

Patterns of Wolfpen

By Harlan Hatcher

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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 Abrael, 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. Sparrel decides to sell timber land to Shellenberger.

CHAPTER V—Continued

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 "Yes. I want to know law and be a lawyer like you."
 Tandy studied him as though he were about to seat a juror.
 "Well. Do you honest?"
 "I sure do. I just wondered if you'd take me into your office here with you and help me learn law. I might be able to help you a right smart looking up things for you and writing papers." His eagerness mounted with the words and quivered in his throat.
 "Well, now, I don't hardly know, Jesse. When would you want to come?"
 "Not much before fall I don't reckon till things about the place are up in shape. But I thought if . . ."
 "How much schooling have you had, Jesse?"
 "A right smart. Five winters at Gannon Creek school. And then I've read all Dad's books over and I always read the Cincinnati Weekly Gazette."
 "Well, now, I don't hardly know, Jesse." Tandy walked about the room impressively.
 "I thought if you'd agree to it I could take one of your books over home and get started some before fall."
 "Well, Jesse, I'll tell you. If you've made up your mind to follow the law, I'll be glad to have you. Things are slack right now, but they're going to pick up before long around here. I'm getting practice down the river now and it'll be handy to have somebody here in the office."
 "I'll be much obliged to you," Jesse said.
 "Don't mention it."
 Tandy showed him some of the law books and told him how they were arranged in series and how you found by number the statute and judgments on a case. "And here's a brand-new book. I ain't

even read myself. You take it and read it. It's the bed-rock of the study of law."
 He placed in Jesse's hands the Cooley edition of Blackstone's "Commentaries on the Laws of England," with reference notes to English and American decisions and statutes to date (1884) and some considerations regarding the study of the law.
 Jesse spilled the folios from his lap, and took into his plow-hardened hands the unopened volume of bed-rock law. After a while he found himself up by the fence around the high grounds of the Institute above the crowded town. He sat on a log in the sun, his eyes moving from the book down to the court-house steeple and the wharf, then back to the book, projecting himself into the day when he would be a great lawyer like Tandy Morgan, and have an office and clients to plead for. He was absorbed beyond all disturbance. The morning passed, midday came and went without suggesting food, and the dream and the book full of strange and puzzling words like libellant and argumentum and hominem absorbed him into the middle of the afternoon. Then he came to, seeing that the square was emptying of horses and men. He got stiffly to his feet, placed the book awkwardly under his coat and hurried down to the stable for the long ride back to Wolfpen.

When Sparrel detached himself from his boys, he walked by the bank and the three stores, greeting the men he knew, and up to the corner of the Gibson House. The thing Sparrel had made his mind up to, now wavered within him, and instead of going in at once, he turned and went back down the street, greeting the men in the square, and watching the horse traders riding up and down the street before the skeptical customers. He went on around the court-house square, slowly traversing its four sides banked with horses and saddle mules hitched to the rails, and came up to the Gibson House from the opposite direction, and then, as though the destined moment had arrived, he lifted his head above the press of men and walked straight into the lobby of the Gibson House.
 Shellenberger was sitting in a chair with his legs crossed and one foot resting on the shelf of the bay window, smoking, looking not at the square but above it into the timbered mountains. He looked the part of a well-to-do stranger temporarily isolated in a mountain town.
 There was no one else in the room. Shellenberger stood up, and extended his hand in eager hospitality.
 "Good morning, Mr. Pattern!"
 "Howdy," Sparrel said reservedly.
 "Well, how are you this morning?"
 "Well as common," Sparrel said, and then calmly in his slow voice with the melody in it, "You got around all right, I see."
 "I got around all right, thanks to your mule. What do I owe you for the use of it?"
 "Nothing at all, nothing at all. Glad to accommodate you."
 "Smoke?" Shellenberger offered a cigar.
 "No, but much obliged to you." They sat down.
 "A good deal of trade on the rivers."
 "Yes. Pikeville is a right good-sized town now," Sparrel said.
 "And it will get better as this region opens up."
 The subject was ready to be brought into the open, but Sparrel was still. Then Shellenberger plunged.
 "Well, Mr. Pattern, I rode by that lower timber-land. It may not be as good as I first thought, but I'll stick to the proposition I made. What do you say about it?"
 "I don't guess I can do it," Sparrel said.

