

Patterns of Wolfpen

By Harlan Hatcher

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CHAPTER X—Continued

"Some parts of the place I have never been to," she said. "I like best the Pinnacle and Cranesnest and the hollows here by the house. I don't know whether they're best when the spicewood begins to bud and the white dogwood blooms, or in September when the wild touch-me-nots are waist high with yellow-and-red-spotted bags and two red ears on each one, and bumble-bees crowding down into them and shoudering the yellow dust."

"That sounds the best," Reuben said.

"It's right pretty when the creek freezes over and the bushes are glazed with ice and the snow hangs on the pine trees. I guess it is always a good place to be."

"You'll be getting the survey done soon now, I guess?"

"It won't be so very much longer now, I'm afraid."

"Then what will you do?"

"I'll see if it closes on the map, and then I'll take it back home and my father will or maybe I will make the calculations and fix up the papers."

"You don't have to come back any more after you've finished running it?"

"That depends. I might have to come back about the piece cut off for Shellenberger." There was a long pause. Then he added, "When do you go to Pikeville?"

"In September. Jesse's going too, but he hasn't told Daddy yet. He's to read law with Tandy Morgan."

"I think that will be fine."

"Are you going to follow surveying?"

"Yes. There's lots of work to do in this country. And the towns are growing, and the counties thinking about roads. I want to be the county surveyor some day."

"Oh, that would be a fine job for a man. As good as the law."

"I kind of hate to see a place like this go over to a man like Shellenberger to cut into. The Big Sandy slopes where the timber is cut off are awful-looking things."

"It's just the part down the creek and you won't see it from here. But sometimes at night I can hear the trees talking about what's going to happen to them and it goes from one to another all over the hills and dies away in a sigh on our creek. Still, I reckon people need timber."

"I reckon."

They sat in silence, listening to the life all about them.

"Isn't all this cooking and boarding so many too hard on just you and your mother?" It came so suddenly and without preparation that she was startled.

"Why, no, Reuben. A body just don't think much about it."

"Your mother looks a little worn out. Don't you think so?"

"I guess I just hadn't thought of it."

He had surprised her again by this kind of observation which men-folk did not make. She turned and looked full at him.

"You're different, Reuben."

He smiled at her, a singularly rare and engaging smile.

"Different how and from what?"

"I don't know how to say it. But you are."

"Well, so then are you."

He felt the thrill of these advances which came unwilling into being, and then as curiously retreated.

"Is Doug Mason what you call different?" he asked.

"No. Why him?"

"Oh, I have seen him look at you and watched him when you are around. Do you . . . Are you old friends?"

"He's a good boy and runs the place since his Daddy died. He's a . . . he's just a good neighbor and his mother's not well."

They had been led far deeper than the surface of their talk since the half-confused moment by the drawing table. Cynthia began to realize that they had both dressed

Doug in a word and set him before them as a symbol of their new relationship. Nothing else seemed to exist except this entranced moment of creating a new experience with another human being. Her open hand lay along the delicate green moss covering of the stone dividing it into cool points, with her fingers. Reuben dropped his long brown and briar-scarred hand gently upon it. It was warm and alive among the moss fronds.

"I never even dreamed of finding anybody like you when I started up here. And I nearly didn't come, only another job came along that my Dad had to look after himself."

"Would you have minded that so much?" Cynthia asked.

"Yes," he answered.

There seemed to be nothing more to say aloud. She withdrew her hand and let it lie in her lap. It seemed different from the other one and in communion with all the rest of her being.

Julia was now at the gate of her garden. She stood looking at Cynthia and Reuben.

"We'd better go back now," Cynthia said.

The cows, heavy with the long day, were coming slowly in file around the hill toward the barn. Everything was stirring again into life for feeding-time.

"I like to come down this valley this time of day," Reuben finally said as they neared the yard. "It seems like everything is doing just what it was intended to do."

"If you look close you can see Saul climbing back to Cranesnest Shelf," Cynthia said.

"I see him," Reuben answered.

Abra was already in the yard. He smiled boyishly, and when Cynthia had gone into the house, he said to Reuben, "Oh, you've been surveying."

Reuben smiled at Abra. He liked his spirit and his energy.

"Yes, Abra. There's a lot to be surveyed on this place."

CHAPTER XI

NEAR the end of an afternoon some days later into July Reuben Warren drove the iron spike of the Jacob's staff into the ground below the mill and brought to a close the uncertain line around the Pattern lands. Day after day from dawn to dusk they had pushed it through the ax-cleared way through the timber, climbing over the ridges that lay lifeless in the noonday heat, and down into cool damp hollows where the birth gathered in the afternoons. Then they had marked off the portion for Shellenberger, cutting across the place from the jutting point on the Big Sandy watershed overlooking the river where the long ridges rolled into form out of blue and indistinct space, to the rich earth at the foot of the Pinnacle on Gannon creek in view of Cranesnest.

