

The Wrightsville Clan

Book Three of *The Trackers*

Tom Sparks

2017

Cast of Characters

Beau Wright
Erin Hunt Wright
Mason John Wright - son

Nelson Hunt – Erin's Pa
Kate Hunt - Erin's Ma

Jerand Wright
Evie Carsen Wright
Harriett Erin Wright - daughter
Donal Beau Wright - son

Sheriff Bennet -Walder's Point.
Deputy Barnes

Claude Bowman - New sheriff of Ryker
Deputy Lane

Miss Elly - Sarn Reach
Durik - smith at Sarn Reach

Ty Akers - owner of Stag&Horn in Ryker

Dockrats:
Safer - killed by rival gang
Baller - new leader of dockrats
Candy - new Blacksmith in Wrightsville

One

It's been over ten years since Jerand and Evie Wright built their house on a small piece of Homesteaded land situated between Sarn Reach and Ryker, not too far from either. It was a large farmhouse with plenty of bedrooms for family and friends and has become known as the Homestead. Jerand had hired several dockrats from Ryker to help him with his tracking business. They were tracker apprentices, but he was also using them to help build the outbuildings on the Homestead. Once the barn was finished, the dockrats all moved into their own space there. They didn't mind the arrangement and their favorite thing was Evie's cooking.

Some of the frequent guests include Beau and Erin Wright, Jerand's namesake and best friends; Kate and Nelson Hunt, Erin's parents; Durik, the Smith at Sarn Reach and his new wife Elly; Sheriff Grant from Ryker and Sheriff Bennet from Walders. Even Ty Akers, owner of the Stag&Horn in Ryker, has been know to visit.

Their daughter, Harriett Erin Wright, was almost twelve and was named after Evie's Ma, Harriett Carsen. Her middle name was from Erin Wright, her aunt, who lived up in Walders, with her husband Beau.

Harriett made up her mind already that she was not going to be a tracker like her Pa. She liked doing figures and wanted to be a woman of business like her Aunt Elly. She is very fond of Aunt Elly up in Sarn Reach. Harriett was told that Elly used to own the Publik House there before she sold it to one of her employees

Jerand and Evie's second child was born about six months ago. It was a boy and they named him Donal Beau Wright. His uncle Beau was very pleased with the name. Jerand wanted both Harriett and Donal to take up tracking, but Evie said they should not push them in that direction. She wanted them each to follow their heart.

Harriett's close friend these days was Mason John, the son of Uncle Beau and Aunt Erin. He lives up in Walders and spent a lot of time each summer at the Homestead, where he helps his uncle Jerand. Mason was to inherit his

father's tracking company and he always wanted her to go tracking, just like his parents did back in the old days.

One bright summer day, Mason and Harriett were sitting on the front porch enjoying a cold drink.

“I've told you before, Mason, I really don't enjoy tracking. I want to be a business woman someday.”

“I know Har, but I don't have anybody else to go with me. And, my Pa doesn't want me tracking alone.”

“Please don't call me that. My name is Harriett!”

“Oh, sorry.”

“Can't you take one of the dockrats with you?”

“Naw, they're no fun. They are too serious and always want to head towards Ryker and there is more game to the north.”

“Well, both your Pa and mine takes you tracking sometimes, isn't that enough?”

“I guess so.”

“Wanna go to the barn and visit my colt?” asked Harriett

“Sure. Got a name for him yet?”

“No, but I have several I'm considering.”

Even though Mason was older than Harriett, he still liked her company. He admires how smart she is and knows she was much better with figures than him. The company he really likes though, is Lila Jean Biggs. She's a girl he met last year and they will both be fifteen soon. She worked at the general store in Walders and he sees her often, except for when he is at the Homestead. The best thing is, unlike Harriett, she is interested in tracking.

The next morning, he said his goodbyes to Evie and Harriett and headed north. It was nice day and figured he would be home for lunch, unless he stops off at Sarn to see Durik. He really liked Durik and would like to spend more time with him and his new wife Elly, but he wanted to be tracking and Durik is a Blacksmith.

After deciding to continue on home, he passed Sarn and soon was at the spot where his Pa and Jerand first saw the colt in trouble all those years ago. He

stopped and remembered the story how Jerand had saved the colt and met his wife to be, Evie. The cabin where she and her Ma, Harriett lived was gone now, but then so was Harriett. He really liked hearing the stories about his Pa, Beau and Erin.

He also liked the idea that he would be a tracker just like his Ma and Pa. And, someday he would take over their tracking business. He felt like he was really getting good at following sign, but needed to work on his instincts more. His Pa said that would come in time and he was sure it would.

He thought about his name and who he was named after. It was his grandfather, Mason Wright, who lived in Sarn. He never met him, but loved hearing the old stories from his Pa about him. He was killed by smugglers when his Pa was young and he tracked them and brought them to justice. Those days sounded so excited to him and his Ma and Pa had a reputation of being the best trackers in the land.

He knew he would follow in their footsteps and he was anxious to get started. Someday he would own the tracking company, along with Lila Jean and they would live in Walders. He hoped to marry her someday and raise a family there. It was a dream, more than anything, he thought.

Two

As Mason came into the yard of his home, he saw a lot of activity around the barn and the back door.

“Are you going out, Pa?”

“Yes. A dockrat was just here from Ryker. Jerand needs help. He wants us to come,” answered Beau.

“Really? I just left the Homestead. I didn't see a rider.”

“He was going into Walders for a few things before heading back. Can you feed and water your horse? He can rest while he eats. I'd like to be on the road in an hour,” Beau explained.

Erin came out then and hugged Mason and started packing the saddle bags with food and water.

“I want you to be careful, Mason, and do exactly as your Pa tells you. Don't take any chances on your own, ok?” asked Erin.

“Yes, Ma. Do you have any details on the situation Pa?”

“Only that Jerand is tracking a gang and needs more trackers to help him. None of the dockrats are experienced enough.”

They spent the next hour getting ready. They had bows and swords to clean and pack as well as supplies for forest camps. Mason grabbed a quick lunch and was ready before Beau. They gave Erin hugs goodbye and headed south. They would ride faster than normal, since Jerand might either be in trouble or lose a trail. The dockrat told Beau to stop at the Sheriff's office for more details.

