

Patterns of Wolfpen

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SYNOPSIS

In 1785 Saul Pattern of Virginia came into the beautiful virgin country of the Big Sandy valley in Kentucky. Chief of the perils were the Shawnees, who sought to hold their lands from the ever-encroaching whites. From a huge pinnacle Saul gazed upon the fat bottoms and the endless acres of forest in its primeval quietude at the mouth of the Wolfpen, and felt an eagerness to possess it, declaring it a place fit for a man to LIVE in! Five years later he returned with Barton, his fifteen-year-old son, and built a rude cabin. In Saul's absence the Indians attacked Barton and wounded him so badly Saul was forced to return with him to Virginia. In 1796, when it was reasonably safe, Saul returned with his family and a patent for 4,000 acres, this time to stay. He added to the cabin, planted crops and fattened his stock on the rich meadows. Soon other settlers arrived. A century later, in the spring of 1885, we find Cynthia Pattern, of the fifth generation following Saul, perched on the pinnacle from which her great-great-grandfather had first viewed Wolfpen Bottoms. The valleys, heretofore untouched by the waves of change sweeping the Republic, are at last beginning to feel that restless surge. Her dad, Sparrel, and her brothers, Jesse, Jasper and Abrai, convert the old water-wheeled mill to steam power. Cynthia feels that something out of the past has been buried with Saul. Cynthia is pretty and imaginative miss in her late teens, who often re-created Saul and her other forebears, and fancied them still living. Sparrel proudly brings home the first meal out of the steam mill, and Julia, his wife, is pleased. Generation after generation has added comforts and conveniences to Saul's homestead, and Sparrel has not shirked. The family goes easily into the work of the new season, due to the simplicity of life designed long ago on the Wolfpen. Joy is abundant. Jesse plans to study law. A stranger, Shellenberger by name, comes to Wolfpen, intent on buying timber. Sparrel refuses his offer. Shellenberger tells of progress in the outside world. With the advent of Shellenberger some intangible disturbing alteration seems to affect the atmosphere of Wolfpen.

CHAPTER V—Continued

"I just never thought about selling any; a man buys land if he can and he sells only if he has to. I'd rather have my land. A family ought to have plenty of land around them. But here I'm getting along and it stands to reason in a few years it'll go to the children. Sometimes it 'pears like it's coming to the place where you have to have more money instead of making your own things. And I could saw on that new mill. I'd like to see how a big wheel saw the size of a millstone would go through a log when my new engine twirled it."

Jasper found him there among his herbs and canisters enveloped in a smell of turpentine, ginger and tar. Through the small window came the bewildered bleating of the new lambs.

"How are they?" Sparrel asked just as though he were not thinking of Shellenberger.

"They're dropping pretty fast right now," Jasper answered, making the same pretense.

"How's that young ewe?"

"She's not making it."

"We'll try this," Sparrel said.

They walked around behind the barn to the railed lot where the ewes were penned. Sparrel treated the afflicted one; then they stood apart from her against the low fence.

"What did you think about that feller's offer?" Jasper asked, as though his thoughts had suddenly and without warning become audible.

"I haven't had a chance to think about it much yet, son."

"We better take it."

"Why so?"

"It's a good price. That'd be a sight of money."

Sparrel regarded the lambs making friends with their mothers, and made no reply.

"I want to get married before

long, Dad," Jasper said with a boyish shyness.

Sparrel turned to look at his oldest son who was covering his words by moving a new lamb against its mother. He was a well favored man of twenty-four, wide in the shoulders, clear-eyed, a young mustache which emphasized the gravity of his bearing.

"I allowed you'd be getting married one day, son. I didn't know. Who do you favor?"

"Jase Burden over at Pike." It was emotional to utter her name.

"I guess she's a good girl all right. She comes of good people."

"I ought to have a place to take her to."

"You can have the Marebone farm. There's a fine place for a house there."

"That's just it. I want a house with things in it and money to start in."

"We can soon saw up a house on the new mill if you don't want to come into the home place for a while."

"We ought to have that money, Dad. There is no sense to it. You sell and let me have my part while it'll do me some good."

"A body gets attached to things, Jasper. Don't you feel that?"

"Not to a lot of timber-land we never see much of anyway and it won't move."

They were silent again. Sparrel watched the pained efforts of the young ewe grow weaker.

"She can't make it, but it's a pity to kill her because she wasn't made right to start with."

He stood apart delaying for several more minutes, but when the poor creature fixed her agonized eyes upon him, he opened his long hunting knife and slit her throat.