"You mean you won't sell!" Shellenberger exclaimed.
 "That's about what it amounts to."
 "But why not, Pattern, why not? Four dollars an acre is a big price. Well, what do you want for it?" he demanded resolutely.
 "Five dollars an acre."
 Shellenberger smoked, making short puffs, and twisting the cigar.
 "You'll have it surveyed by a competent man?" Shellenberger said.
 "I'll board him," Sparrel said, "and you pay the wages against the price of the land."
 The tension relaxed, there was a pause, and Shellenberger said, more naturally and pleasantly, "You're robbing and cheating me, Mr. Pattern, but I'll do it. And we'll get a man over there as soon as possible. Do you know anybody?"
 "I've heard of a good man down at Catlettsburg."
 "What's his name?"
 "Warren."
 "I'll see him when I go down tomorrow and send him up if I can and I'll be back in here in a couple of weeks or so."
 As Sparrel walked through the square, greeting the men, talking of the crops and the price of cattle,



the feeling that he had made a good bargain with the extra dollar sustained him in the backwash of doubt that followed the important and irrevocable decision.
 Jasper was already at the stable. Jesse, with the book under his coat, came breathlessly with long strides through the open doors just as Hardin Slusser brought the mules from the stalls.
 "Did you make out all right?" Sparrel asked.
 "I got what I came for," Jesse said, mounting.
 "You know we got an extra mule here," Jasper said.
 "It seems like a waste just to lead her," Hardin sputtered.
 Jasper had no retort. He swung into the saddle.
 Then as Sparrel mounted and started to go without saying anything, Hardin could wait no longer for the news. "Did you trade any with that feller, Sparrel?"
 "I figure I may do some business with him, later on," Sparrel said. He rode out of the stable and down the road followed by Jasper and Jesse.
 — CHAPTER VI —
 WOLFPEN seemed emptied to Cynthia when Sparrel and Jesse and Jasper had ridden out of it.
 Or, perhaps, the feel of emptiness was only the moment of unusual stillness between the tumult of day-

break and the lonely cadenced silence of a mountain farm when people were not about: tufted cardinals flashing red among the cherry blossoms and scattering liquid notes on the morning like a flutter of released petals spiraling to the ground; bleating lambs leaping nervously and awkwardly about the lot, still dazed and bewildered by the new and unfamiliar world into which they had suddenly been dropped.
 Slowly she went back to the house and put the kitchen in order. Julia had gone out to her garden. Abrael had disappeared into one of the hollows. The wanted equilibrium was even more upset within, and she could feel the fragments moving about her into new arrangements. She went upstairs and sat on the foot of her bed looking out on the orchard. "The world looks different to a body when you look out of an upstairs window. What would it be like if you were always above it as high as a house instead of down in it as low as a man and looked over an orchard in bloom the way you look over a cornfield in June? Would you still feel a bit twisted out of shape inside because of the way your folks and things move about in the bottoms? I feel like I'm being pulled by something that is moving around the place and taking me with it, and I guess I'll just go."
 It was the smell of the orchard surging through the window and retreating with the wind that did the pulling. She wandered down among the apple trees where the bees were diving in the golden dust in the pollen centers, and the gray-blue catbirds were fluttering with no sound through the branches.
 The wavering bleat of a young lamb ran over the jagged shingles of the barn roof and broke into pieces about her. That reminded her of Jesse's charge and she went down to the barn and leaned over the bars of the sheep-pen. By the door in the sun lay like a piece of cloud a little pile of white fleeces, and on the wall was stretched the raw hide to dry before it went on to Sparrel's tanning vat. The sight of these things made her heart heavy with the thought of birth and death.
 The ewes in the lot were placid with the weight and experience of timeless and ageless years of bearing and being born. Their unconcern for the lambs was for the moment monumental. They lay in complete tranquillity under the sun as though their energy had fed them and was now leaping again in the spindly legs of the new offspring.
 She went quietly down to the lower bars, and when she had slowly drawn them without disturbing the calm which was on the sheep, she drove them down to the creek to water them. The shepherd bounded off professionally down the fence and across Wolfpen to prevent the sheep from scattering. They hovered on the edge of the creek in hesitation, lifting doubtful heads toward Cynthia and then staring at the dog. He was alert but motionless. Then one of the oldest ewes accepted him and went down into the water and drank. The whole flock drank and then raised their heads to look again, letting a trickle of water dribble from the tuft of fleece under their throats. The same ewe started to cross the creek, but the shepherd lowered his head and barked, and she turned back and was followed by the others into the pen. Cynthia closed the bars.
 "That's better," she said, and the dog muzzled her hand.
 "Sheep live a calm and easy life, don't they, Shep? Never much to bother them worse than your bark that wouldn't hurt a motherless lamb if he just knew it. And always somebody to see that they have food and water. The women always water the sheep; there's Bible for that. And come to think of it the Bible women always met their men at the well when they watered their sheep. Let's see: there was Rebekah and Rachel and Jethro's daughter . . . I wonder if it would be better to be watering a flock of scared ewes, just putting up the last bar like this for in-