Within 30 minutes, they walked into the Sheriff's office. Claude Bowman, the new Sheriff since Grant retired, looked up from the mound of paperwork in front of him and said,

“Ah, Beau Wright. And, this must be your son Mason. One of the dockrats said to expect you. Sit and I'll update you on things.”

He told them Jerand took a job for him a few days ago that should have been an easy tracking of two men suspected of killing two warehouse guards in a robbery. Several thousand silvers were taken from a company safe. After a short trip out, Jerand returned and said there were more than two men

involved. It appeared to be a gang of five or six.

“He found tracks leading to one camp and several more sets going out from there. He watched the two men for a short time and returned here. He asked if I would send word to you two.”

“Where is he now?” Beau asked.

“He should be back at the camp of the two men. He wanted to see if any others joined them. It's about two miles east of town on the old logging road. From there about a quarter mile north by the burned out sawmill. He will be watching for you.”

“Ok, thanks. We will head there now.”

“Lane and I will bring some dockrats to the sawmill first thing in the morning. Think that's too early?” the Sheriff asked.

“No, that will be fine. By the way, how is Grant enjoying retirement?”

“He says he loves it, but I think he is bored and still misses the activity around here,” the Sheriff answered.

“He was Sheriff a long time here...and a good one.”

“That he was. I have a lot to live up to.”

“We all do, Sheriff. It's what keeps us going.”

“Please, call me Claude.”

“I will. Thanks.”

Once Beau and Mason arrived at the sawmill, they immediately saw a sign from Jerand to follow his trail. They secured their horses, grabbed their packs and headed out. Within ten minutes, Jerand appeared from behind a tree.

“Boy am I glad to see you two,” Jerand said quietly.

“Where are they?” asked Mason.

“Just beyond this ridge next to an old well. There are still just two of them. I think the rest of the gang is about a mile up this trail. Probably waiting to ambush whoever these two lead up there.”

“What weapons these two?” Beau asked.

“Near as I can tell, swords and knives. No bows.”

“Gives us a bit of advantage then,” smiled Mason.

“Exactly what I had in mind,” Jerand smiled back. “That's why I wanted you and your bows.”

“Good plan, Jerand. Mason is much improved, especially in forest brush.”

Mason warmed at the praise and asked,

“Why do you think they are waiting around?” asked Beau.

“Probably waiting to see any pursuit or meeting someone,” Jerand answered.

“So, what's the plan?” asked Mason.

“You and your Pa head north, see if you can find the others. I'll stay near this camp. You get around the larger group and flush them. See if you can spook them to return back. Follow them and we'll put them in a trap between us.”

“And if they don't come back?” asked Beau.

“Follow them till near dark and meet back here. We'll have to take them out one group at a time,” Jerand answered.

“The Sheriff and his men will be here in the morning. We can take these two and hand them over. Then we can track the others.” Beau said.

“You up for that, Mason?” Jerand asked.

“I am,” he replied with a determined look.

“His Pa's son, all right,” grinned Jerand.

Jerand settled in, watching the two men. He hoped they would stay put until the others came back, or Beau and Mason did. With any luck, he would have company soon. You just never know with these gang members. Some are savvy and know how to evade trackers and some are not. He sure felt a whole lot better now that he had help.

Beau and Mason headed up the trail.

“Remember. Quietly until we're ahead of them.”

“Yes, Pa.”

They were out about a half mile before hearing anything. Then they saw four men waiting by a large oak. They all had swords and knives. No bows. They skirted around the four and Beau grabbed the branch of a tree and started shaking it. The men came alert at the sound. They talked low between themselves for a few seconds and quickly gathered their things and started back down the trail. So far, so good.

Beau and Mason followed a short distance behind and joined Jerand just as the group joined the other two. They all started arguing about what they heard. Most believed it was just an animal. Since it was near dark, the group

decided to set a camp here and post extra guards all night. They would leave in the morning. Beau and Jerand smiled at each other and settled in for the night.

“Mason, you go back to the sawmill and wait for the Sheriff, ok Bring him here as quickly as you can,” said Beau.

“Sure Pa,” he answered and headed back.

Just as the sun started filtering through the trees, the Sheriff and his men arrived at the old sawmill. Mason was waiting for them and led them to where Beau and Jerand were waiting.

“Welcome, Claude. Lane, long time,” said Beau shaking Lane's hand. Beau explained all that happened. Jerand talked quietly to the three dockrats that the Sheriff had brought.

“So, eight of us against six. Good odds,” said Mason.

“Guess we need a plan, though,” replied Beau.

“Jerand, this is your party,” Claude smiled.

“Ok. How about Mason goes left and Beau goes right. Both of you get high for better shots. The rest of us will call them out,” explained Jerand.

“They will probably scatter. Do we follow from where we are?” asked Mason.

“No. We regroup here. Try to determine who has the money and that's who we go after,” Jerand answered.

Beau and Mason headed out and after several minutes Jerand nodded to the Sheriff.

“Hello, the camp. This is Sheriff Bowman from Ryker. You are surrounded. Throw down your weapons and get on your knees with your hands behind your heads.”

Surprisingly most did just that. As the dockrats came to get their weapons, two gang members turned and ran straight north out of camp. Neither Beau or Mason had a clear shot and they were gone within a few seconds,

“They just disappeared!” exclaimed Lane.

“One of them had a satchel,” Beau said.

“Yes, and a nasty looking long sword,” Mason added.

The remaining four gang members were bound with the dockrats standing over them.

“Well, looks like they have some forest experience then,” said Jerand.

“Apparently,” Beau replied.

“Lane and I will take these four back to town,” the Sheriff said.

“And, we'll help you,” added one of the dockrats.

“Since the two that left have the money, I need to go after them,” said Jerand.

“You want one of us to go with you?” asked Beau.

“No, this will take some time. You two can head home and I thank you for your help,” answered Jerand as he shook their hands.

“Send word when you get back to Ryker, ok?” asked Beau.

“Will do.”

Jerand knew that he could track and overtake them before nightfall. He gathered what supplies he needed and headed north. Beau and Mason headed back to the sawmill to pick up their horses. Then they headed north back to Walders.