No one said anything more about Shellenberger or his offer, but the spirit of unrest he had brought into the family continued and multiplied in silence through the week. Sparrel would have to decide, and when he had made up his mind he would say what was to be done. In the meantime the responsibility lay heavy upon him. All the daily purposes of his life grew easily out of tradition; that is the way it had always been done on Wolfpen. But for this problem there was no precedent, and Sparrel found it bewildering to settle on what was best to do. He could think about buying land and building a new mill, because three generations before him had bought land and made new mills. But there was nothing about selling. And how was a simple, honest, hospitable man like Sparrel Pattern to know anything helpful about partnerships or royalties or selling off surplus timber while reserving ownership of the land or the marketing of logs.

He sat with his perplexity in the corner by the fireplace in the evening, fingering slowly at his trimmed beard and looking into the white oak-bark ashes smoldering in the circle Julia had arranged purposely for baking the fluffy wheat biscuits for his supper. He loved her and her way of speaking to him through such personal gestures as ash-baked biscuits on the evening when the butter was sweet from the churn.

He took down the second volume of the history of the United States and held the yellow-cornered pages open in his hands. There was the tale of the growth of these states and of the westward sweep of restless men who were always leaving one thing and seeking out another. Now they had done all that while he and his fathers lived out their days in the self-contained fields of Wolfpen.

The rough sketch must now be filled in. The fact was certain, but the manner rested with the makers of the future. Would it be continuous destruction and debris, dirt and ugliness, wasted land and destroyed timber like the Ohio end of the Big

Sandy? Or might it be in the orderly manner of Wolfpen? Haste and greed would never pause for vision or plan. The Ohio was filling, the West was filling, the mountains were filling; everywhere (from what he could learn) the unrest of men and the inexorable pressure of trade. The outside had pushed into Catlettsburg, then up to Louisa, on to Richardson and Paintsville, and now the big Sandy boats were towing it right into Pikeville. Most of the timber on the lower Sandy was gone and the hillsides were gutted with washouts. The demand was increasing; the hungry mills must be fed, and now Shellenberger was up here on Gannon and Wolfpen wanting logs and land. And after all, why not? No telling but the demand might cease. His children needed the money more than the stumpage.

There was the new mill that could run a saw. He had been so busy, with the planting he had hardly seen his mill. It was no crime to sell timberland at a profit. Sentiment could never prosper a man. He closed the worn history-book and put it back on its shelf. He wound up the weights on the clock, and bathed his feet, and lay on the bed, waiting for Julia. When she had put out the lamp and had taken her place by his side, he laid his hand on her face, stroking it gently, and said, "We won't natch miss the land Shellenberger wants and the money will come in right handy."

"I think that's best, too, Sparrel," Julia said, just as though they had had a long talk about it.

"We didn't think much about not having real money when we were young, did we, Julia?"

"We had this fine place to start on, and it wasn't a bit of trouble to make things."

"I reckon it's not that way with our children."

"We can see them all get a good start now," Julia said, thinking.



"I Want to Get Married Before Long, Dad."

as always, of her children and not of herself.

"You're going over to town in the morning?" she said.

"Yes."

That was the talk they had about selling four thousand acres of timberland to Shellenberger.

Cynthia was awake when the first undecided birds in the orchard chirped uncertainly for the morning. By the time they had swelled to a full chorus with the coming of daybreak, she was in the barnyard opening the gate and watching Sparrel and Jasper ride down Wolfpen toward Gannon on their way to Pikeville. Before they disappeared around the lower orchard, Sparrel turned in the saddle and waved good-by to Cynthia.

She was still leaning on the gate when Jesse came out of the barn with his own black gelding.

"You open the gate for me, will you, Cynthia?"

"Why, Jesse, wherever are you going to?"

"I just took a notion to go over to town, too. I don't feel at rest in my mind this morning and I'm going to try to see Tandy Morgan about what I told you about the other day." He rode through the gate. "Will you water the sheep and tell Mother?"

"Yes, Jesse." She had never seen him in a flurry before. She waved good-by to him also and watched him ride hurriedly down the creek after Sparrel and Jasper.

He overtook them at the Gannon creek ford.

"Where are you going to, son?" Sparrel asked also in surprise.

"I thought I'd just go over to town, too," Jesse said.

"I thought you went up to the field to look after that last piece," Jasper said, and there was an irritation in his voice.

"Abrai's looking after it."

"What about the sheep, son?" Sparrel asked. It was as near as he got to reproving Jesse for coming along.

"Cynthia will water them all right," Jesse spoke quietly, riding on with his father and brother up the bank.

Sparrel said no more; he rode off at a lope up Gannon.

"What are you going to do over at town anyway?" Jasper demanded.

"I've got some business of my own to attend to, Jasper," Jesse said.