Tomorrow Reuben would be leaving this place where he had lived through the days of spring and early summer. He would ride in silence behind Sparrel to Pikeville and then by boat down the Big Sandy, sitting on the prow to watch the Pattern lands he had surveyed come into view and recede and pass into the hands of Shellenberger. It was the first time he had ever been sorry to complete a job in the hills and return home.

He had had enough experience in the changing world to foresee that the loveliness of Wolfpen could not survive the wave of development which would some day sweep over it. He was sorry.

He stood by the kitchen window, smelling the scent of poplars and pine trees on the light breeze from the hollow. Cynthia found him there for a minute alone. The note-books and the deeds were tied in a bundle on the table by the compass, ready for the journey. In the corner were the pins, the chain and the staff.

"I guess it's all finished." He smiled.

"It will be different tomorrow when you are gone," she said.

"It's been a good place to be in, and it will be a good place to come back to," he said. "But I suppose you'll soon be busy over at the Institute."

"I reckon so. Will you have any more to do here at our place?"

"It doesn't look like it now."

"Then you won't be coming back?" she said.

"I'll be coming back," he answered. "It may be September and it may be spring and it may not be to survey. But I'll be coming back."

The spirit of the place changed abruptly after Reuben went away. Released from the survey, Jasper, Jesse and Abra were deep in the neglected corn and the ill-tended crops heretofore unknown on Wolfpen. Cynthia found the day very long and the work irksome when it was done for Shellenberger and Mullens.

Shellenberger filled up the valley with his presence and his lumbering operations. The old gristmill was converted into a sawmill. One change in a generation was well established by precedent, but two,



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and not only in a generation but in a single year, threatened the stability of a man's customs. Sparrel was too engrossed in the mechanical details of rigging up the saw and ripping out boards for the camp to be sensitive to it. But to Cynthia it was all new and disturbing. Sometimes she watched the smoke boil up through the laurel bushes on the Pinnacle and the bright whirling saw bite into the body of a yellow log which had lived in these hills longer than all her people. She would listen tensely to the saw making its first noisy attack and then settling into a steady raucous scream as it sliced off a piece from its side. A shiver would pass through her spine. The tree-trunk became a living thing suffering mutilation, and she wondered whether the screaming came from the exultation of the furious saw teeth, or from the hurt tree in its cry of pain.

The mountain men were coming to Wolfpen and Dry Creek with axes on their shoulders looking for work. They came from the cabins in the squeezed hollows where farming was already growing precarious, hearing the rumor that there was cash to be had for chopping timber on Sparrel Pattern's place. They cleared away the flat at the mouth of Dry Creek and erected shacks for the men and sheds for the mules and a blacksmith shop. Then their axes and saws gnawed at the boles

of the trees through the hollow and up the hillsides, spreading relentlessly like a grim disease. A few sharp slaps of an ax, the thin swish-swash of a saw, then a shout from the men, a slow groan rising to an explosion in the final crash and dying away to a whisper in the limbs waving through the air to the ground. Over and over through the weeks; the attack, the cry of surrender, the crash and sigh of the fall, spreading up the hollow.

The heavily timbered spot where Barton had caught 'possums, which always lay so silent and black in the mornings under the Pinnacle, became a thick group of men in a settlement to themselves. And yet not to themselves, for these aliens seemed to press in upon Wolfpen itself and to swarm in a multitude beyond their appointed place even though they kept to their hollow, and the sound of their axes could not be heard over the back of the ridge between. Cynthia could see them sometimes pilfering about everywhere, and every rustle of the leaves in the trees by the house became a cry of panic spread through all the timber.

Then there was always Shellenberger bringing back the disturbance from Dry Creek, for he still ate at the house and slept between his two sheets and made no mention of the money for his keep which Cynthia carefully recorded on a piece of paper. There was Sparrel losing imperceptibly his first pleasure in the steam-mill, the survey of his lands and the new saw.

Abra was now working for Shellenberger, Jasper was silent, Jesse was more than ever absorbed in his own plans, Julia was tired, Reuben was far off down the river in another world; it was no use making believe that the corn and sweet potatoes were the same as in other years, or that Julia's hollyhocks stood up in the same proud grandeur, or that the lumbering was isolated over the ridge. Dry Creek pressed ruthlessly in.