“Think Jerand will find them?” asked Mason.

“Sure he will,” he is one of the best trackers around.”

“Of course he is, considering his teacher,” Mason replied.

“You're nearly that good, too,”

“Yea, but Jerand has much better instincts than me,” said Mason.

“He's had a big head start on you, though.”

“True. Think he will contact us to help with those two?”

“Probably not. They are no match for him.”

They arrived back home an hour or so later. Erin came out to greet them.

“That was fast. Did they get away?”

“Two did, but four others are now in custody. They didn't even put up a fight,” Mason answered.

“Jerand after the two?”

“Yes. He should have them back in Ryker by this evening,” Beau said.

“I hope he doesn't have to kill them. I know how he feels about that,” Erin stated.

“Yea, me too.” responded Beau.

Mason took note of that. He felt the same way.

Three

Jerand stopped beside a small stream and checked the tracks closely. He had been on this trail for two hours now and it was starting to get very fresh. He was not worried about finding them, it was after he found them that had him concerned.

Thieves are very similar to animals; when on the run and cornered, they are very dangerous. Their senses are heightened and adrenaline causes them to make choices they would not normally make. Jerand had to plan very carefully just where he overtook them and exactly how he controlled the confrontation. In these woods, where they all eventually seemed to end up, there was lots of cover for them. He didn't like to overtake them from behind, but rather have them walk into him.

Beau had taught him how to determine their direction of travel and circle around and get in front of them. He could hide in a copse or ground cover and challenge them when they got close enough. And, if they turned and ran, they would almost always go back the way they came, making it doubly easy to follow their tracks. Of course, there were those robbers that were forest savvy and didn't make that mistake.

At first he thought these two were, but these two were noisy and clumsy with the sign they left. Each time they stopped to rest, they disturbed the entire area. He was also able to determine the interval of their rest stops. He decided that the next time they stopped, he would circle out in front of them and setup his ambush. He would make it within a few hundred yards of their camp to make sure they would still be on the trail.

As they stopped to rest, he positioned himself at the far side of a small clearing just a couple hundred yards past them. Beau had taught him the sword, but because of his small size he didn't really have the strength to wield one and he liked some distance between him and a foe. Beau's wife, Erin, suggested once that he learn the rapier, but he never really liked it either.

He waited behind a fallen tree and it didn't take long before he heard the two crashing their way down the path. When they got just inside the clearing he called,

“Halt. This is the Walder's Point Sheriff department and you are surrounded. Throw your weapons off the trail and lie down on the ground.” Jerand knew this bluff would probably not work, so he readied two arrows. At this range he couldn't miss. After a few seconds of indecision and a quick word by one of the two, they pulled their swords and charged in the direction of his voice.

Jerand's first arrow found the lead robber's heart and he went down hard. The other one stepped over his partner and kept coming. A second arrow took him in the neck. He went down, but was still alive. Jerand moved quickly to disarm him. Glancing at the first one, he knew he was dead. He removed his arrow from the second one and started to bandage the wound when the robber tried to pull his knife. Jerand was ready for that and pushed hard on his wound, causing him to scream in pain. The wound started bleeding faster and the man died before Jerand could staunch it.

Such a waste, he thought. If they would have just surrendered, turned over the money and did a couple years jail time, they would be free men. He had seen this before. Desperate men making irrational decisions and it cost them their lives. In some ways, not much had changed since the days he was a dockrat in Ryker. He lived in the worst part of town where he spent most of his time dealing with undesirables. He had seen so much senseless killing in his young life. And, the killing he regretted the most was Safer's, the head of the dockrats and a father figure to Jerand.

After he finished burying the two men, he packed up their belongings, the money they stole and headed for Ryker. He would get a percentage of the three thousand from the bank. It wasn't much, but it was all he needed these days. His life with Evie and two children was good. His dockrat trackers were very busy on small jobs in Ryker and he was thinking about maybe expanding..

Later that day, Jerand walked in to the Sheriff's office.

“Jerand! Glad to see you safely back. Do you have a couple thieves for

me?” Claude asked.

“Well, not quite. The two men did not surrender and both rushed me, swords at the ready,” Jerand answered. “I had no choice. One might have lived, but as I was patching up his neck wound, he went for his knife.”

“Sorry. You're not injured then?”

“No, but I still dislike the killing.”

“Of course you do. You were trained by Beau and Erin.”

“True. And now, so is Mason. He's a good lad, for sure.”

Jerand sat and penned a note to Beau and went to find a dockrat to take it north. He then gave the leader some money for the three that helped him. The dockrats were always glad when someone contributed to their shared pot. As soon as he finished his business with the bank, he would head home. The Homestead kept Evie busy, but whenever he was out for more than a day or so, she worried.

The bank was very glad when Jerand handed them their money. They gave him the customary ten percent fee, plus a bonus for returning it so quickly. He would send the bonus to Beau and Mason. He was very fortunate to be part of their family. He vowed to visit them more often, too. He wanted to find out the status of the friendship between Harriett and Mason. He always thought they were a good match, but he wasn't sure how they felt about it.

Later, as he rode into the Homestead, he thought it was getting crowded these days and decided to acquire a few more acres to the north. Maybe he could get some cattle and a few horses to put on it. Harriett really needed more room for her colt and he was sure she would want a mare for him soon. If he got a dozen head of cattle, they could sell some and butcher the rest. He loved having friends and family always around, but it meant a lot of cooking for Evie and Harriett. It was best if he could keep them supplied with meat to go along with their garden.

“Pa's home!” yelled Harriett back to her Ma as she ran out to meet him.

“I've only been gone a few days, girl,” Jerand grinned.

“Sure seems longer. We were starting to worry,” Evie said, walking up

and hugging him.

“Well, we got the bad guys and a good bit of money for it. Even got a bonus that I will send to Beau and Mason.”

“Oh, I didn't know they came to help,” Evie said.

“Well there were six of them and one was forest trained. I also had the Sheriff and three dockrats help out too.”

“Did you have to kill any?” asked Harriett

“Unfortunately, yes. Two of them would not surrender.”

“I'm sorry, Jerand. I know how you feel about that,” said Evie.

“Sometimes it just can't be helped,” replied Jerand.