They rode in file—Sparrel, Jesse, Jasper—with ease and rapidity up the creek, the fall of twelve hoofs, muted in the soft dirt, beating quick rhythm as if they were only one rider, and then nervously out of rhythm as though there were nine. They rode without words, the only sounds the mild friction of saddle leather and the quick intervals of the hoofs collecting into a more insistent one and then shattering into many.

At the upper ford the Pattern men crossed the creek and began to climb up Stepstone Hollow by the bridge path which lifted them slowly into Cranesnest Gap, took them around the ridge, and lowered them into the Big Sandy Bottoms a few miles below Pikeville. As they climbed, leaning forward lightly while the hill-trained mules picked their way with precise steps up the mountain, Sparrel and his sons rose out of the revolving thoughts that had possessed them and relaxed into the untroubled sensation of riding up a steep hillside on a capable mount. The hills were now fully awake, and the wild life astir in the woods; the original possessors of the land which had survived the Patterns but had not yet felt the hand of the Shellenbergers.

They came out of the dense upper woodland at the end of the ridge and paused for an instant to look back at the Pinnacle barely visible through the faint green of the trees, and down upon the green fringed bends of the Big Sandy river sweeping through the valley. Then while the mules placed their precise downward steps, the men leaned backward lightly and dropped gradually into the aura of thought which surrounded and isolated each one: Sparrel, Jesse, Jasper in file; Shellenberger, Tandy Morgan, Jane Burden in a circle of revolving thought.

At nine o'clock they rode into the straggling outskirts of the little county-seat, on the dirt road which thickened with houses farther along and became the main street. It gathered on its edge the livery-stable, the hardware store and harness shop; then, overflowing around the public square that held the court-house and jail, it fronted the three general stores, the state bank, the post-office, the Gibson House, a restaurant and pool-room, a few homes with trees and wide yards, and then plunged down through the warehouses to the wharf where several small boats were tied. This was Pikeville.

And Pikeville had a future, the wise men said. It stood at the head of navigation on the Big Sandy in the heart of the coal region. It was only a matter of time. The boats had at last come; one day, so the more hopeful predicted, the railroad would lengthen up the val-

ley, bearing on its rails more people and more trade. The county was full of coal and timber, and strangers like Shellenberger were arriving and there was talk of development and natural growth and progress.

The Pattern men rode into Shusser's livery-stable.

"Howdy, Sparrel, howdy, Hardin," called out.

"Howdy, Hardin."

"Right smart gang of yours town today," Hardin said.

"Looks like they're all up around the court-house," Sparrel said.

"I got about all I can take of," Hardin led the mules to clean stall smelt.

"That mule that fell off got a shoe loose on the back side."

"It's a cause for wonder he not all loose, the way he was riding that mule down Wolfpen. You'd better try showing her, have an eye on her. I have a hunch her, myself."

"I'll fix her."

"When did he get in?"

"Day before yesterday. He tell you he'd pay for the mill."

"Much obliged."

"You doin' some trade with some way, Sparrel?"

"I don't reckon I am, Hardin, have been figuring on it, but I wants to buy some land and get timber."

"That sure is what we need in here, Sparrel, is somebody to develop this country, as the boys says."

Sparrel gestured a good-bye to Hardin and walked with his square, three tall men in boots and white shirts, toward the lead setting the pace Jesse, Jasper in step behind him.

"I guess you boys will look after your own business," Sparrel said.

"You aim to start back about usual time?" Jesse asked.

"About the middle of the week I reckon," Sparrel said.

They separated at the square. Jesse crossed the rutted, dunged street into the court-house grounds, passing a group of men who were beginning to talk trades, and went toward the pump and water trough. There in the center of the crowd was Tandy Morgan.

He could hear Tandy's laugh bubble his lungs before it burst into a circle of ripples over the group of men. Tandy Morgan was already the criminal lawyer in the county. Every one said that as soon as a section developed, Tandy Morgan would go to Frankfort as governor of Kentucky. He knew everybody in the county and most of the people down the river. When he walked up to the pump, he crushed his hand and said:

"Why, how are you, Jesse, glad to see you. How're all the folks?"

"About as well as common," Jesse said. "How's yours?"

"Never felt better and had in my life," Tandy said, the bubbles and breaking over the crowd.

"I'd like to see you a min. you're going to be in your office time," Jesse said.

"Sure. Right now if these boys will excuse me."

Tandy Morgan opened a door through the crowd and Jesse carried along in the eddy behind him across the courtyard to the bank building, up the dinky way, and into the large bare floor room littered with yellowed books on the chairs, the rough table, and away on the various book shelves.

"Just have a seat, Jesse." Jesse lifted two fat books from a chair and sat down with them on his lap.

"I've been thinking about asking you something for a long time, Tandy."

"Is that so, Jesse?" Tandy Morgan's hand spread over a disarray of papers on the pine table.

(TO BE CONTINUED)