It grew more emphatic with the difficulties at the camp. They had come on gradually, intensifying a little from day to day before they came to a crisis. They were reflected in Sparrel's taciturnity and the troubled mood which followed him into the house, for there had never before been any ill feeling between men on Gannon creek. The mountain men could not adapt themselves to the discipline of a supervised lumbering operation.

It was partly Shellenberger's air of detached authority which they found barely tolerable. Not that he kept his own counsel and ate only at Sparrel's, but that he went among them as though they were trees or mules, and acted so superior by virtue of his ownership of Sparrel Patterns' timber and not by right of character, one man to another, as it was among the Big Sandy men.

It was more especially Mullens. He had his own superiorities as boss of the work. He said little to the men beyond a few terse orders. Moreover he had his own methods for felling trees, determining log lengths, constructing the dam, for every single detail of the logging. He insisted on telling these men who had lived their lives in the hills and swung axes since they were striplings, how to fell a tree, how far above the ground they should cut, and where to stand when it began to lean. Sometimes they would do as they were told; more often they would do as they liked and meet the sour looks of Mullens with a passive and child-like silence.

They were difficult and individual as children, and Mullens did not know what to do about it. So he swore at them and marked on each tree the exact spot where he wanted it cut. If he then stood by and watched, they would cut low; but when he turned away they would straighten their backs and cut high.

They were not happy at the camp. When they got homesick or took a fancy for home-cooked victuals, or a notion to leave the camp for a few days, they quietly shouldered their axes and went. They returned when they got ready and they did not expect any unfavorable notice to

be taken of their going or coming.

Abra said that the men were beginning to think it ought to be payday some time, but that neither Shellenberger nor Mullens had said anything about it yet.

And since they were not accustomed to hiring out for a wage, they did not know whether they should ask about the time of their pay or just wait until the job was finished up. Sparrel seemed to take it as being all right, so it must be, but a little ready money would come in handy.

This general unrest culminated in the latter part of August. The occasion was the accident and first casualty on the job. They were chopping the greatest poplars in Dry Creek. Grover Sims was standing near by watching them bring down one of the finest of them all. Mullens happened to be there at the moment the tree began to lean. He shouted sharply to Sims to jump up the hill out of the way. The boy was startled by the shouting of Mullens and the loud cracking of the giant bole breaking away from the stump and crashing through the smaller trees. In nervous confusion he sprang full into the path of the falling mass. It caught him squarely, knocking him down as though he were a reed, pinning him under the heavy trunk, and crushing in his lungs. Had he stayed where he was before Mullens shouted, he would have been safe. The moans had ceased by the time Sparrel got to him. It went quickly through Dry Creek that it was Mullens' fault, and if he had kept his mouth off of the boy it wouldn't have happened. And why, anyway, should they be down here in a lumber camp at the risk of their lives, working for a foreigner like Mullens when they might just as well be at home and their own bosses, as they had always been?

They quit. They were quiet about it. Some of them told Mullens they allowed they'd better be getting back home now, what with the corn about ready to cut and things about the place to be attended to, and they'd just have their time. Mullens said he couldn't pay them until Shellenberger got the money. And they said that they reckoned if it wasn't handy they'd just wait around for it, and it better not be too long. So while they were burying Grover Sims on Big Brushy, Shellenberger took one of Sparrel's mules for two days and when he came back there was money to pay them.

The work was at a standstill. "So now what?" Shellenberger said to Mullens.

"Go down-river and get me some men who know how to be told what to do," Mullens said.

The month of August was going by on the rumor of these troubles at the camp. In other Augusts, the thought of disputes among men never came into Wolfpen or disturbed the head of Cynthia. The talk had always been of the growth the lambs had made, of the rams and ewes to be sold or slaughtered, of the thickness of the clover in Stack Bottom, of whether the time for the making of sorghum would be earlier or later this year than the one before, of the late corn in Julia's patch, of the steers for the drovers, of the progress of the bees, of the size of the potatoes where Julia had graveled, of the absence of sickness and the probable price of 'seng. These things were not mentioned this year because of Shellenberger and Dry Creek.

Cynthia felt the alteration in herself and noted it in the others and thought on it as she tried to finish the cloth that had been already too long in the loom. "I never in my life got such a little bit at a time done on a piece. 'Pears like a body's day is so tied up with other folks' doing I can't get any work done and out of the way. Part of it is the way nobody doesn't seem natural. Mother acts like she was tired all the time and she doesn't show off her flowers when Amy comes or offer her any seeds and she doesn't say much. I don't see when she's going to dry apples and make jelly and put things away."

(TO BE CONTINUED)