“Well, you home safe now,” Harriett said, hugging him again.

Jerand stabled his horse and spent the rest of the day relaxing and telling Evie and Harriett of his plans to get more land. Harriett was very excited and asked about getting a mare. Evie said she would start a winter garden for corn, squash and pumpkins. Little Donal was crawling now and getting into everything. He was a lot more inquisitive then Harriett had been. It was a full time job watching after him. Luckily, Evie had a lot of help from Harriett.

He sent a dockrat to Walders with a note to Beau and Erin. It contained the bonus money with his thanks, again. He was sure if he tried to give it to them in person, they wouldn't take it, so it was better this way.

Harriett was excited about the possibility of getting a mare. She decided to make a space in the barn for them both for winters. She wasn't much of a builder, so she thought she would ask Durik to help her. She would go see him in the morning. She would also need some advice from him on how to take care of the two horses. It would mean a lot more work, but she looked forward to it.

She also thought that it was time for her to make some money by working part time somewhere. She couldn't expect her parents to supply the food for both horses. She decided to stop into the Publik house and ask Norma if she needed any help. One or two days a week should be sufficient to make enough money to pay for the feed.

Four

Some months later, it was time for the annual clan gathering at the Homestead. Beau and Erin were the first to arrive. They stopped and picked up Erin's parents, Kate and Nelson Hunt in Sarn Reach. Durik and Elly followed in their wagon. These gatherings were so important to everyone, as they were all able to catch up on the latest news. Beau told Jerand how much he appreciated him allowing everyone to use the Homestead for them.

"The thanks go to Evie and Harriett. They do all the work," Jerand replied.

"I'll make sure Erin and I thank them properly, as soon as we can pry them from the kitchen."

Later, while fixing supper, Kate told Evie and Erin that Nelson has been feeling poorly the last couple weeks. The doctor in Walders said it was just old age, but Kate knew better.

"What are his symptoms?" Erin asked.

"Well, he doesn't sleep well, so he is tired a lot," she answered.

"Have you asked Elly to check him out?" asked Evie.

"No, but that's a good idea. As soon as we get..."

They all heard a commotion outside and Beau called Kate's name. They ran outside to see Nelson on the ground and Jerand talking quietly to him. Kate knelt down beside him and felt for a pulse. There was none.

"I'll get the doctor from Ryker right away," Beau said.

"No need, Beau. He is gone," Kate said.

"Oh, my," said Evie. "Are you sure we can't revive him?"

"I don't think so."

Jerand concurred. He had the most experience with people dying. He still tried to get Nelson breathing again to no avail. The men carried Nelson into the house for preparations. Everybody was crying and hugging.

"Come now. No more crying. Nelson and I talked about this and both agreed we would have a wake for each other," Kate said through tears.

"Nelson wouldn't have wanted to spoil our gathering. Beau, can you and Durik go to Sarn and let everyone know and bring back those that want to attend?"

“Sure. I'll go now. Will it be tomorrow?”

“Yes. Around noon, I think.”

They all had a quiet supper when Beau returned. When it was over Jerand headed to Ryker to let folks there know about the wake. He even visited Baller and the dockrats. Many of them knew Nelson and would want to know. He gave the word to Sheriff Bowman, too.

The wake was held the following afternoon with people from Sarn and Ryker attending. Sheriff Grant even came, with several dockrats. Everyone tried their best to make it a happy occasion. They all spoke about an experience they had with Nelson. Erin told the story about when she and Beau went off to Ryker to look for the ones that killed his father, Mason. Nelson insisted on giving her a bag of thirty silvers. For emergencies he said. I paid him back, of course, but it did come in handy.

They buried Nelson the next morning in Sarn Reach. The place he loved. Kate was very quiet, but having family around was the best thing for Kate and they all visited her regularly for the next few weeks. Erin even took her on a shopping spree in Ryker. They stayed at the Stag and Ty Akers pampered them in his usual fashion. It helped, but Erin could see that she was having a difficult time without out her lifelong companion. She would have to talk to the doctor in Walders about it. She probably just needed time, but maybe there was other things that she could do.

The leaves were changing and winter was not far off. One evening Jerand and Evie were sitting on their porch talking.

“I sure wish we were closer to town. We may have saved Nelson if we had a doctor close by,” Jerand said.

“Maybe. It happened very fast, though. But, you are right. Both Ryker and Walders are many miles away. And, there is not much at Sarn.”

“Maybe we should build a few office buildings on the new piece of land for a doctor and general store.”

“That sounds like a lot of work. Are you sure you're up for it?”

“It would be nice not to have to take a wagon to town for supplies all the time. And the road to Walders in hardly passable in the winter. And, thats when we need supplies the most,” Jerand stated.

“I think it would be a good idea to have a store right here on the Homestead. Why don't you talk to Beau and Durik about it.”

“Yes, I think I will,” Jerand said.

Later, Jerand asked Harriett if she want to go with him up to Walders in the morning. He said he wanted to stop and talk to Beau and Erin on the way.

“And, you can visit with Mason. Wouldn't that be nice?”

“I guess. But he's probably be up visiting his girlfriend in Walders.”

“Oh, I wasn't aware he had a girlfriend,” Jerand said.

“Yes. Her name is Lila Jean and they are the same age.”

“Hmmm. So does that mean you don't want to come with me?”

“Oh no. I do want to see Erin and I have a few things I need to buy in Walders.”

So, that answered Jerand's question about how things were with Mason and Harriett. He wasn't disappointed though, because he knew that Harriett wanted to be a business woman. Maybe she could work in the new general store he was planning. She could apprentice with someone and take it over someday. Besides, Mason really wanted to take over Beau's tracking business and Harriett was not interested in that.

Maybe he would build a small Blacksmith shop, he thought. They were always running to Sarn to have things made or fixed. He would just have to find somebody to be the Blacksmith. Durik could help there. He now had plans in his mind for a general store, Blacksmith and a doctors office. It would be a good start, he thought. Now he just needs to talk to the doctor in Walders to get some backing. And, the owner of the general store. With Beau's help, he was sure he could convince him to help get started.