stance, and the stranger from other land would come to see you and say he had from a far piece to find you could he water your flock for me. No, I still think it would be better to be by the year tree with a sprig of blossom in your hair."
 When she had reached the end of that dream, she found her back in the barnyard a little less in her mood of idle and aimless wanderings, and then rushing back to her the rain Sparrel disappearing in the night with Jasper, and of Jesse's away on a sudden notice. The balance returned and she saw it through the sweet potato where the plants were being to trail the sandy earth with tender green tentacles, and down the creek. There was sunlight in this kind of idleness, the quiet of afternoon on the chestnut tree staring into the peace beyond the world of meat and flesh. She drifted without to the sparse clump of willows where the water ceased flowing over serrated slate bottom and lay into the profound peace of the dam.
 Does running water like to into the pool and stop and down like a tired eye, or try to get away again and down to the mill and tumble in the big wheel, clapping its water and pulling it around while the water cases itself down to the bed again, like Jesse swinging the ground from the top of a young sapling. I guess like sheep and people, that and sometimes likes to go and sometimes likes to pull a wheel and go some place else to be where you're not."
 The shepherd, springing her around the willow tree to a low growl and retreated a Cynthia looked. It was more startling than a barking and that was nothing at all. Sparrel always kept out a corn-crib to catch mice. But she was yet speaking this to herself, she felt her stomach involuntarily and a wave of dizziness gripped her abdomen and attracted up into her throat. A thick black reptile was in the act of swallowing a copper-colored toad with blue warts on its back. It had already sucked into its let both twitching hind legs. The lubricating slime from its extended mouth was coming out white froth to engulf the front legs and the trembling toad. The glassy eyes of the toad bulged out in a death gasp. It seemed to Cynthia that she were fastened upon her, and became the suffering animal, swallowing the toad with her own vulvions, feeling her own legs gulfed and absorbed into the tile.
 She picked up a stick and pressed the snake on the neck. Frightfully she seized it. In a trickle of blood it ejected the toad, and slid its fork back into the bushes across the path. Cynthia controlled the pain of nausea as she watched the paralyzed toad try to move its legless legs. She pushed it gently under a ledge in the rock back and left it there.
 She stood for a moment where she had sat watching the toad and the minnows, relaxing her disturbed and breathless. The now, Cynthia Pattern, what are you going to do and think next, any way? Why did you go and do what Snakes have to live too; and they hate to see such things but they go on all the time and don't think anything about it. It must be the seeing of it." And she tried to shake off the recollection and shuddered and ran down to the again.
 She tossed the stick into the pen, watching it float away toward Gannon creek. One end caught on the rock and stood while the other moved slowly around with the current and set it free. She followed it through the Y Meadow and Gannon where it gathered speed and soon disappeared around the bend.
 (TO BE CONTINUED)