't do that, sah. An' what's moah, the knowledge that I was about to be married would keep 'em from tellin' me if anything was goin' wrong."

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"Well, I wouldn't worry. Dreams are out of date, you know. You are dreaming because you are nervous, and you're nervous because you are going to be married. That's all there is to that. It's usual under the circumstances."

"I reckon," murmured the mountaineer, "but I suah did heah those houn' dogs!"

He said no more about it, and left Berenson, to make his way to his sweet-heart's house. Berenson, strolling along before going to his rooms, saw the two of them pacing back and forth in the little garden. He heard the low sound of their laughter. They were quite safe in Arcady, he concluded, and went to his bed well pleased with the idyl of his making.

The next morning he awoke with the consciousness of a singularly paternal feeling. He was to meet Miss MacDonald at ten, and nine o'clock found him at his club reading his paper and waiting for his breakfast.

He had unfolded his sheet and was settling back for the enjoyment of it when the door boy entered. He was making for Berenson, and that gentleman of well-arranged habits felt a touch of annoyance.

"A gentleman and lady to see you, sir."

He presented a card. On it were written in the girl's chirography the names of his lovers just "Bill and Summer" in perfect confidence and unconventionality.

Something was wrong, evidently. Every step that Berenson took toward the little parlor into which they had been shown convinced him that something was very wrong.

It was, indeed, two white and drawn faces that he encountered, and the second glance showed him the girl's face eloquent with appeal and the man's set in stern and obstinate lines.

"For Heaven's sake, what's the trouble?" he broke out, closing the door behind him.

Bill pointed a quivering finger at the paper Berenson had unconsciously retained.

"Have yo' read that, sah?"

"No, I haven't. I was just about to when" he had shaken the paper out and swept his practised glance over the headings. There, in their ancient and fatal juxtaposition, were the names of Shehen and Babb! Berenson's eye ate up the despatch. The vendetta was on again. Tulula Mountain was a battle-field. Old Bill was slain. So was Loren, his eldest son. So was Dudley, the brother of the elder William. Dudley's two sons and William's second son, Lee, were entrenched in the old Shehen shack. The Babbs held them there, beleaguered kept them at bay on one side and held off the officers of the law on the other. The Babbs, it appeared, had accessions to their side. The trouble had broken out when some of the contending factions met, during a four days' rain-storm, where much corn whisky was dispensed.

"I'm going back, sah," announced Bill when Berenson lifted his eyes from the page.

"I brought him here to you, sir," cried the girl. "I could do nothing with him!"

He came an hour ago and told me, and I've pleaded and pleaded."

"You'll go to your death!" broke in Berenson, seizing the mountaineer by the arm. "Or you'll make a murderer of yourself which will be worse! Don't be a fool! Don't be a lunatic! Your duty's here! Look at that dear little girl. Think what she "

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"They—all hev killed my ole dad," muttered Shehen. The vernacular had tangled his tongue again.

"But I say you've no right to leave," protested Berenson, shaking him by the shoulder. "You belong here with that girl. Your honor is involved here, not in that death's hole back in the mountains."

Bill's face did not soften in the least. His eyes were as cruel as bayonets; his face settled in battle lines. He looked taller and his boyhood was gone from him.

"They—all have got Loren, too!" It was as if Berenson's words had not penetrated to his understanding.

"You hear him!" sobbed the girl. "Oh Bill! Bill, dear! I can't give you up. Oh, all our happiness together, Bill that we planned! And the home, Bill, and all we were going to do for mother and "

"Great God, man," cried Berenson. "I can't stand the torture of this, if you can! You don't mean to stand there and break that girl's heart, do you?"

"I stand by my kin," said Bill. But he seemed hardly to know what he was saying. He had decided to take the ten o'clock train. He was in a daze; but the one idea persisted. He was going to give the Babbs something to do. If they wanted a target, they should have one. In spirit he was climbing Tulula by those secret paths which he and his clan knew. He saw nothing save the motherly old mountain, with hidden and treacherous foemen in her fastnesses; he heard nothing but the howl of the Shehen "houn' dogs" lamenting the slain.

He would take nothing with him none of the possessions he had accumulated with frank pride.

"I shan't be needin' much!" he said, a whimsical smile breaking his face for the first time. "I'll fit myself out at Hahdin." He was thinking of his armament.

Summer had given up. After he had unclasped her arms from his neck, she made no further protest. Her pride was wounded to the death. Her world was taken from her her East, her West, her moon, her sun as the Gaelic rune has it.

She sank upon a divan, and the tears had dried in her eyes. Berenson went to her.

"There's nothing to be done," he whispered. "I'll call a cab for you. Go home to your mother to her arms. That's the best place, after all."

She stood up bravely, and he helped her from the room. At the door she turned and gave one backward look. Bill was standing as if turned to stone, but at that glance he threw his long, quivering hands over his face.

"Take her away," he groaned. "Take her away."

So Berenson put her behind the curtained windows of a cab and stood while the vehicle drove down the sunlit street and out of sight.

Then he went back to the mountaineer. He got him to break bread with him. Bill would take little more but he drained cup after cup of the black coffee. Then they went together to the station. They barely spoke. There was nothing to say. Berenson had not, for years, felt pain so dragging at the throat, the heart, the head, the feet of him. He was clogged and burdened with it, and at the last had only an impatient desire to have the parting over and be through with the sharper misery.

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Bill strode before him, unconsciously taking the long, springing lope of other days. His blue eyes were repulsive, Berenson thought. All the sweetness had gone out of his face. Though for a glimpse it returned, when Berenson, in a swift, uncontrollable emotion, embraced him this consecrated, mediaeval boy, with doom written large upon him. So they parted. Bill stood on the rear platform of the train, tall, grim, uplifted by his hate even more than he had ever been by love. But after all, as Berenson reflected, love lay fiercely at the core even of his hate. The long train swung around the curve with a mournful wail, and Berenson shuddered. It sounded, for all the world, like "Shehens' houn' dogs" with their prophetic howl.