Jerand didn't fancy himself as a businessman, but he wouldn't be tracking forever and he kind of liked the idea having these things right here on the Homestead. It would be good for both Evie and Harriett The more he thought about the idea, the more excited he got about it.

Five

Claude Bowman finally felt comfortable as Sheriff of Ryker. It's been almost a year since he took over for Sheriff Grant. The council was getting easier to work with and so were the dockrats. He had misgivings about the dockrat's methods at first, but finally has come to consider them a valuable partner in fighting crime. Especially in the wharf area. It was a huge place with many docks and ten times more warehouses. He thought that if he was ever made responsible for patrolling them, he'd have to hire a half dozen more deputies.

He was just finishing up the day's paperwork when Lane knocked on his door and then entered without waiting for a response. This was not like Lane, he thought.

“Problems, Claude. A dockrat just came busting in the front and said there was a warehouse on fire in the main dock area. They are trying to help fight it, but they're losing. Should I round everyone up?”

“Yes. What was the dockrat's name?” asked Claude.

“Candy, I think he said.”

“Well then, it's probably as bad as he said. He is one of the seniors.”

“I'll have everyone I can find meet at the dock. And I'll send a runner to the council chambers,” said Lane.

“Ok, I'll be a minute here and meet you there.”

Claude had to put a couple things in the safe and then get word to his wife that he would be late. Very late.

When Lane arrived at the main dock, he saw two warehouses fully involved. And, two or three more would be next if they couldn't get it contained. He counted three dockrats and about a half dozen others. He was only able to find five deputies and he knew more would be needed to man the pumps alone. If there were enough pumps. He grabbed a dockrat and instructed him to take someone and bring all the pumps from the other docks here as fast as they could. He put on his fireproof coat and joined the others.

Claude arrived five minutes later. He looked at the warehouses that were in jeopardy and knew he needed more people. Lane was busy with the dockworkers on the main warehouse, so he headed to the Stag. He needed to

sound the town emergency alarm and get a lot more help. When he arrived, Ty was waiting for him with six people already geared up.

“We could see the smoke from here. Must be bad,” Ty asked.

“Worse than bad. These six people will help, but if I don't get at least a dozen more, we won't be able to contain it.”

“I'll put the word out. I'm sure I can round up that many,” Ty said.

“Thanks. And will you sound the alarm on your way?” Claude asked.

“Sure. And, I'll have my staff start putting food and water together. Looks like a long night ahead.”

As Claude headed back to the docks, he met a councilman heading to the Stag.

“Claude. How many warehouses involved?”

“Just two, so far. We sent a runner to the chambers. If we don't contain the first two, there will be many more involved. Can you a request to people for help.”

“Sure. Good luck.”

As they both headed off, they heard the town emergency bell start peeling. I need to get the warehouse number of those involved and contact the owners, Claude thought. Not that they can do much, but for insurance reasons, they need to be there.

When he arrived, he saw many more bodies fighting the second warehouse. As he came around the first building, he saw two more on fire. Damn, he thought. Surely it won't jump to the next dock. He turned and saw about a dozen more dockrats heading towards him.

“Sight for sore eyes, Baller. You are needed. Can you get over to that next dock to keep it from spreading there?” Claude asked.

“Will do. Do you have any more fireproof coats at the station?”

“Yes, I brought these six coats from the station, but that's all we have.”

Baller and his group grabbed the coats headed to the next dock over. They took two pumps over and set them up. He then saw Lane helping a man walk towards him.

“This is the main warehouse owner. He says he knows who started the fire,” Lane said as he helped the man down and gave him some water.

“My name is Martin Basel. I own this warehouse and another over on dock five.”

“The docks are numbered? I knew the warehouses were, but not the docks,” Lane responded.

“Yes, they are. This is dock two and that one is dock one,” he said pointing to the one where Baller and his group were hosing everything down.

“So, you know who started this,” Claude asked.

“Yes. The previous owner of a warehouse on dock four. There are no more empty warehouses and he has been pestering me to sell one of mine. Last week, when I refused again, he got nasty and said I'd pay. Guess he was right.”

“Wait a minute. Lane, have you found anyone else in any of these warehouses?”

“Just a night watchman over there on dock one, but he's fine. I haven't searched all the other warehouses on these two docks.”

“I'll send in a few dockrats to check for anyone that may be hurt.”

“So, Mr. Basel, what is the man's name that threatened you?” asked Lane.

“Rolands. Never knew his first name.” he answered as he started coughing again.

“Here, drink some more water,” Lane instructed as he gave him a blanket.

“Thank you, Mr Basel Would you like someone to help you home?”

“No, thanks. I'd like to just stay here and watch my livelihood burn.”

Just then, they heard a series of explosions from the second warehouse It sent an enormous ball of fire over to the dock where Baller was. He saw them drop everything and run for safety. He knew immediately it was too late for those warehouses

“What caused that explosion?” Claude asked, to no one.

“My second warehouse contained twenty cases of fuel oil.” replied Basel

“Ah, that was unfortunate. Do you have any more oil in any other warehouse.” Claude asked.

“No, just those.”

It was now full dark and the fighting was getting harder. And hotter. There were five warehouses involved now, with at least a dozen more on these two docks. Claude did not have a good feeling about being able to contain things

and worried about the safety of the people fighting. He instructed Lane to get a headcount of those fighting and report back to him.

Baller and his group moved to the opposite end of dock two, trying to wet down the warehouses not yet involved. Claude took a mental note of the time they started and hoped they could get things contained by morning.

Lane came back a few minutes later.

“There are a total of 35 people fighting.”

“Any casualties?” Claude asked.

“Only one. Someone from town was overcome inside a warehouse in the back of this dock. They took him to the Stag. Ty will take care of things.”

“Ok, thanks. Do you think that these these two docks will be the only ones involved?” asked Claude.

“Yes, dock three is quite a ways south. And, luckily there is no wind tonight.”

“Let's hope it stays that way.”

Six

The area around the Homestead was open land. All Jerand had to do was apply and show what improvements were planned. He was lucky enough to get three full acres north and west of his property. It was good flat land with hardly any trees to remove. He was sure that the main part of the new village would be closest to his house. But, he would put in a separate road and fence his land off. He didn't want strangers wondering into his backyard. A gate big enough for a wagon would be built and locked.

