



A Pride of Kin (Wardlaw Books)

Callie Coe Wilson, Ellen Walker Rienstra

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“They have a staying quality, these Hookses, that I can only describe as haunting. They have inhabited my imagination all my life, inexplicable ghosts, to be exorcised only by that bit of magic that created them in the first place, the turn of a phrase.”

Thus Callie Coe Wilson introduces us to her family of inveterate tale tellers, the expansive and eccentric Hooks clan of Hardin County, Texas. Wilson and her cousin Ellen Walker Rienstra capture in this unusual family saga the essence of why families take such delight in the stories of their ancestors.

We see William “Pap” Hooks, legendary progenitor of the numerous clans, plowing his fields in his shirttail because “he disliked the constrictions of conventional dress and ...refused to be encumbered by custom.” We hunt black bear in the Big Thicket with Ben and Bud, confronting the enraged bear that once grabbed the end of Bud’s gun in its teeth. We marvel at Ben’s fiddle rendition of “Cattle in the Canebrake,” recorded with a cactus needle. Ben, the shrewdest of Pap’s many sons, is said to have made three separate fortunes: one in whiskey, one in lumber, and one in oil. In 1904 he brought in the Saratoga oil field in East Texas with just small hand pumps, a hand-bolted derrick, and a passel of friends and brothers.

There are also fleet-footed Gus, “unconventional to the point of being perverse”; khaki-clad Arden, the family’s principal raconteur; and Bryant Coe, who declined an invitation to a family dinner party because he “could not find his other sock.”

In a unique blend of two voices, Wilson and Rienstra sing the ballads of their forebears, who not only settled Harding County but largely populated it. Each from her own perspective, but with both perspectives formed by the same family traditions, the cousins memorialize the exploits of the celebrated Hookses. Their stories are true---with the truth that is “the patina that forms in time on fact.” They illustrate and celebrate the passage of time, the permanence of memory, and the melding of separate lives into an acceptable family tradition.

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