Durik and Beau showed up one morning just after sunrise. Jerand already had rudimentary plans drawn up for the doctors office. The lumber and materials were being delivered soon. Jerand thought he had enough wood for the doctors office. Mason and two of his friends from Walders came an hour later. The six of them started building and by dark the next day, a good amount of the building was finished.

Erin and Evie kept everyone fed and they all slept in the barn that night. Just before the end of the day, Kate and Elly arrived with everything they would need to set up the waiting room and doctor's office. By the end of the next day, Elly pronounced the office ready for business. The men were all tired and after Elly's comment about the barn odor, they all headed to the creek for a bath.

Later that evening, they all sat around the porch with their coffee.

“Are you sure you want to run the office till we find a doctor?” Jerand asked Elly.

“Yes, I'm sure.”

“And, hopefully we can get started on the Smithy next,” Durik commented.

“Thats the plan, Durik. Then after that the general store.” answered Jerand.

“I have plenty of hardware I'm not using. Anvils, hammers, dowels, tongs and the like. Should be enough to get things up and running.” Durik said.

“Great. What would we do without you two?” asked Evie, hugging both

Durik and Elly.

The plan was to start the Smithy the next week, then start the general store the following month. Jerand hoped things went as smoothly with them as they did with the doctor's office. He wasn't sure where he would get a lot of supplies for the store, but something would come up. He needed to talk to the store owner in Walders yet. Maybe he had some ideas.

The people of Ryker had been fighting the fires for almost a full day now and there were still warehouses burning. Claude setup food tents at the end of dock one. More water was brought in and the council made sure there were lots cots and blankets for the men. Ty Akers supplied all the food and drinks. His waiters and cooks kept everyone fed.

By the end of the second day, they could finally say it was contained. Seven warehouses were destroyed and everything in them. They lost four townspeople, 3 dockrats and even a deputy. It was the worst fire in Ryker history, everyone said. A lot of people from town came by with wagons to help haul the debris away. The council paid for everything. Ty wanted to donate everything, but the council insisted they pay him for supplies and his employees time. He graciously accepted.

The afternoon of the second day Claude was talking to Lane and Mr. Basel. He said he lost everything in his main warehouse, but not the second. He made arrangements with a man from town to haul most of what was left to another part of the wharf.

“I think this is it for me. I'm out of the warehouse business,” Basel stated.

“What will you do with all that you salvaged?” Claude asked.

“Sell it. Give it away, I'm not sure,”

“Maybe the dockrats will take it. They could keep what they needed and sell the rest for you,” Lane said.

“They worked extremely hard and even lost three of their own. I think I will just give them whatever I have left. They can do with it what they see fit.”

“Very nice gesture, Basel,” Claude said, smiling.

“I'll also cover the funeral costs of your deputy and the townspeople we lost. If I could find that scoundrel Rolands, I'd get him to help too,” Basel said.

“My deputies and I will find him if he is still in town. He will pay, believe me,” Claude said.

The next day Claude went to see Baller in their headquarters.

“Greetings, Sheriff. Quite an ordeal, wasn't it?” asked Baller.

“Yes. I'm so sorry for your loss, Baller. Do you need anything?”

“No, we have plenty in our fund to take care of all the burial expenses.”

“Well, on a brighter note, Mr. Basel said he wants you and your dockrats to have everything that was salvaged for him. It's all down on dock five under guard. I even have a couple wagons you can use to pick it up.”

“Well, that's very generous of him. I'd like to thank him personally,” Baller said.

“Sorry. He left last night. He has a sister south of here and he plans to stay with her for a while.”

“Not sure what I'm going to do with it all, though.”

“Guess you could sell it. Or give away whatever you don't need.”

“Yes, I guess so.”

The Sheriff headed back to his office. Baller and several dockrats went to pick up the salvaged contents. They brought it back to their headquarters and inventoried it all. There was furniture, kitchen equipment, building materials, lumber, metal, and tools of all kinds. All things the dockrats didn't have much use for.

“Say, I heard Jerand was expanding his Homestead. Maybe he could use this stuff,” Candy said.

“Great idea, Candy. How about you heading up and getting him while we still have the wagons from the Sheriff,” Baller replied.

The next morning, Candy headed to the Homestead with a list of all the salvaged goods. He explained to Jerand and Evie what happened the last few days. Candy said Baller wanted Jerand to come down and get the goods, if he wanted them.

“Why, yes. By all means. I could use every piece of this for our new village,” Jerand said, looking at the list.

“How about some lunch and we will head back with you,” Evie offered.
“Never turn down your cooking, ma'am,” smiled Candy.

While they ate Candy gave them all the details of the terrible fires. They were saddened to hear about the loss of lives. He explained about Mr Bassel and what he did for the dockrats. Jerand said they would both attend the ceremony for those lost.

Then they explained to Candy about their plans for the new village. He was really excited and asked about the Blacksmith shop. He told Jerand and Evie that he would love to come and learn from Durik. They were both pleased. After lunch the three of them headed down to Ryker. Candy rode on the back of the horse with Evie. He insisted he couldn't steer a horse yet.

When they arrived at dockrat headquarters, Baller showed them everything on the list. Jerand couldn't believe his luck. He knew he would need everything he saw. And, Evie was pleased to see all the kitchen equipment. There were lots of things for the general store, too. So, they hooked up the horses to the two wagons, loaded them up and headed home. Of course, he just happened to have some silvers for a donation to the dockrat's pot.

Candy and another dockrat went along to help unload. When they were finished, Evie had a nice supper waiting. They all ate and Jerand, Candy and the other dockrat headed back to Ryker. They dropped off the wagons at the Sheriff's office and Jerand thanked him for the use.

“And, please thank the owner for us, too,” Jerand said to Claude.

“I will next time he is in town.”

The dockrats headed home and Jerand took his horses back to the Homestead. He was very pleased with all the good fortune he just had. It almost looked like his new village was destined to happen.

Seven

Over the next several months Jerand, Beau, Mason and Durik managed to finish the shells for the general store and the Blacksmith shop. Durik brought all his unused equipment down and set up the forge. Jerand recruited Mason and several of his friends to build all the shelves for the store. They stocked the store from the Ryker supplies in the barn.

Elly and Harriett spent a couple weeks organizing the store. Harriett was so excited about working in the store. She could finally use her talent with numbers. Elly had the doctors office all setup, ready for a doctor. Evie and Erin went to Ryker to see about getting a doctor on a part time basis. It just so happened the doctor there had hired a young man that was just licensed. He agreed to come up to their office a few days a week. He could also handle emergencies, as needed. So, the doctors office was nearly done.

Durik had the smith up and running. He would be the Blacksmith for two or three days a week, but told Jerand to try to find someone that could be his apprentice. Both Evie and Jerand said at once,

“Candy.”

“Pardon me?” Durik said.

“Candy. One of the dockrats. He said the last time he was here that he would like to learn smithing,” Jerand explained.

“Great. I do remember him. Short stocky fella, right?”

“Thats him. Strong boy, too. He must be 18 or 19 by now,” Evie said.

“We will send word and have him come see you in Sarn, ok?” Jerand asked.

“Be fine. Anytime. I'll start his training there. Gotta see about another name, though. Candy just doesn't seem right for a smith.” Durik laughed.

Beau was just finishing up a tracking job outside Walders. He and a deputy were bringing back a fella that stole some whiskey from the local pub. The fella insisted he acted alone, so they tied his hands and started back to the Sheriff's office in town.

“Think he is telling the truth?” asked deputy Barnes.

“Probably. Only one set of tracks led us right to him,” Beau answered.

“Well, Sheriff Bennet told me that from the description by the pub owner, he has seen this guy around town before. Each time with a friend.”

“Could be the friend was not into stealing, though.”

“Maybe, but I think we should still keep an eye out.”

“Sure. We should be back to town in an hour,” Beau said.

They had gone about another 30 minutes when all of a sudden, from behind a tree, a man jumped out and took a swipe with his sword. Caught Beau right across his middle. Bennet pulled his sword, turned and put the end through the man's neck. He pushed the prisoner to the ground and told him not to move or he would get the same. He ran to Beau and saw he was bleeding badly. He staunched it as best he could.

“Hold that tightly. Will you be alright here for a while?” Barnes asked Beau.

“I think so. Sure happened fast, didn't it?”

“Yea. If we had been five seconds slower, it would have been me.”

“I'll be fine. Take our prisoner back and fetch the doctor.”

Barnes grabbed the prisoner and started running back to town. Every time the prisoner complained or slowed down, he popped him in the head with the butt of his sword. He was really worried about Beau keeping awake to keep pressure on the wound. And, that no animal came along at the smell of blood. Of course, if he stayed awake, he had his sword, so he should be fine.

When they got to the office, Barnes told the Sheriff what happened.

“I'll saddle two horses and you go get the doctor,” Sheriff Bennet said. Within a few minutes, Barnes and the doctor were pushing the horses hard, hoping they didn't stumble on the forest trail. They made it back to Beau in good time. He was still awake, but there was blood seeping from the wound. The doctor worked on him as best he could and they made a traverse to carry him.

Beau had lost a lot of blood and was very weak when Erin ran into the doctor's office. The doctor told her he would be ok, but was to stay down for several weeks so both the wound and his body could heal.

“We'll get you home, then I'll head down to Sarn to get Elly,” Erin said.

“And your Ma, too. I really need her soups,” Beau said, grinning.

“This is not funny Beau. You could have been killed,” Erin said through tears.

“But I wasn't.”

“We are still going to talk about Mason taking over more of the business, though.”

“Yes, I guess it's time.”

It was about time for another clan gathering and this time Jerand and Evie planned to announce the forming of their new town. So, written invitations went out to all their friends in both Ryker and Walders. Evie estimated that if everybody came that was invited there would be over thirty. So, the barn would have to be the place to hold it. An area was cleared, tables were set up and benches were made ready. They could have a large fire right outside the main doors to sit around.

She would need lots of help cooking and called on Norma from the Sarn Publik house and Ty from the Stag&Hound in Ryker. Along with her and Harriett, the four of them could put on quite a spread. The new doctor's office was up and running. The smithy was ready and the forge going. The general store was partially ready and Harriett had done a wonderful job stocking the new shelves, built by Mason and his friends. She felt that all was as ready as could be for the announcement.

Mason came riding into the Homestead the next morning with the news about Beau. Jerand and Evie were stunned. As far as Jerand was concerned, Beau was indestructible. Mason said the instructions from the doctor were for Beau to stay down for several weeks. Beau said if they made a bed for him in the back of a wagon and drive real slow, he would be fine. He insisted on being at the gathering.

The morning of the gathering was busy. People arrived for several hours, from Sarn, Ryker and Walders. Even Sheriff Bennet from Walders and deputy Lane from Ryker. About a dozen dockrats came, including Candy and Baller. It was a wonderful day of visiting, eating and drinking. Beau was propped up in a comfortable chair and everyone made it a point to stop and greet him. He

was totally embarrassed by all the attention, but was very gracious. He even gave everyone a short story about what had happened when he was wounded.

After the main dinner, Jerand and Evie banged on their wine glasses and called for quiet.

“Evie and I have an announcement. We have finished the first phase of our project on the adjacent land to the north,” Jerand announced.

“In a few minutes, we will take everyone on a tour of the three new businesses,” Evie added.

“But first, we want to tell everyone the name of our new town. It will be called Wrightsville. And, there are many people Beau and I would like to thank for helping in the building process,” said Jerand.

“Before he does that, however, I would like to announce the name of our new mayor. We have asked Kate Hunt and she has accepted,” Evie said through tears.

The applause was loud and long. Congratulations came to Kate from everybody. Jerand named all those that helped in the building, with applause for each. They went on to tell about the new doctor and smithy.

“And lastly, before the tour, we want to announce that the manager of the general store will be our daughter, Harriett Wright,” Evie said proudly. More applause and congratulations. Harriett couldn't believe it. She never thought this day would come so soon.

Now Jerand and Evie lead everyone, except Beau, who was napping, on a tour of the new town. Evie explained about the doctor coming several times a week and they hoped to get a permanent one soon. Beau introduced Candy and Durik talked about his apprenticeship. And, he also announced the new name for Candy would be Alex the Blacksmith. Everybody approved of the new name, even Candy.

Eight

Over the next couple months, Beau healed, but did no more tracking jobs. Mason was now doing them and sharing the silvers with his parents. He was quite comfortable with this arrangement. The temporary doctor decided to become full time. He said he could live in the back of the office and go down to Ryker to help the doctor there as time permitted.

A strange thing was happening, too. Jerand was getting requests from people to build a house somewhere on the three acres. This was a good thing and Jerand agreed to all requests to lease plots until he filled up two full acres. He was grateful for the extra income.

People were now coming from Sarn and Ryker for most of their needs. Soon, Wrightsville would be larger than Sarn. One day in late spring, there was a knock on the door and Evie answered.

“Ty! What a pleasant surprise. Come in.”

“I was just admiring the new town. I'd like to talk to you and Jerand,” Ty said.

“Sure, have a seat. Would you like tea?”

“Yes, that would be nice.”

Evie put the water on and went to the barn to find Jerand. She told him Ty was in the house and wanted to talk.

“Ty, how are you my friend?” Jerand said shaking his hand.

“I'm well, thank you. Do you both have a few minutes to talk?”

Jerand look inquisitively at Evie and said,

“Nothing wrong, I hope. If you need anything, you need only ask,” replied Jerand.

“I know. And, thats the reason I'm here. How long do you think I've been running the Stag?” he asked.

“Since before I came to the dockrats. Many years now,” Jerand answered.

“Fifteen years. And, I think I'm ready for a change. I've decided to sell the Stag and retire.”

“Wow, thats great! No one deserves it more than you,” Jerand exclaimed.

“What will you do then, Ty?” Evie asked.

“Well, it won't be total retirement. But, out of the hustle of Ryker. I'm looking for a place to just open a small pub, with no rooms for rent. Hire someone to run it and just sit around and visit with the patrons.”

“Great plan, for sure. Any idea where?” Jerand asked.

“Actually, yes. I would like to do it in a sleepy little town not far from here,” he said, grinning.

Both Evie and Jerand were elated. Beau stood and pulled up Ty and hugged him fiercely. Then Evie did the same.

“You're like my family, Ty. And, I love having family close,” Jerand said.

“I take that as a yes,” Ty said, near tears.

“Of course. When do you think you will be ready?” asked Jerand.

“I already have a buyer for the Stag. I sold it with everything included except what I need to open the new pub.”

“And we have the perfect place to build it on,” Evie said.

“And, we can start building next week,” Jerand added.

“My, you don't waste any time. I know now it was the right decision.”

“Good. Let us show you the plot now,” said Jerand.

They started building Ty's pub and had it ready in record time. Jerand gathered several dockrats and they brought everything from the Stag to the new pub. Erin and Beau were both pleased to help set things up and within a month, it was ready to open. Beau said he was making a sign for the door and asked Ty what it should say.

“Ty's Pub,” he answered.

“We'll start making that today,” Beau said.

“I can't tell you how pleased we are to have you here,” Evie said.

“And, I am honored to be a part of Wrightsville,” said Ty.

One evening, Beau and Jerand were sitting on the porch talking.

“So, how is Mason handling the business?” Jerand asked.

“He is doing great. And, Lila Jean is a big help to him. I think those two are getting serious,” Beau answered.

“I thought as much, She is a very nice girl.”

“So, you're pretty much retired from tracking, right?”

“Yes, I'm just too busy around here to take any more jobs.”

“Will you start teaching Donal when he is older?”

“No, Evie wants him to decide his own career. So, we won't steer him in the direction of tracking. Mason will have to carry on the tradition you and Erin started all those years ago.”

“Well, he is definitely up to it. The last time we walked the hills, I was really impressed with his skills. And, good instincts too.”

“His fathers son.”

“Erin and I were talking and we would really like to turn the entire business over to him. You know, house and all.”

“And leave Walders?”

“Yes. We would like a small cottage around here. Know of any place?”

“You bet I do. I've been saving a small plot in the third acre for something special and I think I've just found it.”

“Great. Although, I'm not sure how I would pay the lease. I'm not working anymore.”

“I have that covered, Beau. I've been thinking I'd like to start a small tracking school and I need someone to help teach. Know anyone?”

I certainly do. And, he is available, too,” Beau said, smiling.

Within a month, Beau and Erin's cottage was done enough to move in. They had help from just about everyone. It took all their savings, but now they could relax in their new place in the new town. Beau never dreamed that Jerand would be so successful. If Safer could only see him now. He would be so proud.

So, now Wrightsville was nearly complete. Alex the Blacksmith took over the Smithy and Durik checked in with him every few days.. His health was not too good these days and he was glad he was away from the smoke of the forge on a regular basis.

He and Elly loved the quiet and their talks about the old days when Beau and Erin were children. And, Durik missed Mason and Nelson. He was forever telling stories about his adventures from his youth and Elly loved hearing them.

Mason and Lila Jean eventually married and ran a successful tracking

business out of his parents place in Walder's Point.

Jerand and friends built a small one room school for Donal and the rest of the children of Wrightsville. The population was over thirty residents and there were nine children in the school. They brought a teacher up from Ryker and everyone liked her.

Beau and Jerand started their small tracking school and Beau did most of the teaching. They got students from Ryker and several were dockrats. The school was supported by donations from both Sheriff departments, since they were the ones who would be using the graduates the most. Two dockrat graduates went to work for Mason and Lila Jean.

Harriett never married. She was just too busy running the general store.

Kate, the first mayor of Wrightsville passed away a couple years later. Both her and Nelson were buried in the small cemetery in Sarn Reach. The town they started so many years before.

Sheriff Grant passed away not long after Kate. All of Ryker turned out for his ceremony and the council dedicated a statue of him.

Mason and Lila Jean had several children. Between them and Donal, the Wright name was carried on for many years. And, the town of Wrightsville thrived, but could only grow so big. It came to be known as the three acre town.

Beau and Erin, Jerand and Evie and Mason and Lila Jean all prospered and lived out their days in the wonderful little community of Wrightsville.

Ed note:

This will be the last book in the Trackers series. I hope you've enjoyed it.